



ESRC
Delivery Report
2009-10

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Delivery Report provides detail on the achievements of the Economic and Social Research Council during 2009-10, as well as progress against the targets set out in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2008-2011.

The Council has funded investments across the challenges for social science identified in the Strategic Plan 2009-2014 and has made contributions to the RCUK Research Priorities. Highlights include awards funded under the following challenge areas: Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management, Environment, Energy and Resilience and New Technology and Skills, and the RCUK Global Uncertainties programme.

ESRC completed commissioning of several of its annual competitions and continued to support research awards through its open schemes under the responsive mode. The excellence with impact, interdisciplinarity and innovation initiative was implemented, complementing the RCUK Pathways to Impact project.

This year has seen further development and implementation of the *Understanding Society* longitudinal study, with the second wave of data collection entering the field, and work beginning towards the collection of biomedical data. The scientific and business case for the 2012 Birth Cohort Study was finalised and submitted for Ministerial approval in early 2010, and the specification for the Cohort Resources Facility was also prepared.

ESRC's commitment to further improve the quality of postgraduate skills development has seen significant advances in 2009/10 with the announcement of the revised Postgraduate Training Framework and the launch of a call for Doctoral Training Centre and Doctoral Training Unit proposals. ESRC has also continued its capacity building activities through the funding of new studentships and fellowships in priority areas including Management and Business Studies and Economics, as well as the development of activity to reduce supply side deficits in quantitative methods.

The Council has continued to develop its international leadership role through the launch of the first call for proposals under the innovative Open Research Area agreement with France, Germany and the Netherlands, and has supported further research awards under its bilateral agreements with Hong Kong and South Africa. Awards have also been funded under the International Training and Networking Opportunities scheme and the Collaborative Analysis of Micro-data Resources Pathfinder Research initiative.

ESRC has revised both its Business and Third Sector Engagement Strategies during 2009/10 and has continued to develop its relationship with the Technology Strategy Board. Further investments have been approved under the Collaborative Research Ventures Scheme and funding has been announced for several knowledge transfer awards across the Council's schemes.

Another successful Festival of Social Science was held in 2010 and public engagement work continued with the commissioning of research syntheses to highlight trends and gaps in public knowledge about science and society issues. The Council has also provided public engagement support to both the RCUK Global Uncertainties programme and the *Understanding Society* study.

Key organisational developments included revisions to the ESRC governance structure with the introduction of new Committees and Networks, and transition of the finance functions to the RCUK Shared Services Centre.

2. RECENT SUCCESSES

ESRC has continued to develop its research activities during 2009/10 and has further invested in the development of its infrastructure, skills, partnerships and international agendas, taking steps to embed impact throughout all areas of activity. Below are some of the highlights of the year.

2.1 Impact through world class research

2.1.1 Directed Research

Under the **Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management** challenge, the ESRC funded nine networks with embedded visiting fellowships under the **Rising Powers** call in 2009/10. Some networks focused on particular rising powers such as China while others compared evolution across rising powers nations. This year also saw the launch of the second phase of the **ESRC partnership with the Department for International Development**, a £23m five year investment. The first call under the second phase of the initiative led to eight awards being recommended for funding, with the potential to inform strategies for poverty reduction.

Developments under the **Environment, Energy and Resilience** challenge have included the commissioning of two new investments in **sustainable behaviours**, working in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the devolved administrations. In addition, 2009/10 also saw the launch of the **UK Transport Research Centre**, a £7.75m collaboration between ESRC, the Department for Transport and the Scottish Government. Three new awards were also announced in the area of **Understanding Individual Behaviour** under the second phase of the collaboration on responsible gambling with the **Responsible Gambling Fund**.

During 2009/10 ESRC completed commissioning under phase two of the **Innovation Research Initiative** of three substantive projects and six exploratory projects on open, holistic innovation in collaboration with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts and the Technology Strategy Board. This followed the establishment of the UK Innovation Research Centre in the first phase of the initiative in 2008/09. This area of work supported the **New Technology and Skills** challenge.

