

# **ESRC**

## **Delivery Plan**

### **2008-2011**

(Updated April 2010)



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## INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

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Britain faces many challenges that will determine the future of the country and its role in the world. All of these challenges are essentially social scientific in nature or require the deep involvement of social science. If we provide the necessary leadership and resources we can: help improve the health of the nation, support economic recovery and boost our relative economic performance, make better provision for our citizens in later life and develop a more efficient and sustainable approach to energy and our natural environment. We can also contribute to addressing global poverty and economic progress in the developing world.

While social science is at the very heart of these challenges, interaction with other disciplines is essential to maximising the impact of such research and to contributing fully to economic development and improved quality of life. Through a shared commitment to co-operation and multidisciplinary, the Research Councils collectively have a number of shared research priorities. ESRC is involved in **all** of these priorities.

These problems can only be tackled by adopting a long-term and informed view which increasingly needs the highest quality social science research. The UK has the skills and capacity to carry out this work but it will require the provision, throughout the spending review period, of significant resources. This plan, originally published in April 2008 and updated in July 2009 and April 2010, reflects our new Strategic Plan 2009-2014 describing an integrated programme of research, capacity development and knowledge transfer to ensure that we do this to our fullest potential. The overarching aim will be to maximise the impact of all the activities we fund.

The ESRC's final allocation from the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 was: 2008-9 £164.924 million; 2009-10 £170.614 million plus £2.5 million capital funding from the Large Facilities Capital Fund (LFCF) to support specific longitudinal studies; 2010-11 £179.1 million plus £6.9 million capital funding from the LFCF. Together with co-funding from various partner organisations, this funding will enable us to deliver on the key priorities for 2008-11, set out in this Delivery Plan.

### **Supporting the Government's Ten Year Framework for Science and Innovation and the Strategic Objectives of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills<sup>1</sup>**

The priorities in this plan will support the commitments set out in the Government's ten year framework and the strategic objectives of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. They will enable the UK to continue to support world class, independent social science which impacts fully on economic development and quality of life in the UK and beyond.

The priorities embed impact across our activities:

- World class directed research on **our challenges**
- **Leading edge basic social science** funded outside of the challenges but with impacts on all areas of economic, political and social life.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/about/objectives>

- **Improving social science infrastructure** by enhancing access to and usage of datasets and supporting the development of cutting edge methodological tools and techniques.
- **Training the current and next generations** of social scientists to ensure that the UK will have the skills and capacity to find the solutions to the challenges facing our society and maximise the impact of their work.
- **Engaging** with users of social science research and the wider public and building on key strategic **partnerships**.
- Providing **international leadership** for social science research through enhancing opportunities for collaboration and improving the international mobility of UK researchers.

We will also contribute to carrying out the recommendations of the Sainsbury Review of the UK science and innovation system, by working with the Technology Strategy Board and building on our knowledge transfer work.

## IMPACT THROUGH WORLD CLASS RESEARCH

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The Council's research priorities fall into two main categories. These are:

- **Directed Research** – This includes our own challenges and the RCUK multidisciplinary priorities, in each of which the ESRC is centrally involved.

Work in these areas addresses each of the Treasury's key policy challenges for the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) and will build upon past achievements to deliver new knowledge and important impacts.

- **The Responsive Mode** – A continuing commitment to supporting excellent research which realises its potential impacts and to fostering innovation and interdisciplinarity.

All of our major new research investments will be driven by the twin imperatives of scientific quality and impact. This can only be achieved by the meaningful involvement of both producers and users at all stages of the research process – the 'co-production of knowledge'.

## Strategic Challenges

After extensive consultation in 2008, we identified seven areas of strategic challenge for our Strategic Plan 2009-2014. Some build on our existing investments and help consolidate knowledge. They also recognise emerging areas for social science. They are:

- Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management
- Health and Wellbeing
- Understanding Individual Behaviour
- New Technology, Innovation and Skills
- Environment, Energy and Resilience

- Security, Conflict and Justice
- Social Diversity and Population Dynamics

We will approach the challenges holistically, supporting the research, skilled people and infrastructure needed, often in partnership with others. Links between the challenges will also be exploited.

## **Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management**

The collapse of confidence in the world financial system will shape the research agenda for a long time. The full extent of the damage to the global economy remains unclear. Governments have been forced to intervene in the economy, overturning the economic orthodoxy of the last 30 years. The boundaries of public and private are being redrawn as new economic regimes are created. The recession puts renewed pressure on understanding the causes of poverty and what policies reduce it. Through research centres and grants, ESRC funded social scientists have already been active in these areas, giving us the opportunity to build on and deepen what is already known. Governance has proved inadequate in the face of the spiralling complexity of financial innovation. Social scientists will increasingly be expected to examine the causes and the resulting economic and social distress, and suggest remedies.

The challenges facing social science include: calibrating the impact of greater governmental involvement in the economy; understanding individual investor and consumer behaviour within a highly volatile global economic context; how policymakers can ensure that market governance mechanisms effectively address risks, for both individuals and businesses; and the impacts of globalisation. To address these challenges social science will use new international data resources and comparative methods. Increased investment will be required, including studentships geared to the economic opportunities and risks agenda. Interdisciplinary collaborations will seek to explain the co-evolution of global economic performance, environmental sustainability, security, and human health and wellbeing, and the role of individual and collective behaviour in economic events.

