



ESRC  
Delivery Report  
2007-8

## CONTENTS

<b>1.</b>	<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Recent Successes</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1	Delivering World-Class Social Science	4
2.2	Strengthening our Future Capacity – people and disciplines	5
2.3	Strengthening our Future Capacity – research resources	5
2.4	Engagement and Partnerships	6
2.5	Measuring and Improving our Performance	7
<b>3.</b>	<b>Progress in Management</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Progress against Targets and Milestones</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Future Targets and Milestones</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>The Efficiency Programme</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>7.</b>	<b>Science and Society</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Summary Financial Table</b>	<b>12</b>

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Delivery Report provides detail on the achievements of the Economic and Social Research Council during 2007-8, as well as progress against the targets set out in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2007.

In 2007 the ESRC completed commissioning of the second year of both the Large and First Grants Schemes. Commissioning also commenced on the third year of both schemes with 21 large grant applications received and four awards funded. 163 First Grant applications were received compared to 151 in 2005/06, demonstrating that early predictions that the scheme had tapped into a real vein of need were correct.

The Council agreed to fund three applications to the 2007/08 centres competition, the Centre for Population Change at the Universities of Southampton and St Andrews, the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Leeds and the Research Centre on Micro Social Change (funded by the ESRC since 2004) at the University of Essex.

The ESRC secured a further £7 million of co-funding for its Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM) Initiative. In addition to the £12 million allocated by the Council, additional funding was agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). This is likely to be supplemented by further investment from the Scottish Funding Council.

Ensuring the establishment of the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), a major new longitudinal study of the UK population, has been a major activity for the Council in 2007. Both the Scientific Leadership Team and the Survey Organisation for the study have been appointed. A detailed topic consultation exercise with key stakeholders was completed in December and a Governing Board, chaired by Professor Patricia Broadfoot, was established for the study. The ESRC has also commenced discussions with the MRC and the Wellcome Trust about the possible co-funding of the collection of bio-markers in the UKHLS.

The ESRC has extended and expanded its knowledge transfer activities to engage with the business sector and the 'third' or voluntary and community sector. The ESRC Business Engagement Strategy has been implemented and has ensured a substantial increase in the Council's engagement with business, focusing on priority sectors. The Council is currently in the process of developing a formalised strategy to engage and interact with the third sector. The strategy will be implemented primarily through a research centre and three capacity building clusters, jointly funded with the Office for the Third Sector and the Barrow-Cadbury Trust.

The ESRC has continued to engage young people and children with the social sciences through its support and promotion of the Researchers in Residence Scheme, which places PhD and post doctoral researchers in secondary schools across the UK. The ESRC also sponsored two regions (Central UK and North-West/North Wales) in the 2007/08 Debating Matters Competition. The competition, run by the Institute of Ideas, was a new style of national debating competition for sixth form students. ESRC funded researchers participated in the panels as judges, and ESRC written material (the Edge) was used as background reading for the students.

Key organisational developments included the appointment of a dedicated Director of International Affairs, the creation of a Management Development Programme for ESRC staff and full participation in the Shared Services Centre project.

## 2. RECENT SUCCESSES

2007 was an active year for the ESRC, with a number of new research initiatives, strategic collaborations and partnerships: below are some of the highlights of the year.

### 2.1 Delivering World-Class Social Science

#### 2.1.1 Seizing Opportunities in Research

In 2007 a Responsive Schemes Review Group was established to review the Council's responsive funding schemes. Overall the review provided a strong endorsement of the current portfolio of schemes and did not propose any major changes. However, there were a number of recommendations to enhance current provision, such as encouraging more innovative and cross disciplinary research and the need for more emphasis to be placed on maximising and demonstrating the impact of responsive mode research. The review also recommended that a more explicit focus on early and mid career development and capacity building should be built into the Research Fellowship Scheme and the scheme broadened to provide a conversion route into academic research from professional practice in allied fields. Work has commenced to implement these changes and will be continued over the coming year.

In 2007 the ESRC completed commissioning of the second year of both the Large and First Grants Schemes with three and 36 awards funded respectively, representing success rates of 14% and 22%. The three projects funded under the second round of the Large Grants Scheme were: 'Social Interaction: A cognitive Neurosciences Approach'; 'Conflict in Cities and the Contested State: Everyday Life and the Possibilities for Transformation in Belfast, Jerusalem and Other Divided Cities'; and 'Peterborough Adolescent and Young Adult Development Study'. Commissioning also commenced on the third year of both schemes with 21 Large Grant applications received and four awards funded. 163 First Grant applications were received compared to 151 in 2005/06, demonstrating that early predictions that the scheme had tapped into a real vein of need were correct.

