



ESRC  
Delivery Report  
2005-6

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Delivery Report provides detail on the achievements of the Economic and Social Research Council during 2005-6, as well as progress against the ESRC Delivery Plan 2005.

In April 2005 Council made the first funding decisions under its new planning and decision making process. These included increased funding for responsive mode support and a commitment to increasing success rates. Two new responsive mode schemes were introduced. The Large Grants Scheme was set up to offer groups, networks and projects funding between £1.5m and £5m (FEC). 24 applications were received and four awards were announced in July 2006. The First Grants Scheme was introduced to offer established young researchers an opportunity to move into research management and direction. The first call under the scheme attracted a total of 152 applications and 28 awards were agreed in May 2006.

Council agreed to fund one centre out of the 2004/05 centres competition – the Deafness, Cognition and Language Research Centre at University College London – and it was officially launched in March 2006.

Commissioning took place under a number of new and ongoing programmes, for instance the World Economy Programme, the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme and the Census Programme. Commissioning was also completed for the first phase of projects under the collaborative ESRC/Department for International Development Alleviating Poverty Scheme, and nine projects were funded by the international commissioning panel.

ESRC has stepped up its international activities and eight bilateral funding agreements were concluded with Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Netherlands and Sweden. The agreements cover responsive-mode collaborations across ESRC's remit and have created a great deal of interest among the researchers in all the countries involved.

In the postgraduate training area our largest ever recognition exercise was run and a quota allocation system was announced for the allocation of studentships, to ensure that studentships are located in institutions providing particularly high quality research training. A major study of current and future issues in relation to the social science workforce was also carried out by the ESRC – the Demographic Review of the Social Sciences. Following this a number of measures and activities have been initiated in areas where particular problems were identified for the long-term health of the discipline. These disciplines are economics, socio-legal studies, social work, language based area studies, management and business studies, and advanced quantitative methods. The measures range from increased studentship stipends and postdoctoral salaries; to additional studentships; to extensive discussions with the research and user communities of the disciplines in question in order to identify mechanisms for improving both recruitment and the development of research skills. The joint language based area studies initiative with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) aims to create a world class cadre of researchers who can enhance the UK's understanding of the Arabic speaking world, China, Japan, and Eastern Europe, including areas of the former Soviet Union.

ESRC took the lead in developing a National Datasets Strategy for the social sciences. This has been endorsed by a wide range of agencies that provide funding for a range of social science data resources, including government departments, charitable foundations and other Research Councils. The Strategy provides a common framework for identifying and co-ordinating the future funding of new datasets as well as improving access to existing data resources. This is a very major step forward in sustaining the long term development of the UK's world class national data infrastructure. A key part of the National Datasets Strategy is the new British Household Panel Study, which will be the biggest in the world and will ensure that the UK sustains its position as an international leader in the provision of social science data resources.

ESRC's knowledge transfer activities have been enhanced and extended, particularly through the introduction of new schemes for placement fellows and impact grants. Collaborative funding has been developed through the new Ventures mechanism allowing ESRC to work closely in partnership with other organisations in the public, private and voluntary sectors.

ESRC has extended its engagement and communication activities in a number of ways, including the launch of a new web portal 'ESRC Society Today' and the establishment of a new cross-Council Science in Society Unit under ESRC's management. Social Science Week 2006 celebrated some of the very best British social science research, as well as highlighting the ways in which social science touches everyday lives.

Other key organisational activities included the introduction of full economic costing and the cross-Council Joint Electronic Submissions (JeS) system for all grant applications, as well as initial preparations for the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review, and participation in a range of cross-Council activities to achieve greater harmonisation and efficiency.

## 2. RECENT SUCCESSES

2005 was an exciting year for the ESRC and below follows what we consider to be the highlights of the year.

### 2.1 Delivering World-Class Social Science

#### 2.1.1 Seizing Opportunities in Research

Following the 2004 consultation with ESRC stakeholders it was clear that the community wanted to see an increase in the success rates for responsive mode grants. The funding decisions made by Council in April 2005 responded to this and included an increase in funding for responsive mode support and a long-term commitment to increasing success rates. The change in success rate is measured relative to the level of demand in 2004-5 and in 2005-6 we were pleased to achieve a standard grant success rate of 23 per cent (compared to our 22 per cent target).