In 2009-10, we established a new initiative on 'Rising Powers, Global Challenges and Social Change'. The emergence of the so-called "Rising Powers" - including but not limited to China, India, Brazil and Russia - represents one of the key drivers of global economic and social change. The aim of the initiative will be to deepen our understanding of the regional and global impacts of the Rising Powers and the economic, political and social implications for the UK. A call for Networks with embedded Visiting Fellowships was launched in 2009 and nine awards were announced, commencing in 2010. A new call for research awards will be launched in 2010/11.

In the final year of this spending review period we will also work with HM Treasury to develop a research agenda on prudential macro-economic policy.

### ***Development and Global Poverty***

A challenge of economic growth is to ensure that increased wealth benefits all in society, both nationally and internationally. We will build on our existing commitment to development research, including the partnership with the Department for International Development (DFID) which will impact on policy and practice for alleviating poverty and increasing economic development in the less developed world. This exciting partnership has attracted hundreds of high quality proposals involving universities in the UK and across the world.

In 2009-10 ESRC launched the second phase of the partnership with DFID, a £23M five year investment to fund development research with the potential to inform strategies for poverty reduction. The 2009-10 call specifically sought to support research on:

- Security, conflict & development
- The economic crisis poverty & growth
- Cities and development

In 2010/11 we will announce awards under the second phase and review the scope for further deepening the partnership with DFID.

## **Health and Wellbeing**

Avoidable health problems caused by social and economic factors are central to understanding huge differences in life expectancy - both between countries, where the gap can be over 40 years, and within the UK itself where the gap can be over 20 years for communities just a few miles apart. Maintaining and promoting physical and psychological health and wellbeing for all the population is a pre-condition of a more prosperous and cohesive society. Marked inequalities in health remind us how far we are from achieving the goal of health and wellbeing for all. Lower levels of wellbeing and ill health hold back employment and productivity, and make public services more difficult and costly to provide. How ill-health links to poverty is a global concern. Social and economic development in parts of Africa and Asia is held back by preventable disease and disability.

The challenges facing social science include: the consequences of the global economic downturn for health and wellbeing; the local, national and global social, economic and environmental causes of improved physical and mental health and wellbeing across the lifecourse, particularly in light of an ageing population; what underpins resilience in the face of ill health and wellbeing; the social and economic dimensions of predicting, preventing and responding to threats from existing and new infectious diseases and other health challenges; the long run socio-economic consequences of ill health and poor wellbeing; identifying and developing evidenced, effective policies and interventions that lead to improved health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities. Utilisation of national and international data resources, including the growing wealth of cohort, other longitudinal and administrative data is critical, as is developing new and innovative ways of combining diverse datasets in order to understand health and wellbeing.

### **Ageing**

There are considerable benefits to the UK in having an active and healthy older population. There are also profound economic and social implications both at a national level and at an individual level in terms of a citizen's own quality of life. The ESRC-managed cross-Council New Dynamics of Ageing Programme (NDA) aims to advance our knowledge and understanding of the dynamics of ageing and how their consequences can be managed to achieve the maximum benefits for older people.

The cross-council initiative on Lifelong Health and Wellbeing builds upon the achievements of the NDA programme and will identify those factors over the whole life course that are likely to be major determinants of health and wellbeing in later life. This will provide new opportunities for effective interventions. The research will therefore focus on: Lifecourse factors and experiencing older age - early origins of optimal health, causes and consequences of changing identities and beliefs, changing measures of quality of life. Under the initiative new interdisciplinary research centres are being established targeting the major determinants of health and wellbeing over the lifecourse and reducing dependency in later life. The third phase

of the initiative will be launched in 2010 inviting proposals that focus on ageing-related challenges including mental health and age-related conditions.

## **Understanding Individual Behaviour**

People vary in how they behave and make decisions and we need to integrate the insights and methods from contemporary biology and medical sciences with those of social scientists in seeking to understand individual behaviour. Social science enables a focus on understanding those decisions by individuals in the context of family, neighbourhood and social relations more generally. Research is starting to bring better knowledge of some behaviours. However, links between social, biological and environmental factors and individual behaviours, choices and outcomes are still far from clear. We need to understand how diverse factors fluctuate and compound over people's lives and how they can be predicted, managed or influenced. Specific challenges include: interdisciplinary understanding of the interplay between predispositions, values, actions and possible interventions to improve, for example, the quality of financial decision-making or reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour; how multi-level interventions at individual, household, community and societal level may be most effective; enhancing data sources to integrate social, environmental and bio-medical data to model multi-level influences on individual behaviour; identifying and measuring the strengths and limitations of particular influences on individual responses to change. Breakthroughs are likely to come as much from combining techniques as combining knowledge. As well as ensuring the sustained prosperity of individual disciplines, further investment in relevant interdisciplinary training, especially at post doctoral level, will be essential.

In 2010-11 we will build on the eight exploratory networks established in 2009 by investing in major cross disciplinary grants to further research in this area.