1,100 Standard and Small Grant and Fellowship applications were considered by the Council in 2007/08. 267 were recommended for awards, which represents an overall success rate of 24%.

#### 2.1.2 Creating Opportunities

The Council agreed to fund two new Centres and to continue its support for an existing centre as a result of the 2007/08 centres competition: The Centre for Population Change at the Universities of Southampton and St Andrews; the Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of Leeds; and the Research Centre on Micro Social Change (funded by the ESRC since 2004) at the University of Essex.

Six **Leadership Fellowships on Climate Change** were awarded by the ESRC in 2007. The fellows will complement the existing initiatives in the field including the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research and the new ESRC Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy, and are an important step in mobilising UK expertise to respond rapidly to the key issue of mitigating climate change.

In 2007 the ESRC completed the commissioning of five Centres of Excellence in UK Public Health on behalf of a consortium of seven major funders with a combined contribution of £20 million. The Centres, based in Newcastle, Cardiff, Belfast, Cambridge and Nottingham, bring

together leading experts from a range of disciplines working in partnership with practitioners, policy makers and wider stakeholders to strengthen research into complex public health issues such as obesity, smoking and health inequalities.

## 2.2 Strengthening our future capacity – people and disciplines

In 2007 the ESRC secured major co-funding for its **Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM) Initiative**. In addition to the £12 million allocated by the Council, a further £7 million of additional funding was agreed with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and this is likely to be supplemented by further investment from the Scottish Funding Council. This funding has provided a powerful launch pad for the initiative. The first phase of commissioning has been completed following the renewal of the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). Through its distributed structure, the NCRM will provide a national network for capacity building and training in quantitative methods.

A third round of commissioning under the **Researcher Development Initiative** has further strengthened training and development opportunities for researchers at all stages of their careers. These range from advanced courses in multi-level modelling and survey design for established researchers through to more basic training sessions on project management and writing good research applications for new researchers. 12 new awards were funded this year bringing the total number of projects to over 40. Over 220 training events have now been run under the initiative with close to 5,000 attendees. Initial evaluations of the initiative have been overwhelmingly positive with a clear view that the training infrastructure that is being created is meeting a very real need across the social science community.

The Council has continued to maintain its strategy of enhanced stipends in Economics to improve recruitment and retention in the face of attractive alternative employment opportunities. Early evidence is that this strategy is beginning to exercise a positive impact. Prior to the introduction of enhanced stipends the drop-out rate between the completion of Masters and progression to PhD stood at 46% but is now at 15%, which is close to the average for all other disciplines.

## 2.3 Strengthening our future capacity – research resources

Ensuring the establishment of the **UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS)**, a major new longitudinal study of the UK population, has been a major activity for the Council in 2007. Both the Scientific Leadership Team and the Survey Organisation for the study have been appointed. A detailed topic consultation exercise with key stakeholders was completed in December and a Governing Board, chaired by Professor Patricia Broadfoot, was established for the study. The ESRC has also commenced discussions with the MRC and the Wellcome Trust about the possible co-funding of the collection of bio-markers in the UKHLS.

In collaboration with the MRC and the Wellcome Trust the ESRC has conducted a scoping study to explore the scientific case for a New Birth Cohort Study. The report has been used as the basis of an ESRC led application, with support from the MRC and the Wellcome Trust, to the 2007/08 round of the Large Facilities Capital Fund to establish a **Research Facility for the Birth Cohort Studies**. The proposed facility will integrate the existing birth cohort studies and, critically, it will expand the series with an innovative new cohort commencing in 2012. This will sit alongside additional continued investment by the ESRC, MRC and Wellcome Trust in the existing suite of cohort studies. The outcome of the bid to the Large Facilities Capital Fund is currently pending.

In 2007 the Council completed the roll out of the **2006-11 ESRC Census of Population Programme** through the commissioning of nine projects under the development programme of this initiative. The projects will bring forward innovative solutions in the areas of census dissemination, census data linkage and understanding the impact of contemporary change on the census itself. The projects will not only enhance the current programme but will also help to inform decision making both by the ESRC and the census organisations concerning the next Census in 2011.

