

‘Excellence with impact’ and budget constraints: the Economic and Social Research Council

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▶ ESRC Delivery Plan 2011-15

- Strategic Priorities
- ESRC Funding Opportunities
- Demand Management
- Collaboration and Partnerships

Funding

- ▶ ESRC budget 11/12 approx. £203m
- ▶ ESRC - 12% cut in real terms to Programme budget
- ▶ ESRC - 23% cut in real terms to Administration budget
- ▶ Important to continue to invest in the future:
 - Long-term infrastructure
 - Next generation of research leaders
 - Areas of major national importance

Distribution of ESRC Programme Funding 2011/12

- ▶ Responsive research – c£48m
- ▶ Strategic and Collaborative research – c£33m
- ▶ Training and Skills – c£48m
- ▶ Knowledge Exchange, Impact and Evaluation – c£8m
- ▶ Methods and Infrastructure (inc Capital) - £29m
- ▶ Other programmes and International – c£8m
- ▶ Plus other external income from co-investment – currently c£23m

ESRC Delivery Plan 2011-15

- ▶ Corporate strategic direction:
 - Economic and societal impact central to our activities
 - Focus on three strategic priorities
 - Streamline existing funding opportunities and focus our resources on longer, larger grants
 - Introduce demand management strategy
 - Protect core investments in the national data infrastructure
 - Expand collaborative activities with HEIs and the private sector
 - Incorporate international perspectives across the full range of ESRC's activities
 - Contribute to the RCUK interdisciplinary research programmes

Economic and Societal Impact

- ▶ ESRC does excellent research that has impact
- ▶ Creating, assessing and communicating impact is central to all our activities
 - Pathways to impact
 - Impact toolkit
- ▶ Research Excellence Framework (20%)

From seven challenges to three priorities

- ▶ Sharpened our focus with the introduction of three strategic priorities:
 - Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth
 - Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions
 - A Vibrant and Fair Society
- ▶ To be delivered through:
 - Enhancing impact from existing investments
 - Encouraging investments to work together
 - And, only exceptionally, new investments
- ▶ To be refreshed annually

Refinement – some principles

- ▶ Retain quality, impact and independence
- ▶ Tackle deep difficult issues
- ▶ Exploit existing resources
- ▶ Enhance international opportunities
- ▶ Avoid disciplinary capture
- ▶ Join up ESRC activities to enhance impact

Strategic Priorities – Misconceptions

- ▶ Not:
 - A long list of new research programmes
 - A steer to research grants –commitment to vibrant, innovative response mode
 - A narrowly UK-centric agenda
 - A narrow, applied agenda
 - All about research
 - Everything we do

Simpler and More Strategic

- ▶ Streamlining - fewer but more flexible research competitions
- ▶ Focusing resources on longer and larger grants – ambitious social science
 - Phase out Small Grants scheme
 - Increase lower and upper thresholds for Research Grants scheme (formally Standard Grants)
 - Merge Centres and Large Grants competitions

Research Grants

- ▶ Continue to lie at heart of ESRC strategy
- ▶ Remain completely responsive
- ▶ Longer, larger (£200k - £2m)
 - More flexible menu of opportunities for researchers
 - Greater opportunity for inclusion of training/career development
- ▶ Interdisciplinary within and beyond social sciences
- ▶ International Co-Investigators
- ▶ New innovation phased funding

Centres and Large Grants

- ▶ Combined competition (£2m - £5m)
- ▶ Renewed emphasis on
 - Maximising impact through working with other investments
 - Strong partnership with host HEI
 - International Co-Investigators
- ▶ Open competition but with a strong steer towards areas within the three strategic priorities

National Capability

- ▶ Providing support across all stages of the career
- ▶ Expanding training and development opportunities – building a national training infrastructure
- ▶ Targeted initiatives:
 - National Quantitative Methods strategy
 - Partnership with Treasury to build capacity in macroeconomics
- ▶ Opportunities for early and mid-career through Future Research Leaders and Research Grants

Doctoral Training Centres

- ▶ Discontinue accreditation and separate competitions for studentships
- ▶ 21 Doctoral Training Centres drawing together the best social science training
- ▶ Concentrating studentships in strategic areas (e.g. QM and macroeconomics)

Data Strategy: Current Progress

- ▶ Strong data infrastructure is an essential core resource
- ▶ ESRC supports some of the world's leading studies
- ▶ Underpins research and training; provides evidence to both academic and non-academic researchers
- ▶ Only ESRC supports these kinds of large, long-term investments
- ▶ The longitudinal 'jewels' appreciate in value
- ▶ Despite cuts to capital, we will protect prioritized data infrastructure
- ▶ Support for secondary data analysis