## **New Technology, Innovation and Skills**

Contemporary economies rely on innovation. Already, 40 per cent of the UK's value added arises from knowledge-intensive services and high-tech manufacturing. The economic downturn offers scope to rebalance the economy as investment moves into areas where the UK may have or may be able to build comparative advantage. Economic resilience depends on the capacity of people, firms and governments to innovate. Individuals need new kinds of expertise, technical skills and understanding. Firms must develop, adopt and adapt cutting edge services, products, processes and ways of working. Governments need to create policies and set frameworks for innovation and address the social, technical and ethical challenges set by biological, nano-, communication and other technologies. Emergent technologies can challenge our understanding of what government can do, what constitutes an organisation, even what it means to be human.

Social scientists need to play active roles in innovation, demonstrating how social, economic and political drivers shape new technologies. Our evidence has demonstrated how innovative teaching can stimulate interest in science and how well designed education technologies enhance learning. In the area of skills, social scientists have shown how and why early years education contributes to lifelong opportunity as well as the benefits of learning throughout life. In a time of global instability the UK needs to be well placed to develop and exploit new technologies and enhance the range of skills needed to drive the UK economy forward. Challenges include: the opportunities and threats of the explosion of human interaction on the internet and related technologies; how future technologies can underpin both economic and learning opportunities and open up new platforms for civic participation in contemporary

democracy; the social drivers and implications of developments in ubiquitous computing, nano-technologies and bio-technologies; determining how apparently autonomous technologies in areas as diverse as finance and defence can be regulated, governed and made accountable; skill development at all levels.

During this spending review period, we have established a new Centre in innovation research and have announced awards for projects on open holistic innovation in partnership with the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills, the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, and the Technology Strategy Board. In 2010-11 we will explore the potential to launch initiatives in the areas of intellectual property rights and copyright in the digital age, and high performance learning and skill development.

### **Digital Economy**

Early adoption of ICT tools supported by research capacity and skilled people better positions a country to reap the economic and social benefits of those tools – this is the aim of Digital Economy. This will transform every single aspect of business, government and public service activity and places social science at the heart of a very wide-ranging research agenda.

The ESRC has previously made significant investments in three high quality programmes of research (Cognitive Engineering, People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies and e-Society) that have given us valuable insights into how applications can best be designed to suit the capabilities of the user whilst producing viable products and processes. In partnership with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the ESRC is funding work on Technology Enhanced Learning that will deliver interdisciplinary research to support the creation, development and exploitation of digital technologies with the potential to improve the quality of learning experiences and learning outcomes radically.

Outstanding research questions for which high quality social science is necessary include how best to understand the co-evolution of new technologies and their societal and economic applications in a range of different sectors, including the environment, transport, healthcare, public services, creative industries and financial services. There are four particular areas where the ESRC has made new investments:

- Work with the TSB and the EPSRC on identity management and vulnerabilities in networked systems, contributing to the TSB's Technology Platform on Network Security.
- The creative industries and the digital economy, with the TSB, EPSRC and AHRC.
- Delivery of healthcare in the digital economy with MRC, EPSRC, the Wellcome Trust and the Department of Health.
- Enhancing the work of the new joint ESRC/ Department for Transport Centre, contributing to joint investments with the EPSRC and the TSB Technology Platform on intelligent transport systems.

### **Nanoscience**

Nanotechnologies can revolutionise society; they offer the potential of disruptive step changes in electronic materials, optics, computing and in the application of physical and chemical understanding (in combination with biology) to generate novel and innovative self-assembled

systems.

Social science has an essential role to play in the nanoscience debate not least in relation to the public's understanding and confidence in and engagement with its potential applications. The ESRC is taking forward work on public perceptions and understandings of both the risks and opportunities of nanotechnologies, in concert with other Research Councils. This work will focus on specific domains such as energy and healthcare; the internationalisation of science and innovation; cultural and social influences; and how to engage with the public. Convergence between nanotechnologies, biotechnologies, information technologies and cognitive science will provide unprecedented opportunities to improve human performance. But this potential will not be realised effectively without social scientific understandings of risk, public confidence and regulation.

In 2009-10 the schedule for a new grand challenge in nanotechnologies in healthcare was announced in partnership with the Research Councils. ESRC jointly funded an award under this grand challenge, and also contributed to the RCUK response to the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills consultation on the UK Strategy on Nanotechnology. In 2010-11 we will advance the nanotechnology and social science research agenda through a joint seminar with partners, and work with the Technology Strategy Board to review research issues for the nanotechnology sector's skills base.

## **Environment, Energy and Resilience**

By 2030 global demand for energy and food is predicted to double. A bigger world population, up by two billion, will put additional pressure on water and other resources. Environmental and climate change over the next 50 years will pose important threats, to food security, to health, and to economic prosperity around the world. Urgent, dramatic and far reaching action is required now to mitigate and adapt to environmental change. Energy use, security and trade, food and water consumption and greenhouse gas emissions are all social and economic issues.

Challenges and questions include: how to underpin the transitions to a low carbon economy and a more climate resilient society; identifying ways to secure safe, sustainable and affordable energy, food and water supplies; understanding perceptions and beliefs around the value of energy and environmental goods and services; development of sustainable environmental practices and policies for international agencies, governments at multiple levels, business, communities and individuals, and the structural, institutional and behavioural changes needed to implement them; how environmental knowledge is understood when the modern world suffers from 'information overload'; understanding perceptions of the risks from environmental change and natural hazards and development of interventions to strengthen resilience; shaping environmental regulation and the roles of governments, markets and civil society.