## **2.4 Engagement and Partnerships**

### 2.4.1 Knowledge Transfer and Impact

In 2007 the ESRC developed and implemented its Business Engagement Strategy, which ensured a substantial increase in the Council's engagement with the business sector, focusing on priority sectors. In 2007 the existing ESRC people transfer schemes were expanded and modified to the private sector. 27% of Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering (CASE) studentships are now allocated to the private sector and 37% of new Knowledge Transfer Partnerships awards are business-related.

The Council is currently in the process of developing a formalised strategy to engage and interact with the 'Third' or voluntary and community sector. The strategy will be implemented primarily through a research centre and three capacity building clusters, jointly funded with the Office for the Third Sector and the Barrow-Cadbury Trust.

A **Follow-on Fund** has been developed by the Council and will be introduced in 2008. The new scheme will allow social science researchers to seek ESRC funding to develop and apply their research in partnership with users in order to maximise the wider impact of their work.

### 2.4.2 Communications

The **ESRC Society Today** web portal has now been running for three years. It offers free access to a broad range of social science research and presents it in a way that makes it easy to navigate and saves users valuable time. In 2007 the ESRC launched dedicated channels for its primary user groups, including the public sector, the third sector and the business sector. The business channel includes information about ESRC business investments, funding opportunities for business and regularly highlights specific schemes or themes.

Media exposure remained consistent over the last financial year compared to previous, with excellent coverage in major national newspapers, such as the Times, Financial Times, Telegraph and the Guardian and national radio and television coverage on programmes such as BBC Radio 4, BBC Breakfast News, Channel 4 News and Sky News. Internet based sources are an ever growing area and the ESRC has monitored coverage from internet news channels – from general news channels such as BBC, AOL and the Independent to specialist websites such as thisismoney, PhysOrg and News-Medical.Net. Research based articles continue to attract global press attention from countries such as New Zealand, India, Pakistan, the US, Canada, China and across the EU.

In November 2007 Council published the second issue of the annual ESRC newsstand magazine, **Britain in 2008**. The magazine offered a concise analysis of research on issues of relevance to the state of the nation in 2008, showcasing the diversity of ESRC-funded research. It was sold at WHSmiths retail and travel, Borders and Waitrose, Sainsbury's and international outlets. Over 14,000 copies were sold, with an estimated income of £27,000.

### 2.4.3 International Collaboration

During 2007 an increasing number of international collaborative funding applications were received, and a new agreement concluded with the Research Grants Commission of Hong Kong. A simplified International Common Application Process was agreed with Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), aligning procedures more closely and agreeing on clear shared review criteria. A 'lead agency' approach was piloted with the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), allowing decisions to be taken by a single agency and eliminating double jeopardy. ESRC also began a two-year pilot policy of accepting overseas Co-Investigators on grant applications with limited associated costs, allowing recognition of the intellectual contribution of overseas collaborators.

In 2007 the ESRC participated in the launch of two new Research Councils UK Offices, one in Beijing, and another in Washington. Both offices will focus on enabling relationships between funding agencies and the ESRC is working closely with both to ensure that the social sciences experience a step change in international engagement thanks to their on-the-ground expertise.

A fourth call of the **ESRC-SSRC** (Social Science Research Council) **Transatlantic Collaborative Fellowship Scheme** was held, covering all of the Americas for the first time and resulting in 21 applications and 17 awards.

In 2007 the ESRC and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation in the United States launched a research scheme exploring the links between economic development and poverty reduction on the one hand, and population dynamics and reproductive health issues on the other. Nine applications were received and four awards made totalling around £1.6 million.

The ESRC played a leading role in launching an International Forum of Funding Agencies (IFFA), whose 17 members include Canada, China, India, South Africa and the United States. IFFA held a successful first meeting on two key policy issues: capturing the impacts of research and the balance of research funding.

## 2.5 **Measuring and Improving our Performance**

The evaluation of the quality and impact of a range of completed ESRC research from research programmes and resources to individual research projects has been completed. To complement these the ESRC has also commissioned the second in a series of subject overviews that take account of all ESRC work in recent years, this year covering Education and Management research.

The second international benchmarking review to assess the quality of UK research in a global context provided a very positive assessment of UK Politics and International Studies. The review found that research funded by the ESRC and others is making leading contributions in areas such as electoral studies, political theory, security studies and political economy. Political scientists are also making a considerable impact on UK and international policy-makers and agencies to a degree unmatched anywhere in the world. The review of UK Economics is well underway and plans to assess Sociology are in place.