ESRC has continued to ensure social science makes a significant contribution to the RCUK Research Priorities over the past year. ESRC leads the £114m **Global Uncertainties** programme which brings together the global security research activities of the seven Research Councils. In 2009/10 the **Global Uncertainties Strategic Advisory Group** was formed to continue the strategic direction of the programme, building on the success of the interim security forum. A successful **stakeholder event** held in early 2010 saw delegates, including academics, government officials and practitioners, representatives from think tanks, businesses and the third sector with interests in security come together to exchange ideas, develop partnerships and collaborations, and establish directions for future research.

2.1.2 The Responsive Mode

ESRC established its **excellence with impact, interdisciplinarity and innovation** initiative in 2009, designed to encourage and support these three aspects of the research it funds. The roll out of the initiative was supported by a communications strategy which encouraged researchers to identify ways in which they can engage with users and generate and demonstrate academic, economic, policy and societal impact from the outset of their research, through to completion of

the project and beyond. The guidance also confirmed that the ESRC would continue to be keen to support research which was ambitious (but clearly specified) and had the potential for high scientific impact and/or high user impact but also carried higher than normal risks. The integration of the initiative was supported by regional training workshops for assessors and referees to explore the practicalities of implementing the new guidance.

In 2009 the ESRC completed commissioning of the fourth year of both the **Large and First Grants Schemes** with three and 22 awards funded respectively. An outline stage was successfully introduced to the First Grants Competition to manage the increasing demand for this scheme. Five **Professorial Fellowships** awards were funded under the 2009 competition.

Evaluations completed on First Grant awards showed an impressive 45% received a grade of 'Outstanding'. Of 15 Professorial Fellows evaluated to date, 13 have received a grade of 'Outstanding'. The evaluations indicated that these Professorial Fellowships showed strengths in impact as well academic quality.

A total of 1,335 **Standard and Small Grant** applications were considered by the Council in 2009/10, and of these 218 were recommended for awards, which represented an overall success rate of 16%.

2.2 Impact through world class infrastructure

ESRC continued its work to create a world class data infrastructure within the UK and maintain the country's reputation as a global centre of excellence in social and economic research over the last year. The implementation of *Understanding Society*, the world leading longitudinal study of the socio-economic circumstances and attitudes of 100,000 individuals in 40,000 British households progressed successfully with additional co-funding secured during 2009/10. Data collection under wave one of the study continued; the second wave entered the field in early 2010 and work towards the implementation of wave three also began. Development work also began on the collection of biomedical data which would enable the linking of biomedical data with socio-economic data.

Extensive work has also continued on the **2012 Birth Cohort Study** and the **Cohort Resources Facility**, being developed in collaboration with MRC and Wellcome Trust. The Scientific Leadership Team for the 2012 Birth Cohort Study was appointed in 2009, with the scientific and business case finalised and submitted to BIS in early 2010 for Ministerial approval to release the earmarked funding from the Large Facilities Capital Fund. Decisions on the release of funds were deferred by HM Treasury in view of the general election held in May 2010. Following the announcement of the emergency budget and upcoming comprehensive spending review, RCUK will review and prioritise all Research Council bids to the Large Facilities Capital Fund, before priority bids are re-submitted to BIS towards the end of the 2010/11 financial year after completion of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Development of the specification and business case for the Cohort Resources Facility, the coordination facility for all major cohort studies, was also completed in early 2010 in preparation for commissioning. Progress on this element of the project is also subject to RCUK reprioritisation decisions and the BIS approval process outlined above.

Other activities during the year have included the publication of the revised **National Data Strategy** in summer 2009, for which ESRC provides stewardship on behalf of the UK Data Forum. The Strategy sets out priorities for the development of research data resources both within the social sciences and at the boundaries between the social sciences and other areas of scientific enquiry, over a three year period from 2009. This year also saw funding for four awards

under the **Comparative Cross-National Research Methods** initiative. These projects were built upon a range of qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodological approaches and have the potential to bring benefits to methodological development in comparative cross-national research, building capacity in this area across the UK social science research community.