### **Energy**

The Research Councils' Energy Programme brings together energy-related research and training across the Research Councils to address the outstanding international issues of climate change and security of energy supply. Social science research in this area is essential to understanding how a transition to a sustainable energy economy might be achieved. Immediate priorities include: new investments in the economics of climate change; ensuring that the social sciences can play an enhanced role in the next phase of research at the UK Energy Research

Centre; new activities on energy and equity and energy security; and ensuring that social science research plays a key role in the Energy Technologies Institute to enhance the development and deployment of low-carbon technologies.

The Research Councils have identified a need to expand research on energy demand management and energy efficiency as well as transport and energy. All of these are areas where the social sciences need to make a central contribution. Further research is also needed on ways to support changes in energy consumption behaviour within the home, by business and in the delivery of services. This will include analysis of the effectiveness of current interventions, experiments and regulatory and incentive structures. Enhancing research capacity and international collaboration are also essential in this area.

In 2010/11 we will announce awards made jointly with EPSRC under the energy and communities call; part of the Research Councils Energy Programme. We will also review the energy research investment strategy following completion of the RCUK international energy review, led by EPSRC.

### ***Living with Environmental Change***

Living with Environmental Change (LWEC) is an interdisciplinary research and policy partnership programme to increase resilience to - and reduce the costs of - environmental change, addressing the associated pressures on natural resources, ecosystem services, economic growth and social progress.

The key question is how we can change the behaviour of consumers, businesses and governments. These issues have been highlighted by recent major reports such as the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Stern Review of the Economics of Climate Change and the UK Government's Strategy for Sustainable Development.

There is also increasing recognition of the economic and social value of ecosystem services and the need for urgent action to manage these more effectively. The programme will enable decision-makers to make better informed judgements about how to consume such services, how to manage and protect such benefits for the future most effectively, how greater resilience to change might be developed and what social and economic adaptations might be needed.

In 2010-11 our continuing investments in this area will include: ESRC climate research fellowships, the ESRC Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability (STEPS) Centre at the University of Sussex, the ESRC Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy at LSE and the University of Leeds, and the UK Transport Research Centre at Imperial College.

New investments and activities in 2010-11 will include:

- Announcing awards under the fourth call of the Rural Economy and Land Use programme (RELU), focusing on adapting rural living and land use to environmental change
- The launch of two new UK Research Groups on Sustainable Behaviours to undertake research on how to transform UK society towards more environmentally sustainable patterns of consumption and ways of living
- Working in partnership with BBSRC and other partners to develop an RCUK

- programme on food security
- Announcing the outcome of the joint call with NERC for research proposals in the area of resilience to natural hazards

We will also work in partnership with the Research Councils to develop an RCUK programme on food security, led by BBSRC. Under the programme, RCUK will develop a strategy with the aim of harnessing the country's world-leading research base to help to deliver healthy, sustainable food for all.

## **Security, Conflict and Justice**

Although conflicts between states have become less frequent, there remain many threats to the security of individuals, communities and states. Many of these threats are diversifying. All are interconnected and all are global. For example, conflicts over territory and ideology are overlain by struggles about identity and justice which have led to the break up of states and violence between and across countries and regions. Competition for resources, such as water, energy and food, has the potential to trigger new forms of conflict and new technologies can enable criminal activity as well as offering the promise of preventing and mitigating insecurity. Social science has a critical role to play in understanding how and why threats arise and what interventions are most likely to improve threat prediction, and avoid, reduce and manage risks.

ESRC will fund research on the drivers of insecurity; why competition sometimes develops into violent conflict; the nature of contemporary conflicts and how they might be resolved and the effects mitigated; and how social injustice perpetuates insecurities. This will explore how notions of self, community rights, ethics and competing ideas of justice can be incorporated into new ways of predicting, mitigating, avoiding and managing insecurity. In 2010-11 our continued investments in this area include the ESRC/AHRC Ideas and Beliefs Fellowships which commenced in 2009.

### ***Global Uncertainties: Security for all in a changing world***

The world we live in today is characterised by uncertainty including the ongoing risks from international terrorism and conflict, rapid technological development, demographic, cultural, and socio-economic change, and increasing pressures on natural resources. Such pressures often have a disproportionate impact in the developing world, contributing to extreme poverty, lack of opportunities and ultimately instability and conflict. The prosperity and security of the UK will be affected by how we respond to these challenges both nationally and internationally – reducing poverty, tackling and adapting to environmental change, and responding effectively to evolving threats to security.

The RCUK Global Uncertainties programme is a £105M programme which brings together the global security research activities of the seven Research Councils and is led by ESRC. It aims to integrate research across a wide range of disciplines and areas to explore the impacts that drivers such as poverty, health, globalisation, beliefs, and competition for resources have on security, and to generate new knowledge about how threats to security can be better predicted, detected, prevented and mitigated. The programme also aims to strengthen the UK research community in these areas and engage directly with national and international policy makers, public bodies, NGOs and the private sector to accelerate the uptake and maximise the impact of the research.

Activities supported under all seven of ESRC's strategic challenges will contribute to the Global Uncertainties programme – including research to support economic growth in developing countries; research on preventing and responding to the threats of infectious diseases; on identity management and cyber-security; on energy and food security; on strengthening the resilience of individuals, organisations and communities; and on migration.