Innovation Funding

- ▶ Phased funding allowing development and testing of novel ideas and concepts
- ▶ Application for full project with break point identified within first half of grant
- ▶ Not all projects will proceed to second phase, but this is expected

Demand management

- ▶ Last 5 years has seen a 33% increase in number of applications
- ▶ No additional funding available leading to fall in success rates
- ▶ Success rates for Research Grants down to approx 13%
- ▶ Places burden on researchers, reviewers, universities and the ESRC
- ▶ All Research Councils committed

Introduction

- ▶ Scheme restructuring will lead to some reduction in volume but we can not rely on this alone
- ▶ Delivery Plan sets an ambitious target of halving the number of Research Grant applications by 2014
- ▶ Focus on:
 - Identifying and supporting the best social science
 - Reducing the number of applications that are uncompetitive

Initial Measures (I)

- ▶ We expect to see individuals and HEIs demonstrate that they are improving self-regulation
- ▶ To help meet these expectations we will:
 - Maximise transparency, including regular provision of performance data to institutions
 - Develop and disseminate good practice guidelines on grant application writing and HEI quality assurance mechanisms
 - Introduce an invited-only resubmissions policy with associated guidance

Initial Measures (2)

- Reduce the external peer review burden through revised sifting mechanisms (greater use of outline applications and earlier sifting for standard grants)
- Simplify the RCUK JeS outline application process
- Issue more tightly specified calls on managed mode schemes which address the ESRC strategic priorities
- Work with other RCUK partners to harmonise any demand management measures

... review after 12 months

Further Options

- ▶ 12 week consultation on additional measures - we hope that no additional measures will be needed
- ▶ Demand management options will be informed by the impact of the initial programme of measures
- ▶ The four main complementary demand management tools under consideration are:
 - Researcher sanctions
 - Institutional sanctions
 - Institutional quotas
 - Charging for applications

Co-funding and Co-production of Research

- ▶ Collaboration with private, public and third-sector bodies through co-funding of research and people exchange
 - ESRC attracts £28m of additional co-funding from government departments, civil society, international bodies
 - Co-production ensures research is better placed to inform policy and practice

- ▶ Private sector prioritized for increased engagement and co-funding
 - Focus initially on financial services, green business and retail

ESRC's role

- ▶ Working as a knowledge broker with users from Government, Local Authorities, Third Sector and Business
- ▶ Enabling individual relationships between academics and users to flourish, through funding
- ▶ Development of an “Impact Toolkit” to support researchers in developing their skills and capacity for knowledge exchange
- ▶ Website redesigned and attuned to user needs, for example, the research catalogue is comprehensive and easy to use
- ▶ Impact Network is central to ensuring impact is taken into consideration in ESRC's strategy and delivery

Engaging with business – some issues

- ▶ Access: ESRC has a relatively low profile with business sector –communication issues, who to target?
- ▶ Focus of ESRC research portfolio
- ▶ Are schemes ‘fit for purpose’?
- ▶ ESRC requirements
 - Quality
 - Independence
 - Impact
- ▶timescales, disclosure; we don’t offer consultancy

International Collaboration

- ▶ Continue to encourage and promote international collaboration across all our activities
- ▶ Focus on key international partners – 3 RCUK teams (US, India and China)
- ▶ Rationalise targeted schemes
- ▶ Develop innovative new ways of enabling international collaboration (e.g. Open Research Area and Co-Is)
- ▶ Actively encourage social scientists to engage with funding opportunities such as Horizon 2020
- ▶ Continue successful partnership with Department for International Development

Knowledge Exchange – why bother?

- ▶ Facilitates, but does not guarantee, impact
- ▶ Academic perspective
 - gain an understanding of the needs and priorities of potential research users
 - inform academic research
 - increase the prospect of fundamental research generating a wider impact down the line, directly or indirectly
- ▶ Research User perspective
 - research-informed evidence to develop and review policy and practice
 - access to innovative ideas and expertise
 - enhance organisational creativity, performance and productivity through collaborations and partnerships
- ▶ Both gain access to collaborative funding

To summarise

- ▶ In times of austerity, ESRC needs to sharpen focus and priorities on areas of greatest potential impact.
- ▶ Impact through partnerships is crucial
 - important for ESRC to develop strategic partnerships, in order to act as knowledge broker and support impact from our portfolio
 - with focus on increasing engagement with business sector
- ▶ ESRC has a range of opportunities for Knowledge Exchange
 - already available through our open calls but we are exploring other approaches
 - can also act in the capacity of knowledge broker

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