Important progress has been made in the complex task of evaluating the policy and practice impact of ESRC research. The Council is pioneering the development of systematic evaluation approaches through its impact case study series, which aims to identify impact evidence, to

understand the factors underpinning successful engagement and to test and develop methodology. The series was extended this year by assessments of short-term responsive-mode projects and three longer-term ESRC Centres. The results provide further evidence of the contribution being made by social scientists to the UK's economy and society.

The ESRC evaluates all research grants funded and in 2007 some 395 projects were peer reviewed. The quality of individual projects was very high this year. Over 30% of awards were evaluated by reviewers as 'outstanding' (representing a 7% increase on the yearly average), with a 6% fall in the number of projects graded 'problematic' (down to 3% of all projects).

### **3. PROGRESS IN MANAGEMENT**

As part of the ESRC's Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Strategy, a new impact management team was created last year within the Communications and Information Directorate, to allow for a greater concentration of effort and expertise in this area. The team is now fully established within the organisation and has taken the lead in managing a range of ESRC research investments.

In recognition of the growing importance of international collaboration the ESRC has appointed a dedicated Director of International Affairs to have responsibility for leading ESRC's international activities at Director level.

The ESRC has established an Equality and Diversity Group which works to ensure our compliance with the relevant legislation and awareness of equality and diversity issues in both funding and policy decisions across the Council. Equality schemes for disability, race and gender have been published on *ESRC Society Today*, thus meeting the public authorities duties introduced in April 2007. The group will also collate and publish annual statistics on equality and diversity in relation to the ESRC as a provider of research funding and as an employer.

The Council has introduced a Management Development Programme for all its staff. The overall aim of the Programme is to help attendees to develop core management and leadership skills which they can use to ensure they become effective and consistent people managers. The Programme includes a competency framework and management model that was developed specifically for the ESRC with the involvement of its staff.

After undergoing a re-accreditation assessment this year ESRC successfully retained its Investor in People status.

#### 4. PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The ESRC Scorecard for 2007-8 included 24 Key Deliverables, divided further into 94 Milestones. Achievements against the milestones can be summarised as follows:

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> 2007/08
<b>93*</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>0</b>

\* The following 14 milestones will be or have now been achieved, but with some delay to the original timescale: To establish bilateral agreements with South Africa and with India, and initiate a collaborative programme with the Indian Council of Social Science Research (2:6); To agree and announce an ESRC strategy on international development by the end of 2007 (2:10); To complete commissioning of the Centres in UK Public Health on behalf of a consortium of seven major funders (4:5); To announce with AHRC new opportunities for research on young people and religion (4:6); To announce a new joint Transport Research Centre with the DfT by December 2007 (4:7); To announce a capacity building initiative in the area of behaviour and the neurosciences (4:12); To announce with Research Council partners opportunities under the ESRC led new cross-Council research priority on security (4:13); To agree future collaboration arrangements with DFID and to announce the next phase of the ESRC –DFID collaboration (5:2); To announce with EPSRC new opportunities for research on energy and equity and energy and security (6:1); To support the implementation of the UK National Data Strategy by the commissioning of an administrative data service and pilot virtual microdata laboratory by March 2008 (14:3); Produce an ESRC brochure that highlights the diversity of ESRC business-related research by August 2007 (16:3); To produce a minimum of five research syntheses on key science in society issues. To commission the first two by end of June 2007 and to have commissioned all five by January 2008 (17:1); To have commissioned a review of the ESRC research brokers schemes, including a mapping of the social sciences intermediaries landscape, within the context of RCUK engagement with intermediary organisations (18:1); To have commissioned a review of the ESRC research brokers schemes, including a mapping of the social sciences intermediaries landscape, within the context of RCUK engagement with intermediary organisations (22:2).

(The 2007-8 Scorecard, in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2007, is available at: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery%5Fplan/>)

Of the 94 milestones set for the year, one was not achieved in full.

- 1:2 “To achieve and maintain a standard grant success rate of 22 per cent from 2005-6, based on the level of demand in 2004-5.” The success rate for the year based on the level of demand in 2004-05 is 19%. Full Economic Costs continues to place considerable pressure on the number of awards we can support, and the average cost of a post FEC award is still 77% higher than pre FEC, rather than the 45% provided for.

## **5. FUTURE TARGETS AND MILESTONES**

The targets and milestones for 2008-9 have been published in the Scorecard 2008-9, available at <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery%5Fplan/>. The Delivery Plan sets out the activities which the ESRC will be taking forward over the next three years following the spending review settlement.