In 2010-11 the programme will continue to develop under the leadership of the Global Uncertainties Strategic Advisory Group with representatives drawn from academia, government, business and the third sector. Activities will include academic-stakeholder networks, events and placements to enhance the impact of the programme. A call will also be launched for research proposals under one of the programme's core areas.

## **Social Diversity and Population Dynamics**

Local, national and transnational communities are being formed and re-formed at unprecedented speed. Changing patterns of migration, economic opportunity, environmental change, fertility, ageing and new family and household dynamics interact with complex consequences. Understanding the extent and implications of these changes will be essential if we are to seize the opportunities for economic resilience, opportunity and wellbeing that diversity and change can bring, and this will require novel contributions from the social sciences. Inequality which may be compounded by the recession challenges solidarity both within countries and between them. Rapid social change demands a rethinking of how societies define and pursue collective goals – through public, private or third sector organisations at various scales, from neighbourhood to regions, state and transnational. Research will be essential to measure change both within the UK and globally. The ESRC will also enhance knowledge about complex and often deeply embedded differences in practices, ethnicity, and belief alongside class, locality and gender. It will build understanding of the different ways in which people value, respond to and interact with diversity.

Fundamental challenges include: how policies on migration, fertility, social mobility, and local, national and international economic management affect and are affected by social groups; how shifting demographic trends impact on the delivery of public, private and third sector services; how to promote collective wellbeing while engaging the confidence and participation of diverse populations; how diverse populations in particular places create, innovate and use technologies to promote connectivity and cohesion.

In 2010-11 we will commission a research programme on Equalities Research in collaboration with the Equality and Human Rights Commission. In addition, analysis of data collected for the ESRC funded 2010 British Election Study will further understanding of democratic processes.

We will also begin work towards an initiative to support the new RCUK Connected Communities programme, which is currently being developed and will be led by AHRC.

## **Responsive Mode Funding**

Responsive funding has always been a core element of our portfolio. It enables the Council to support work of the highest quality based on ideas developed by the social science community in all of the areas within the Council's remit and across a very large research active workforce. Indeed, the ESRC is one of the largest Research Councils in terms of the community it serves, accounting for over 25 per cent of those staff returned in the last Research Assessment

Exercise across a wide range of disciplines. Responsive funding ranges from basic or 'blue skies' research, often with an emphasis on developing new theory, through to more applied work, much of which maps onto the Council's current, or indeed possible future, priorities with the potential for significant impact. There is no inherent conflict between funding work in a responsive manner and achieving greater impact.

The Council's responsive funding provides a continuum of support for researchers throughout the academic lifecourse. These opportunities range from the first grants scheme, introduced in 2005, through to the large grants and professorial fellowships schemes. The demand for funding through these schemes has been impressive in terms of both the quality and quantity of applications.

Awards under the fourth large grants competition will be announced in 2010. Recent awards in the professorial fellowship scheme will produce major impacts in such areas as:

- public policy systems in Europe
- economic crisis management
- enhancing the use of information on survey data quality
- political campaigning and participation and the internet
- family life and labour in the first industrial revolution

The ESRC will maintain its strong commitment to interdisciplinarity both within and beyond the social sciences and through all funding modes. We will ensure that this is given greater emphasis in our assessment processes and in the training and guidance given to peer reviewers. In April 2009 the Council also announced changes to its responsive funding arrangements to ensure that it gives greater encouragement to transformative, innovative and 'high risk, high potential impact' proposals. Assessment of proposals by appropriate research users will ensure the full impact potential of research funded in the responsive mode is realised. Assessment of responsive mode proposals will be further enhanced through the introduction of our Grants Delivery Group in 2010, supported by three standing panels and a new peer review college. The Council will continue to try to ensure the highest possible success rates are achieved in the responsive mode in times of increasing demand for ESRC funding.

## **IMPACT THROUGH WORLD CLASS INFRASTRUCTURE**

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The delivery of leading edge social science research must be underpinned by a sustained investment in a world class data infrastructure based on an integrated suite of global resources and the most advanced skills, tools and techniques. Demand for such a data infrastructure is high, with use of the Council's Economic and Social Data Service more than doubling in the last five years. We have already made significant strides in responding to such demand through our investment in an internationally renowned portfolio of data resources. We remain committed to meeting the substantial costs of maintaining this portfolio in the future. Bigger and better datasets are required to study our ever more complex society effectively. Investment in the new world leading UK household longitudinal study, *Understanding Society*, and the 2012 Birth Cohort Study is an exciting start. However, further expansion of the UK data infrastructure continues to be essential.

We will drive forward such expansion through the UK Data Forum, building on the National Data Strategy which was revised in autumn 2009. This Strategy has for the first time brought a

range of partners together to identify key national data needs. With additional funding there now exist huge opportunities to exploit these partnerships fully and to develop leading edge data resources to help answer some of the key questions within our research challenges. The Council will in particular:

- radically extend opportunities for high quality, interdisciplinary research and policy analysis through the development of major data resources. This will include development of the world leading longitudinal studies such as *Understanding Society* and 2012 Birth Cohort Study, alongside improved access to key administrative and transactional related data resources. These new data resources will provide the key high quality resources needed to deliver the challenges set out in this plan.
- drive forward new standards in data access and security, supported by a campaign of engagement

In 2010/11 we will launch a fully functional Secure Data Service (SDS) following a two year pilot implemented in 2008. This service will set in place a number of protocols to ensure that sensitive data can only be accessed by researchers under safe and secure conditions, and will help to ensure that the full research potential of these resources is exploited.