The array of responsive mode funding opportunities was further expanded with the launch of two new schemes – Large Grants and First Grants.

The **Large Grants Scheme** was set up to offer a funding mechanism for experienced researchers requiring longer term support for research groups, inter-institutional research networks, linked-project programmes, medium-to-large surveys, other infrastructure or methodological developments, requiring funding between £1.5m and £5m (post FEC). The first round of the scheme attracted altogether 24 applications by the closing date in January 2006, applying for between £1.8m and £5m. The Research Grants Board decided to fund four awards when they met in July 2006.

The **First Grants Scheme** aims to assist new researchers and academics at the start of their careers and give them the opportunity to gain experience of managing and leading research projects. The first round of the scheme attracted a total of 152 applications by its mid-January closing date. 28 awards were made, with Psychology (7), Sociology (6) and Economics (3) receiving the most.

One new research centre was funded following the **2004-5 Open Centres Competition**. The Centre on Deafness, Language and Cognition, based at University College, London, was officially launched during Social Science Week in March 2006.

#### 2.1.2 Creating Opportunities

The groundbreaking joint **ESRC/Department for International Development (DfID) Alleviating Poverty Scheme** was launched in August 2005. The Scheme aims to enhance the quality and impact of social science research addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty amongst the poorest countries and peoples of the world. The Scheme is non-prescriptive in terms of the research topics and type of project that will be supported and it has been designed to provide maximum flexibility for the international academic community to construct appropriate and innovative research proposals that will deliver new understanding, insights, advice or solutions to a wide range of academic and non-academic stakeholders. 127 applications were received under the Scheme's first call and, following a peer review process, the

international, 18-member strong Commissioning Panel agreed to recommend nine projects for funding.

Commissioning has been completed for a number of **research programmes**: World Economy and Finance Research Programme; Public Services: Quality, Performance and Delivery Programme; a new phase of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme (on participation in higher education); Understanding Population Trends and Processes – A Secondary Analysis of Data Initiative; AIM Ghoshal Fellows; and the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme. A new major cross-Council research programme got off the ground – the New Dynamics of Ageing Research Programme – with commissioning to be completed in 2006.

A further three years of funding was agreed for the influential Tyndall Centre, funded jointly by the Engineering and Physical Research Council (EPSRC), ESRC and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

## 2.2 Strengthening our future capacity – people and disciplines

This has been a major area of activity for the ESRC in the past year, with many exciting developments. The ESRC's **Demographic Review of the Social Sciences** was published and the ESRC are following up the results and taking steps to address the issues identified in order to secure the future of the social science base.

A major **studentship re-allocation exercise** was undertaken. The new quota system offers important strategic advantages to the ESRC, as it provides a mechanism for directing studentships to those outlets which offer particularly strong research training in priority areas. This in turn helps to ensure that capacity building is focussed on those disciplines whose long term health is most in need of additional support. The 2006 quota allocation exercise saw an increase in the number of studentships in the priority areas of Economics, Advanced Quantitative Methods, Socio-legal Studies and Social Work. The standard postgraduate stipend was enhanced in Economics and Advanced Quantitative Methods.

A new scheme has been introduced which provides the opportunity for linking studentships to research grants lasting for 3 years or more.

ESRC is co-funding a £20m **Language Based Area Studies Initiative** along with the AHRC, the HEFCE and the Scottish Funding Council. The Initiative aims to create a world-class cadre of researchers who can enhance our understanding of the Arabic speaking world, China, Japan, and Eastern Europe.

## 2.3 Strengthening our future capacity – research resources

The ESRC took the lead in developing a **National Datasets Strategy** for the social sciences, now endorsed by a wide range of agencies that fund the collection of social science data resources. The strategy is not only geared to collecting new data, but also to enhance existing data resources through integration and better access arrangements. Some of the most exciting developments are around the areas of bio-medical data where the Council has been working hard with the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the

Wellcome Trust to open up data resources and look at opportunities for linking social and medical data.

In the past year we were pleased to complete the commissioning of the £8.2 million Census Programme. Funding for six data support units, the Programme Co-ordinator and a suite of innovation projects was approved.

A co-ordinator for the UK fieldwork element of the **European Social Survey** has been appointed and a fieldwork agency recruited to conduct the third sweep in the UK. The European Social Survey, directed by a co-ordinating team led by Professor Roger Jowell at City University, was awarded the prestigious 2005 Descartes Prize, the first time this prize had been awarded to social science research.