2.3 Impact through skilled people

In 2009/10 ESRC began the implementation of its revised **Postgraduate Training Framework** which would see the first studentships under the new Framework commence in 2011. The Framework was designed to introduce more flexible and innovative postgraduate provision incorporating training in general research skills, research methods and transferable skills and to deliver this through a national network of Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) and Doctoral Training Units (DTUs). Commissioning began in 2009 with the launch of a call for individual or consortia proposals from institutions to establish the DTCs and DTUs. The call closed in March 2010 with decisions expected later in 2010.

ESRC continued its support to **build capacity** in shortage areas during 2009/10 awarding over 270 new studentships and more than 35 fellowships in priority areas including Management and Business Studies and Economics, and in advanced quantitative methods across the social sciences.

In 2009/10 innovative and creative training and development opportunities for researchers at all stages of their academic career were supported through commissioning of the fourth round of the **Researcher Development Initiative**. Thirteen awards were announced in early 2010 with particular success in the priority discipline of Management and Business Studies.

2.4 Impact through partnerships

Knowledge transfer is a vital component of ESRC activities, while impact is embedded throughout and across the Council's portfolio as set out in the ESRC Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

In addition to its excellence with impact, interdisciplinarity and innovation initiative, ESRC has implemented **Pathways to Impact** in its research proposal and assessment processes in line with the other Research Councils. Pathways to Impact provide a more extensive opportunity for researchers to develop activities to maximise the potential impact of their research and to ensure that such activities, where appropriate, can be properly supported and funded as an integral aspect of a research proposal.

In 2009/10 ESRC continued to enhance and develop its relationship with the **Technology Strategy Board** (TSB) through joint activities and ventures, with the collaboration with the TSB amounting to over £2.5 million, including investment in the UK Innovation Research Centre. Other investments in collaboration with the TSB included 14 new Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, a Knowledge Transfer Network and a Public Policy Seminar on social and behavioural issues influencing the development and adoption of Assisted Living Technologies.

The partnership with the TSB has embedded implementation of ESRC's **Business Engagement Strategy**, which was revised in 2009/10 to focus on the prioritisation of identified business sectors where there is potential for social science to have a real impact. The revised strategy identified priority sectors of 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. In 2009/10 ESRC supported five awards under the **Business Engagement Opportunities Scheme**, and funded 39 ESRC seminars and six workshops for business.

ESRC also revised its **Third Sector Engagement Strategy** in 2009, following consultation with third sector stakeholders, to align with the new Strategic Plan. The Council developed its third sector engagement delivery plan and supported six placements under a pilot **Third Sector Placement Fellowships** scheme offering placement opportunities for academics with third sector organisations.

Investment in the ESRC **Collaborative Ventures Scheme** continued to form a significant part of the Council's research portfolio. Ventures approved for funding during the past year included the Advanced Quantitative Methods Network with the Scottish Funding Council, Exploring and Explaining UK Dietary Decisions in the 21st Century with the Food Standards Agency, and Energy and Communities with EPSRC, EON and the Isle of Wight Council.

Other knowledge transfer and partnership activities in 2009/10 included funding for 19 **Follow on Funding** awards, 81 **Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering** (CASE), and 42 **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships** in addition to those funded with the TSB. ESRC has also provided training for over 300 of the researchers it funds, including early career researchers, in media relations and communications skills. In addition, it has delivered training in promoting innovation, best practice and knowledge transfer skills across academic and non-academic audiences to over 250 of its researchers, through events such as its **Knowledge Transfer Learning and Development Workshops**.

In November 2009 the Council published the fourth issue of the annual ESRC newsstand magazine **Britain in 2009** providing features, opinions and stories reflecting current trends and topics, and highlighting ESRC research and priorities. Sales have risen by 73% since the first issue in 2007. In 2009 ESRC also published **Recession Britain** which presented research evidence about previous economic recessions and commentary on the current downturn.