Technological advances in recent years have enabled the formation of large administrative databases held by central and local government. The pilot Administrative Data Liaison Service (ADLS), funded by ESRC, was launched in 2009 and will create a pioneering single 'point of contact' service to the academic community and government departments, signposting users to relevant administrative data and supporting them to access it.

We will also maintain the UK's international leadership role in developing a global infrastructure by leading with international partners on a proposal for an expert group to take forward the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global Science Forum's initiative on Data and Research Infrastructure for the Social Sciences. This will be crucial in opening up access to new data sources, supporting new research on many areas within the challenges.

If we are to exploit our expanding data infrastructure fully, then it is also of vital importance that our researchers have access to the most advanced research methods. The ESRC have always been at the international forefront of methodological research and pioneered world class developments in advanced quantitative methods. We remain committed to maintaining this international reputation by building on the National Centre for Research Methods. In 2010, four awards will commence under an initiative on comparative cross-national methods commissioned in 2009.

There remains, however, undoubted scope to deepen our current programmes of methodological research. As datasets become bigger and more complex, then so does the demand for ever more sophisticated tools and techniques to analyse them. We hope to develop innovative approaches to the storage, merging, linking, mining and modelling of complex data resources including real time data streams, text, voice and images.

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## **IMPACT THROUGH SKILLED PEOPLE**

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If the UK is to maintain its position as a world leader in social science then it is critical that it

sustains a high quality research base. However, there are very serious threats to the long-term health of the social science community. The UK social science workforce is ageing. In the next ten years 31 per cent of the current social science workforce will have reached the age of 65 and the recruitment and retention of new researchers is not keeping pace with this potential rate of attrition. The ESRC is committed to sustaining the long term health of the social science research base and with funding provided by the last CSR allocation, we have started to combat these threats.

We will continue to uphold our major investment in training and skills development, to recruit and retain the most talented people by offering diverse and flexible training to researchers at all points of their career. Our strategy will include:

- improving the quality of postgraduate skills development through the introduction of more flexible, innovative postgraduate training, made up of a national network of doctoral training centres and doctoral training units.
- reducing supply side skills and research capacity deficits, by targeted initiatives in areas such as quantitative methods. We have developed a major strategic initiative with the Funding Councils in advanced quantitative methods. More work will be done to expand postdoctoral numbers and mid career training programmes to ensure that we have the skilled research base to exploit our world class data infrastructure fully.
- extending training and development opportunities for early and mid career researchers through further funding of first grants, postdoctoral and mid career fellowship schemes

In 2010/11 we will announce awards for new doctoral training centres and doctoral training units under our revised postgraduate training framework achieving our aim to introduce more flexible and innovative postgraduate training.

Over recent years we have supported a number of highly successful interdisciplinary capacity building schemes with the NERC, MRC and EPSRC. We will continue to support such schemes, which are an important part of our response to many of the interdisciplinary research challenges identified in this plan. Embedding transferable (employability) skills training across our schemes is also a priority, to ensure we are supplying the most highly skilled people to support innovation and growth in the broader economy and society.

We have also been collaborating with the other Research Councils to strengthen our collective understanding of research careers. The ESRC has been the driving force behind current plans to develop a RCUK longitudinal study of doctoral students. This will for the first time create an authoritative national picture of the careers and economic impact of a cohort of PhD completers.

## **IMPACT THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS**

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The Council regards knowledge transfer and the achievement of impact as integral to all of its activities. Impact therefore pervades all aspects of this plan. The concept of 'impact' in the social sciences applies to all sectors and not only the private sector or the UK economy. It embraces 'economic impact' in the sense of direct and often quantifiable economic benefits; wider social impacts that will benefit society more generally such as effects on the environment, public

health or quality of life; and impacts on government policy, the third sector and professional practice.

These wider aspects are crucial. There is a significant cost to the public purse of a failed policy and significant benefit from a successful one. Many of the policies of the last decade in relation to benefits and family tax credits, for example, have been informed by rigorous social science research, most of it funded by the ESRC. Similarly, public sector productivity and a healthy workforce are as important to the UK's economic wellbeing as increased profits in the private sector. For example, it is estimated that absenteeism costs the economy £13.4 billion a year. An improvement to that figure of only 0.1 per cent based on improved knowledge of health, diet and wellbeing would more than repay the costs of additional investment in research in this area over the CSR period. We believe that the research described in this plan could have much bigger impacts.

The commitment to achieving greater impact is reflected throughout our strategic plan. The key elements of our strategy are:

- creating and supporting economic impact through **knowledge exchange, people transfer and infrastructure**
- playing a **leadership role** within the social science community
- **communicating the economic impact** of the social sciences.

These objectives will be realised in the current spending review period and beyond through the following initiatives.

1. Embedding the model of the co-production of knowledge by integrating knowledge transfer and economic impact throughout the research process. In all of our new investments researchers will be required to have clear plans to engage with users and to generate and demonstrate impact from the outset, throughout and following the whole research process.

