ESRC AND ITS ROLE

A majority of stakeholders are positive about ESRC's overall performance as an organisation, with 76% saying the organisation is performing well.

82% of stakeholders agreed that the ESRC plays a leadership role in the UK social science community, while 55% agreed that it is a major player in the international social science community.

On the whole, stakeholders are positive about ESRC's impact, with seven in ten (71%) saying the organisation is effective at maximising impact. A quarter (24%) do not agree that it is effective.

In terms of facilitating engagement between social scientists and other fields, most stakeholders think that ESRC is effective in engaging with policymakers (70%) and with government (63%), civil society 53%, the public 48% while fewer think ESRC works effectively with business (26%).

There is a clear relationship between ESRC's perceived level of engagement, and its perceived level of influence. While seven in ten think ESRC is influential among policymakers (71%) and in government (63%), civil society 53%, the public 48% while fewer think ESRC works effectively with business (26%).

Almost eight in ten stakeholders (78%) feel they have a good overall understanding of ESRC's vision and priorities and virtually all stakeholders (99%) are aware of ESRC's aims. These are also the areas which they consider to be most important (89% agree they are important).

82% of stakeholders feel the ESRC is a strong advocate for social science and 71% feel that ESRC's goals and priorities are relevant to and will meet the needs of social science.

VISION, PERFORMANCE AND IMPACT

RELATIONSHIPS WITH ESRC

ESRC appears to have strong relationships with its stakeholders, with a majority (71%) saying they are satisfied with their current relationship.

Those closest to ESRC are most positive about their relationship - stakeholders who are in contact with ESRC on a monthly basis are significantly more likely to be satisfied with their relationship (82%) than those in contact every 4-6 months or less often (59%).

Stakeholders appreciate open communication on the part of the ESRC. The best relationships are characterised by open, honest communication and a willingness to discuss shared issues.

Some academic stakeholders suggest that the ESRC's processes contribute to the perception of it as a bureaucratic organisation. A sizable minority of stakeholders (44%) feel the organisation is too bureaucratic and 22% feel it does not communicate in a way that is clear and accessible.

The vast majority of stakeholders either have the right amount of contact with ESRC (83%) or would like more (21%). Just seven per cent would like less contact.

Stakeholders appreciate open communication on the part of ESRC, including sharing on its current thinking and activities, and working with them to identify opportunities for collaboration and building relationships.

ESRC is widely perceived to add value to stakeholders’ work, with four in five (81%) stating this to be the case. There is also a clear appetite for closer working with ESRC, with three in five (59%) saying they would like to do so.

FUTURE PRIORITIES

There is a feeling that much is out of the organisation’s control, stakeholders are generally confident that ESRC will do their best to meet challenges. Many would like to see ESRC focus on building closer relationships with stakeholders, in order to help the organisation be as effective as it can be.

Some academic stakeholders are concerned the impact agenda could narrow the field of research ESRC operates in, but those outside academia were more likely to see opportunities to raise the profile of social science research.

Stakeholders are almost unanimous in their concerns regarding the availability of funding, and the possible changes caused by the restructuring of the UK research councils. They frequently mention the impending review and tightened government budgets, often drawing a connection with the need for continuous communication of impact.

COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT

Almost all (99%) of ESRC’s contacts with stakeholders had via email/phone (86%), the website (54%), email/newsletters (45%), and publications (40%).

The website was rated highly in terms of quality (63%), events and workshops (60%), and publications (56%).

82% of stakeholders feel well informed about ESRC and its work and a similar proportion feel it is easy to access the information they need (86%).

The most common ways of engaging with ESRC are by using the website (67%), or through email contact with staff (74%). These are also the preferred means of engaging with ESRC.

Academics’ engagement preference after emails is via the website (67%), non-academic counterparts are more likely to prefer face-to-face meetings (80%) and evidence briefings (45%).

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