Over the year, ESRC has continued to implement its revised **final reporting process** with emphasis on recording the impact of the research in addition to its scientific quality. The new process requires a short streamlined End of Award Report due three months after the award ends, and an Impact Report summarising scientific, economic, policy and societal impact due 12 months after the award ends. In addition, award holders are able to record the scientific and societal benefits of their research using an Impact Record at any point during or after their award. Evaluation of the research takes place 12 months after the award ends.

The 2009 **evaluation programme** resulted in 35% of research projects judged by independent peer review to be 'outstanding', indicating work that has made an exceptional research contribution. The 2009 programme included two Economic Impact Evaluations, the International Benchmarking Review of UK Sociology, and evaluations of the ESRC Researcher Development Initiative, the Cultures of Consumption Programme, the Social Contexts and Responses to Risk Network, and over 300 research projects, plus discipline overviews of Socio-Legal Studies and Psychology.

2.5 Impact through international leadership

ESRC launched its first call under the three-year **Open Research Area** agreement in the social sciences in 2009/10. The agreement is an innovative common call for proposals between the ESRC and funding agencies in France, Germany and the Netherlands to fund the best joint research projects in the social sciences. The partnering organisations will conduct a coordinated peer review and single common selection process to address previous barriers to trans-national research collaborations.

The Council has also played a leading role in working with European partners to enhance opportunities for European collaborators to extend collaborations globally. ESRC was a funding partner of the **CO-REACH (Co-ordination of Research between Europe and China) ERA-NET (European Research Area network)** joint call for social science and humanities collaborative research between Europe and China. There was a strong response from the UK to the call resulting in 10 of the 14 funded projects involving UK partners.

Agreements with other countries have also been developed and implemented in 2009/10 leading to awards announced under the **bilateral agreements** with Hong Kong and South Africa and funding for collaborative awards under the **Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities/ Inequalities** initiative with the US National Institute of Health. In addition, ESRC played a leading role with AHRC in negotiating the first **RCUK-wide lead agency agreement** with the State of Sao Paulo Research Foundation in Brazil to co-fund Brazilian researchers on proposals recommended for funding by a UK Research Council.

ESRC has continued to support capacity building in international collaborative research through 18 awards funded under the **International Training and Networking Opportunities** scheme for early career researchers as a means of fostering international collaboration from an early stage in researchers' careers. ESRC also completed commissioning of 12 projects funded under the **Collaborative Analysis of Micro-data Resources Pathfinder Research** initiative which was aimed at bringing together social scientists in Brazil and India with UK counterparts to foster research collaboration and knowledge around the secondary analysis of existing data resources.

3. PROGRESS IN MANAGEMENT

Building on the development of its new Strategic Plan for 2009-2014, ESRC began to implement revisions to its governance structure to ensure the most effective and efficient delivery of its strategic objectives. In 2009/10 the Council delivered communications to its stakeholders detailing the changes to its governance structure and the grants assessment process. Appointment processes to recruit new members to Committees, Networks, Grants Assessment Panels and the Peer Review College were completed in early 2010. Appointments in 2010 include, for the first time, general public user representatives.

The Council's Management Development Programme, which began in 2008, has continued with the third cohort of participants. The overall aim of the Programme is to help staff to develop core management and leadership skills which they can use to ensure they become effective and consistent people managers. The ESRC has continued to implement its competency framework and management model, which have been reflected in individual objectives and performance reviews, and has maintained its programme of staff seminars to embed the objectives and priorities of the Strategic Plan throughout its activities.

4. PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The ESRC Scorecard for 2009-10 included 13 Key Deliverables, divided further into 90 Milestones. Achievements against the milestones can be summarised as follows:

Milestones fully achieved , or to be achieved , but with some delays	Milestones not fully achieved	TOTAL
87*	3	90

* The following 3 milestones have been achieved, but with some delay to the original timescale:

- *2k: Agree with RCUK partners outline programme for new investment in food security with integral social science contributions (quarter 2);*
- *3c: Finalise the communications strategy for Global Uncertainties (quarter 2);*
- *5c: Announce funding decisions of the ESRC/US National Science Foundation & National Institutes of Health calls for collaborative projects on Health Disparities (quarter 1).*

Of the 90 milestones set for the year, three were not achieved in full.