2. The introduction of a follow-on funding scheme with earmarked funding. This is a substantial extension of the impact grants scheme and is open to all social scientists. It provides up to a year of additional funding at full cost where the research team can demonstrate the potential for significant economic, social or policy impact. Approval of funding is based on a light touch review process to allow for speedy decisions and to encourage people to apply. The Council's commitment to this will be £3 million a year by the end of the CSR period. A total of 29 follow on funding awards have been approved under three calls in the first two years of the scheme. Awards from a further four calls will be announced during 2010/11.

3. The development of a positive relationship with the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) as part of a significant increase in support for business engagement. The Council is already one of the principal funders of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with a current commitment of over £1 million a year. The Council has also invested heavily in developing UK management research in recent years, not least through AIM, and collaboration with the TSB offers new opportunities. The Council will aim to commit £8 million in partnership with the TSB over the CSR period.

4. Implementing the Council's revised business engagement strategy in close partnership with the TSB. This will focus on the prioritisation of particular business sectors including both those where the TSB has particular expertise and those new areas in which the TSB is expanding its portfolio. These priority areas reflect the potential of social science to have a real impact in that area; the relative, and often growing, importance of the particular sector within the UK economy as a whole; and, existing investments and relationships. We will ensure that we work with and address the needs of SMEs as well as larger enterprises. The priority sectors are financial services, retail and sport, and leisure and tourism with activities focused around three strategically important cross-cutting themes of innovation, business models, and skills.

Specific activities will include:

- adding value to existing investments through business fellow placements and workshops
- further collaborative research through the Venture scheme
- increasing the proportion of activity with the private sector within the current knowledge transfer schemes, including Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering.

5. Implementing the ESRC third sector engagement strategy. Our strategy was developed through extensive consultation with academics, policymakers, practitioners, research funders and national infrastructure organisations to identify both the research and knowledge exchange needs of the sector and potential priorities for the strategy. We will work in partnership with the third sector to

- enhance and develop the evidence base with for and on the third sector
- build the research expertise and capacity of the third sector for conducting and utilising relevant research resources and data
- facilitate knowledge exchange and create partnerships between academia, policymakers and the third sector to generate significant impacts on policy and practice

The portfolio of ESRC activity supporting our third sector engagement strategy includes collaboratively funded investments such as the Third Sector Research Centre, the Centre for Charitable Giving and Philanthropy and associated Capacity Building Clusters addressing Social Enterprise and Community Empowerment. In addition, we will continue to provide a variety of schemes to third sector, academics, policymakers and practitioners which enable third sector stakeholders to access collaborative funding, academic expertise, innovative ideas and the opportunity to enhance the sector's creativity, effectiveness and impact.

6. Increasing the budget for the highly successful Ventures scheme, a scheme that is primarily based on the co-production model. There are now almost 60 initiatives supported through the Venture mechanism with a wide range of partner organisations. This is the acid test of the value for non-academic organisations of working with the Council in that they believe independent research will help to deliver the twin aims of scientific quality and increased impact. Over this period, Ventures funding will be targeted on our priority areas to ensure we maximise the funding opportunities

available in these areas.

Current Ventures are addressing, with partners, key research and policy issues such as:

- Dietary decisions
- Sustainable behaviours
- Transport
- Charitable giving and philanthropy
- Homelessness
- Economics of health

7. We know from previous ESRC research that 'people transfer' is one of the most effective forms of knowledge transfer. We have engendered opportunities both for established academics and doctoral students to be supported on placements in non-academic organisations and for research users to have the opportunity to work in a HEI. The Council wishes to increase substantially the number of opportunities for such placements at all levels and across all sectors. The Council will also increase its provision of training and development opportunities in areas such as entrepreneurship and communicating with non-academic audiences.

8. The Council has already agreed a number of changes to improve the management, reporting and evaluation arrangements for its major research investments so as to maximise the wider impact of its work. These include a stronger requirement for all awards to demonstrate the impact of their research; to report all outputs in real time; and to highlight major impacts in their annual reports. Final reports are now requested 12 months after funding has ended so that it will be possible to capture a far wider range of impacts and to evaluate the work on the basis of both academic quality and subsequent impact. Impacts generated following final reports will be traced on an ongoing basis until at least five years post-award.

In addition, the Council's portfolio of case studies, discipline based reviews and methodological work will be extended to strengthen the evidence base in terms of what works and how best to assess and measure economic, social and policy impact.

We will measure our achievement of these objectives by increases in the volume of funding and activity; the quantitative measurement of outputs, primarily through the economic impact reporting framework and baseline report; and the qualitative assessment of impact through commissioned evaluations and user surveys. This will include new work to assess the economic impact of ESRC research drawing on the recommendations of the RCUK Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Group project.

Impact is of course central to all of the activities described in this plan so that additional investment in the challenges and other areas will in themselves entail a considerable increase in our expenditure on impact and knowledge transfer.

## **SCIENCE IN SOCIETY**

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In close partnership with the other Councils and the RCUK Science in Society unit, ESRC will extend its science in society activities, with a continuing emphasis on promoting research careers; strengthening the evidence base on engaging with the public; and widening the range of

activities for the general public. In the CSR period we will:

- engage with young people through further development of our Social Science for Schools initiative
- embed public engagement within our processes by involving public users within our governance structures
- develop a set of syntheses which will highlight trends and gaps in public knowledge about science and society issues.