The first round of the **Researcher Development Initiative**, designed to support the training and development of researchers in the social sciences at all stages of their career, was commissioned and 15 projects were funded.

## **2.4 Engagement and Partnerships**

### 2.4.1 Knowledge Transfer

ESRC has extended its knowledge transfer activities in the past year. The introduction of the new **Placement Fellows Scheme** in early 2006 provides an important channel for promoting knowledge transfer between academic departments and 'partner organisations' (currently government departments and devolved administrations) and the staff employed in them.

An **Impact Grants Scheme** has also been introduced to enable researchers, currently or very recently funded by ESRC, to generate a new and additional activity that demonstrates the impact of their research by engaging with a business/private sector audience.

The ESRC **Ventures Scheme** offers the opportunity to collaborate with interested parties willing to co-fund research programmes. In the past year research projects have been commissioned under the Problem Gambling Initiative, with the Responsibility in Gambling Trust and the National Prevention Research Initiative, with ten other co-funders, led by the MRC.

### 2.4.2 Communications and Science in Society

ESRC has extended its engagement and communication activities in the past year. The new **ESRC Society Today** web portal has been a great success, with a 900-fold increase in page views compared with the old ESRC website. The portal's content has been significantly enhanced, and this work is continuing.

The ESRC is hosting the RCUK Science in Society Unit and has been closely involved in the development of the RCUK Science in Society Strategy, which was published in April 2006.

### *Public Engagement*

**Social Science Week 2006** celebrated some of the very best British social science research as well as highlighting the ways in which social science touches everyday lives. This year the Week moved from June to run in conjunction with National Science Week in March, in order to demonstrate how integral social science is to the wider science agenda.

With over 60 events there were many ways for everyone, from politicians to schoolchildren, to take part in the Week. In addition, ESRC worked closely with the British Association and collaborated on a number of projects, notably, the mass participation experiment, 'Click for the Climate' which encouraged people to reduce the amount of energy they consume and carbon dioxide they produce.

During November and December 2005, the **ESRC Annual Debates** on *Ageing Britain* were held in Cardiff, Glasgow and London. Panellists from a wide range of backgrounds contributed to the discussions, which included the issues surrounding the pension crisis, age discrimination and the effects of an ageing population on society as a whole.

Each September we take an active part in the **BA Festival of Science**. In 2005 we organised a large public debate in Dublin, focused on migration, in light of the enlargement of the European Union. Along with the other Research Councils we also supported 'Perspectives', the Festival poster competition for young researchers.

**The Edge**, published three times a year, brings the latest and most topical social science research to key opinion-formers in business, government and the voluntary sector. Over the last 18 months the readership has widened considerably to include the public and, most notably, it is now distributed to all sixth form colleges and school libraries, where it has been very well received.

In order to strengthen our researchers' interaction with the public, the ESRC organises a variety of **media training courses**. In 2005 we trained 225 researchers – 116 senior researchers and 109 early career researchers. We also provide a comprehensive online communications toolkit which can be used to help with all aspects of communications and public relations.

### *Working with Schools*

ESRC decided in 2005 to participate in the **CREST** (Creativity in Engineering, Science and Technology) awards scheme (a team project based initiative) and the **Researchers in Residence Scheme**.

We have in the past year published a selection of **briefing documents aimed at A-level students**. The briefings relate relevant research funded by the ESRC to topics on the A-level syllabus (e.g. Sociology, Psychology, and Economics).

During Social Science Week we hosted debates in Birmingham and Manchester on 'Climate solutions: saving planet earth', for 280 15-17 year olds. We also supported an event on 'Young people and citizenship' for sixth formers in Lewisham with Ed Miliband MP.

### 2.4.3 International Collaboration

During 2005 ESRC considerably stepped up its international activities. An important achievement was the completion of eight **bilateral funding agreements**, designed to remove bureaucratic barriers to collaborative research projects. Agreements were signed with funding agencies in Australia, Austria, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden.