- *2l: Agree with RCUK partners outline programme for new investment in connected communities with integral social science contributions (quarter 3).*

Funding uncertainties have constrained development of this cross-Council programme led by AHRC.

- *6c: With other national agencies hold a second meeting of the International Data Forum (IDF) (quarter 4).*

Following discussion with international partners the ideas behind the IDF are now being pursued through different fora. The ESRC led (at the request of BIS) on the development of a proposal to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Global Science Forum (GSF) initiative on Data and Research Infrastructure for the Social Sciences. At its April 2010 meeting the GSF approved the proposal to take forward an expert group.

- *12k: Promote the impact of social sciences to the general public and user audiences by publishing the fourth annual commercial magazine Britain in 2010, and increase annual sales by 5% (quarter 4).*

Britain in 2010 was published successfully and has been well received, but due to the adverse economic conditions, sales fell by 22%. This is commensurate with the experience of other current affairs magazines such as the Economist and Time magazine, the sales of which have fallen by 20% and 21% respectively this year. Sales of the ESRC 'Britain in...' series have risen by 73% since its introduction in 2007.

5. FUTURE TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The targets and milestones for 2010-11 have been published in the Scorecard 2010-11, available at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery%5Fplan/>. The Delivery Plan has also been refreshed to reflect activities which the ESRC will be taking forward up to the end of the current spending review period in 2011.

Milestones for the coming year include activities to address the challenges for social science set out in our Strategic Plan and the RCUK research priorities, working in partnership where there is opportunity. Upcoming milestones include: launching a call for a cohort of post-doctoral fellowships targeted on prudential macro-economics and its interface with finance in partnership with HM Treasury; announcing the outcomes of the second phase stage two of the ESRC/DFID collaboration and phase four of the Rural Economy and Land Use programme; publishing a joint call with the Technology Strategy Board on Social and Behavioural Studies and Economic and Business Models for Assisted Living; and further enhancing the profile of the RCUK Global Uncertainties (GU) programme through the second annual GU networking event.

Activities in the impact through skilled people objective will include announcing decisions under the new Postgraduate Training Framework to establish a network of Doctoral Training Centres and Units.

Major strategic investment to provide a world class data infrastructure will continue through the development of both the 2012 Birth Cohort Study and the Cohort Resources Facility (subject to RCUK reprioritisation and BIS Ministerial approval as outlined in section 2.2 above), and the collection and release of data under the *Understanding Society* study. The Council will also develop and implement an e-social science strategy and launch the fully functional Secure Data Service.

The ESRC will continue to develop its international leadership and collaborative funding through the announcement of outcomes from the first round of the Open Research Area agreement with France, Germany and The Netherlands; funding of the first social science projects under the RCUK Lead Agency agreement with Brazil; and the establishment, on behalf of the OECD Global Science Forum, of an expert steering group to oversee a global initiative reviewing the future data and research infrastructure needs to support international research collaboration in the social sciences.

Delivery of the ESRC Strategic Plan 2009-2014 will be supported by the development of detailed impact plans for each of the challenges for social science. A series of themed publications that examine the policy implications will be published as the impact plans are developed. The ESRC website, [ESRC Society Today](#), will be redesigned and re-launched to highlight and support the impact of social science research. In addition, a more flexible portfolio of knowledge exchange schemes will be developed, while the first three rounds of the Follow on Fund will be reviewed to inform the future direction of the scheme.

6. UPDATE ON ECONOMIC IMPACT BASELINE

The ESRC Economic Baseline Report was submitted to BIS in April 2010 and will be published on [ESRC Society Today](#) in summer 2010. The report provides an update on the ESRC's fundamental contribution to the UK's economic performance. A series of case studies are included, which provide evidence of the impact of ESRC funded research, postgraduate training, research resources and knowledge transfer activities, all of which contribute to the RCUK Framework for the Future supporting a productive economy, healthy society and sustainable world.