## **IMPACT THROUGH INTERNATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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The ESRC's international mission is to be one of the world's leading social science research agencies and to ensure that other sciences both draw on and inspire the growing body of world class social science research. Within that context we have three main goals:

1. A commitment to removing the barriers to trans-national research collaborations. Working with our partner agencies, we will streamline and co-ordinate the processing of applications, enhancing the ease with which the bilateral funding schemes can be used to support collaborations between leading researchers.

We are committed to developing further collaborations with the US, India and China, using the RCUK offices in all three countries to identify and develop opportunities. Through the partnership with DFID, we have encouraged greater collaboration and innovative approaches to development research, driven by the need to achieve more effective policy impact.

2. To take advantage of opportunities for international collaboration, social science researchers need appropriate tools and training. We will continue to widen and promote access to international data resources and expand the international mobility of early career researchers through the development of targeted international networking initiatives.
3. We will enhance the effectiveness of international funding bodies and initiatives by continuing to emphasise stringent standards of assessment and evaluation. We will add value to a range of formal and informal networks on both a European and global level. This includes the 'big six' funding agencies' forum to co-ordinate on issues of common concern and interest, including the changing role of the European Research Area and the European Research Council.

ESRC is the managing Research Council for the new RCUK Office in India, which was launched successfully in October 2008. Our CSR allocation therefore includes £4 million to take forward the Science Bridges programme with India.

In addition to our existing international partnerships, the introduction of the Open Research Area initiative in 2010 with partners in France, Germany and The Netherlands will significantly enhance international collaborative work through a coordinated peer review and single common selection process. Awards under the first call of the initiative will be announced in 2010/11.

In 2010/11 we will also commission further Pathfinders projects which encourage collaboration between researchers in India, Brazil, China and South Africa to facilitate access to and knowledge about data resources in these countries.

The seventh European Framework Research Programme is due to be launched in July 2010. In support of this, we will develop a strategy to actively promote the Social Sciences and Humanities Work Programme of the initiative to the UK social science and humanities community. We will also participate in discussions on the UK's strategy towards the development of Framework Programme Eight.

## **EFFICIENCY**

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The Council will continue to achieve efficiency savings throughout the CSR period, for example through streamlined grants processing and final reporting requirements and through more efficient research commissioning. Through our strategic planning and decision-making processes, we will continue to ensure the reprioritisation of expenditure by focusing new investment on our strategic priorities. The impressive increases in co-funding of the last few years, particularly through the growth of the Venture Fund and partnership funding of national infrastructure and facilities, will be maintained but this leverage can only be obtained with an initial increased investment from the ESRC itself. And not least, the Council is committed to the RCUK Shared Services Centre (SSC) and to further cross-Council harmonisation that may lead to some 20 per cent savings in ESRC administrative costs. In 2008-9 the first elements of the SSC went live, with ESRC HR and payroll transferring, followed by the transfer of finance functions to the SSC in autumn 2009. ESRC aims to be amongst the first Councils to deliver grants and studentships processing through the SSC in 2010/11. Our contribution to the SSC project in 2010-11 is currently expected to be approximately £200,000.

## ANNEX I – FINANCIAL INFORMATION

**Table I**

**Distribution of Council's Budget by Strategic Area over the remaining CSR Period**

<b>£m</b>	<b>2010/2011</b>
Area 1: Environment, Energy & Resilience	15.0
Area 2: Global Economic Performance, Policy & Management	37.0
Area 3: Health & Wellbeing	33.0
Area 4: New Technology, Innovation & Skills	20.0
Area 5: Security, Conflict & Justice	10.0
Area 6: Social Diversity & Population Dynamics	40.0
Area 7: Understanding Individual Behaviour	25.0
Area 8: Health Of Disciplines	31.5
Area 10: Other	12.5
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>224.0</b>

Notes:

- (i) The ESRC produced a new Strategic Plan in 2009, which set out its strategic challenges for the next five years. These differ from our previous challenges and thus the figures here are not all comparable with those in the 2008 Delivery Plan.
- (ii) Data and Resources investments generally underpin a number of our challenges and we have included these investments within the social science challenges.
- (iii) These figures reflect the distribution of our budget from our grant-in-aid and external income.
- (iv) 'Health of Disciplines' includes responsive mode and studentship awards that do not fit under the social science challenges.

**Table 2****Distribution of Council's Budget by Funding Mode over CSR Period**

<b>£m</b>	<b>2010/2011</b>
Strategic and Collaborative Research	36.799
Responsive Research	53.209
Research Resources	26.474
Postgraduate Training	50.050
Administration Costs	4.234
Knowledge Transfer and Communication	6.570
International, Policy, Evaluation and Programme Management	9.038
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>186.374</b>

- (i) These figures reflect the distribution of our budget from our grant-in-aid. Distribution of our budget derived from external income is thus not included.

**Table 3****Proposed Contribution to RCUK Priorities**

<b>£m</b>	<b>2008/2009</b>	<b>2009/2010</b>	<b>2010/2011</b>	<b>Total</b>
Energy	5	6	9	20
LWEC	5	6	9	20
Security	5	8	10	23
Lifelong health and wellbeing	8	10	12	30
Digital Economy	-	1	2	3
Nanoscience	-	0.5	0.5	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>31.5</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>97</b>