The **ESRC-SSRC Visiting Fellowship Scheme**, for visits to the U.S. and Canada, received a lot of interest, with fifteen fellowships being awarded. In response to Sir Gareth Roberts' report on 'International Partnerships of Research Excellence', the ESRC has, together with the AHRC, also initiated visiting fellowships to the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

ESRC has been an active member of the **Norface Eranet** and collaborated in international calls for two seminar series, and two UK-led teams were successful. ESRC also participated in the 2005 round of European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) Scheme and two standard grants and one small grant were awarded.

## 2.5 Measuring and Improving our Performance

In the past year the emphasis on evaluating not only scholarly research impacts but also impacts on policy and practice has increased and ESRC is developing new methods for evaluating research impact. An international symposium explored recent developments in assessing the non-academic impact of social science research and a series of case studies has been launched to develop methodologies for capturing more evidence about the use of research in policy and practice.

The ESRC has, in order to be able to assess the quality of UK research in a global context, commenced a series of international benchmarking reviews. The first review was of Anthropology and the results will become available in the summer of 2006.

ESRC evaluates all research grants funded and in 2005 some 333 projects were peer reviewed. The quality of individual projects was very high this year, with 27% of awards evaluated by reviewers as 'outstanding' (representing a 5% increase on the yearly average), with a matching fall in the number of projects graded 'problematic' (down to 5% of all projects).

### 3. ACHIEVEMENTS AGAINST THE SCORECARD

The ESRC Scorecard includes altogether 20 Key Deliverables, divided further into 48 Milestones, of which 37 were due for completion in 2005-6. Achievements against the milestones can be summarised as follows (end of March 2006):

Milestones <b>fully achieved</b> , or to <b>be achieved</b> , but with some delays	Milestones <b>not fully achieved</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	Milestone delivery date <b>beyond</b> 2005/06
<b>36*</b> **	<b>1***</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>11</b>

\* One milestone was achieved in a revised format: Links between the RCUK SiS Unit and ESRC SiS Programme (15:2)

\*\* The following seven milestones will be achieved, but with some delay to the original timescale: Develop proposals for social science research on options for nuclear energy and fuel poverty (5:1); Agree a programme for capacity building and networking activities with AHRC (7:1); Commission new work on evaluation methods (13:3); Appoint ‘research brokers’ (16:1); Implementing recommendations from project to develop robust bibliometric indicators for the social sciences (18:2); Complete and evaluate the first International Benchmarking Review (19:1); Spend at least 5% of the budget on new initiatives in priority areas (20:1).

\*\*\* The following milestone was not fully achieved: ECRP (2:2)

(The 2005-6 Scorecard, in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2005, is available at:

[http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery\\_plan/index.aspx](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery_plan/index.aspx) )

Practically all of the achieved milestones were reached in their original format. The only exception is milestone 15:2: “Develop a framework to establish formal links between the RCUK Science in Society Unit and ESRC’s Science and Society Programme by October 2005”. After discussion with colleagues in the RCUK Science in Society Unit, it was agreed that a ‘formal’ relationship as such was not appropriate as the formal, contractual and management relationship already existed between ESRC and its Science in Society Programme. Instead it was agreed that the Programme would provide an important evidence base for the development of the RCUK strategy, especially through dialogue with the programme director, programme seminars and a series of publications that cover the key themes of the Programme (Governance, Communication, Economics, Globalisation, Identity, Genomics).

Only one of the 37 milestones set for the year was not achieved in full.

- 2:2 “To agree to fund at least six new projects under the European Collaborative Research Projects (ECRP) Scheme” The achievement of this milestone was highly dependent on the number of high quality proposals being submitted, as awards under the scheme are made in competition with other ESRC responsive mode applications and require the support of at least two other European partners. Two ECRP standard grant proposals were funded, as well as one small grant. We have revised this milestone for 2006-7, to better reflect the competitive nature of the funding process.

#### 4. FUTURE TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The targets and milestones for 2006-7 have been published separately in the updated ESRC Delivery Plan and Scorecard 2006, available at [http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery\\_plan/index.aspx](http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery_plan/index.aspx)

Milestones for the coming year include activities to address the key research challenges set out in our Strategic Plan, for example to commission a targeted initiative on innovation, to commission a number of smaller initiatives on security and terrorism and preparations for a major new investment on demographic change. We are developing our research agenda with the Arts and Humanities Research Council with an investment in the area of religion and society.