Highlights from ESRC's Economic Baseline 2009/10 include:

- Research undertaken by the ESRC-funded **Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy** at the Institute of Fiscal Studies which played a hugely valuable role advising government officials, opposition politicians and the media to help understand and respond to the shock to the public finances caused by the financial crisis and associated recession.
- An award winning **Knowledge Transfer Partnership** completed by the University of Manchester and Bradford and Airedale Teaching Primary Care Trust which resulted in cost savings of over £350,000 for the Trust and significantly improved access to healthcare for local residents.
- Research from the ESRC **Sussex Energy Group** and its international partners identified the barriers that are slowing progress in the deployment of low carbon energy technologies in developing countries and policies that accelerate innovation through a new approach to technology cooperation between developed and developing countries.

7. THE EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME

The Council has continued to contribute towards and meet the agreed cross-Council efficiency targets in 2009/10 expecting to have contributed £21.57m towards RCUK value for money savings over the year, achieved through proactive reprioritisation of research spend and new joint funding secured.

ESRC has continued to play an active role in the development of a Shared Service Centre (SSC), the Research Council initiative to fully harmonise back office activities across all seven Councils. ESRC finance functions were successfully migrated to the SSC ahead of schedule in November 2009 following the earlier transfer of HR, payroll, IT and procurement functions. Resources have been provided by ESRC to support the SSC grants and studentships migration project at all levels including work stream, data and communications.

8. SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

ESRC held another successful **Festival of Social Science** in March 2010 which supported 131 events across 40 UK cities and online. The events took a variety of formats from traditional lectures and exhibitions to theatrical performances, film screenings and topical debates, aimed at a range of different audiences, including policy makers, business, the media, the general public and students of all ages. Initial analysis indicated in excess of 10,000 people participated in Festival events.

The ESRC has continued its engagement work with schools and young people over the last year through the continued development of **school thematic resources**. Twelve thematic resources were produced covering a wide range of topics including street crime and teenagers, general elections, and science and religion.

Public engagement work to support the RCUK Global Uncertainties programme continued with the publication of five case studies in early 2010 demonstrating the impact of Research Council funded research around the core areas of the Global Uncertainties programme. Public engagement support has also been provided for *Understanding Society* with regional news coverage secured following a targeted media release designed to raise awareness of the study prior to the survey organisations arriving in localities in the West Midlands and West Yorkshire.

In 2009/10 ESRC commissioned further **research syntheses** to highlight trends and gaps in knowledge about science and society issues. The final reports from two syntheses on widening participation in higher education and academic promotions criteria will be published on the ESRC Society Today website in 2010. A call for applications for a third synthesis entitled '*Using segmentation tools for public engagement benefit*' closed in March 2010.

9. SUMMARY FINANCIAL TABLES

The tables below provide summaries of expenditure during the last financial year by theme and mechanism. These figures include both funding received from the science budget allocation and other income.

ESRC Expenditure by Challenge Area 2009/10

Challenge Area	£m
Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management	19.2
Health and Wellbeing	23.9
Understanding Individual Behaviour	15.1
New Technology, Innovation and Skills	28.4
Environment, Energy and Resilience	13.9
Security, Conflict and Justice	8.3
Social Diversity and Population Dynamics	27.8
Impact and Knowledge Transfer	5.0
Health of Social Science	33.5
Data and Resources	22.3
Other	13.4
Grand Total	210.8

ESRC Expenditure by Mechanism 2009/10

Mechanism	£m
Strategic and Collaborative Research	57.3
Responsive Research	51.6
Research Resources	22.2
Postgraduate Training	58.2
Administration Costs	5.4
Knowledge Transfer and Communication	6.4
International, Policy, Evaluation and Programme Management	9.7
Grand Total	210.8