Milestones for the coming year include activities to address the key research challenges set out in our Strategic Plan and the RCUK key priorities, for example to issue a call for new Networks and Visiting Fellowships on Rising Powers, to announce large grants under the second phase of the Religion and Society Programme with AHRC, to issue a joint call with AHRC for Research Fellowships in the Global Uncertainties Programme and to announce a new collaborative Centre on Sustainable Behaviours in partnership with DEFRA and other partners.

The ESRC will extend its international collaborative funding through agreements with the National Institutes of Health in the US, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the US National Science Foundation. The Council will also participate in a NORFACE call on the theme of Migration in Europe.

As part of ESRC's commitment to develop training and capacity building activities in priority areas, the Council will commission four new capacity building clusters in Business Research and Engagement. A series of pilot capacity building networks in Education will be established and a capacity building strategy in Social Work will be developed. This will involve the appointment of a National Strategic Advisor who will develop the strategy through widespread consultation with the academic community and other stakeholders.

The ESRC will increase the economic, social and policy impact of social science research through its collaborations with the Technology Strategy Board, the business sector and the third sector. The Council will contribute to a number of the Technology Strategy Board's Innovation Platforms and co-fund research on the creative industries and networking opportunities on the financial services. In partnership with the Cabinet Office and the Barrow Cadbury Trust, the ESRC will establish a new independent, multidisciplinary research centre for the third sector. The Council will also deliver six public policy seminars; four Regional Development Agency-based seminars for business; and four priority business sector seminars.

## **6. THE EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME**

The Council has continued to contribute towards and meet the agreed cross-Council efficiency targets for the period 2004/05 to 2007/08. In 2007/08, ESRC achieved savings of £600,000 on administration costs, £8.9 million on the effective reprioritisation of programme spend and £2.6 million on increasing the level of co-funding of research.

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 staff have contributed fully in developing common processes to ensure that the agreed solutions meet ESRC's business needs. ESRC's internal SSC project board and Change Team Leader continue to provide an ESRC input into the project and to provide information on project activities to ESRC staff. The SSC Mid-Project Review reported that as a Council ESRC was ready to migrate and is able to respond flexibly to changes in the project plan.

## 7. SCIENCE AND SOCIETY

The success of ESRC's first Festival of Social Science (held in 2007) was continued with the **ESRC Festival of Social Science 2008**. The festival, part of National Science and Engineering Week, was a week long programme of events held across the UK that were designed to communicate information about the social sciences and how social science impacts on our lives.

A total of 91 events were organised in all regions of the UK. Some 9,400 people attended the events, ranging from traditional lectures and seminars to exhibitions, film screenings and topical debates, gaining a vital insight into the 'why' surrounding issues at the forefront of life in today's global society.

The ESRC has worked to engage young people and children with the social sciences through its continued support and promotion of the **Researchers in Residence Scheme**, which places PhD and post doctoral researchers in secondary schools across the UK. The Council has also funded the Royal Anthropological Institute's successful efforts to include anthropology in the A-level curriculum.

The ESRC sponsored two regions (Central UK and North-West/North Wales) in the **2007/08 Debating Matters Competition**. The competition, run by the Institute of Ideas, was a new style of national debating competition for sixth form students. ESRC funded researchers participated in the panels as judges, and ESRC written material (the Edge) was used as background reading for the students.

## 8. SUMMARY FINANCIAL TABLE

The table below provides a summary of the actual spend, compared to the plans set out in the Delivery Plan 2007.

<b>DELIVERY REPORT INCOME AND EXPENDITURE</b>		
<b>£k</b>	<b>2007/2008 PLAN</b>	<b>2007/2008 ACTUAL</b>
<b>Income</b>		
Science budget – resource and capital (incl. FEC)	150,715	150,715
Other Income	24,748	21,244
EYF Brought Forward	5,900	5,610
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>181,363</b>	<b>177,569</b>
<b>Expenditure</b>		
Supporting World Class Research	95,296	88,740
Future Sustainability: Trained People and Building Capacity	53,500	56,349
Underpinning Research Excellence: Facilities and Infrastructure	17,250	16,045
Engagement and Partnership	5,416	5,914
Measuring our Performance: Evaluation and Efficient Administration	9,026	9,474
International	875	1,047
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>181,363</b>	<b>177,569</b>