As already mentioned above, ESRC is committed to fostering and maintaining a healthy social science base. A capacity building strategy will be developed for Management and Business Studies, working together with the management community in the UK. Studentships have been allocated to those areas in need of additional, targeted support (i.e. economics, advanced quantitative methods, socio-legal studies and criminology and social work). The Postdoctoral Fellowship Scheme will be running, with a commitment to allocating fellowships in the priority areas of economics and advanced quantitative methods. Awards will be made under the First Grants Scheme, and a second round of the Researcher Development Initiative will be commissioned. Centres will be established under the Language Based Area Studies Initiative, and studentships will be awarded.

The new British Household Panel Study will be launched, and activities in the coming year entail agreeing key topics to be covered, appointing a principal investigatory team and designing a pilot study.

ESRC is taking a number of measures to further increase the take up of social science research by both business and policy makers. A research broker, with a focus on public services, will be appointed to act as an intermediary between researchers and research users. The number of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships based in business settings will be increased and the Impact Grants Scheme will be applied to the business sector. We will also seek to achieve collaborative funding agreements with five new strategic partners.

## **5. PERFORMANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.1 Progress in Management**

The main changes and achievements in management and operation in 2005-6 were:

- ESRC has developed an effective Corporate Risk Register and the external auditors KPMG and the National Audit Office have commented that the ESRC framework is one of the most effective they have seen. The risk management process is getting to a point where it is well embedded in the organisation.
- The project to set up the new ESRC Society Today web portal was delivered on budget and it successfully passed a Gateway 5 review (the first RC project to do so).
- From 1 April 2005 ESRC has been managing the new RCUK Science in Society Unit.
- New administration processes were rolled out for the introduction of JeS and Full Economic Costing.
- ESRC has been working with Higher Education Institutions to give them more control over the management of studentships, including payment of grants to students, and a new system will come into effect from October 2006.
- The process for identifying completed projects that would be suitable for ESRC press releases has been reviewed and streamlined, including greater emphasis on quality and relevance.
- By communicating the Gershon Efficiency Project effectively to all staff a change in culture has been initiated, where staff at all levels are now more conscious of the need to identify potential efficiency savings. The ESRC also has in place a mechanism (Ventures) for proactively generating and pursuing co-funding.
- ESRC IT staff moved to the joint RCUK ICT Unit during the year.
- The resources for knowledge transfer and international activities have been increased, to reflect the expansion of activities in these areas, as described elsewhere in this report.
- Following the move to a new strategic planning process in 2004, a greater sense of collective ownership of corporate priorities has been developed across Council and its Boards and Committees.

### **5.2 The Gershon Efficiency Project**

ESRC has completed an internal project plan and established a project group to lead the implementation of the Gershon Efficiency Project.

An audit of ESRC's work to measure and record its efficiency has been carried out by PriceWaterhouseCoopers on behalf of the Office for Science and Innovation (OSI). The total annual savings target for the RCUK Efficiency Delivery Project in 2005/06 was set at £61.50m, out of which the ESRC target was £2.56m. The actual savings will be reported in the ESRC Outputs Framework. ESRC's targets have been achieved in relation to the proportion of expenditure attributed to administrative costs and the effective prioritisation of spend to new areas. The distribution of expenditure over financial years means that we have not reached the target for 2005-6 in relation to the co-funding of research, but our overall target will be achieved in the next two years.

## 6. SUMMARY FINANCIAL TABLE

The table below provides a summary of the actual spend, compared to the plans set out in the Delivery Plan 2005.

<b>DELIVERY REPORT INCOME AND EXPENDITURE</b>		
<b>£k</b>	<b>2005/2006 PLAN</b>	<b>2005/2006 ACTUAL</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Science Budget - Resource and Capital	123,465	123,710
Other Income	10,097	10,557
EYF Brought Forward	1,574	2,374
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>135,136</b>	<b>136,641</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Supporting World Class Research	71,379	70,351
Future Sustainability: Trained People and Building Capacity	38,107	38,456
Underpinning Research Excellence: Facilities and Infrastructure	13,642	15,281
Engagement and Partnership	3,770	3,617
Measuring our Performance: Evaluation and Efficient Administration *	8,238	8,466
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>135,136</b>	<b>136,171</b>

\*Includes all staff costs; including those externally funded, operating costs, capital, depreciation and scientific evaluations.