

**Economic and
Social Research Council
Delivery Plan
2011-2015**



ESRC DELIVERY PLAN 2011-2015

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I EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ESRC is the only UK funder of long-term, strategic social science research, identifying and addressing key societal challenges and co-ordinating the national social science research infrastructure to address them.

ESRC-funded research and data resources support policy and practice across all sectors of the UK's economy and society. We have contributed authoritative analyses of the deficit and suggested ways to secure sustainable growth, as well as increasing understanding of innovation as the driver of our national prosperity. The UK has an outstanding social science research base with most areas considered to be exceptional by world standards.

Our research plays a major role in informing government policy, from welfare and benefits to health and education. It also ensures that we understand how markets and social attitudes influence the application of science and technology. For example, climate experts identify the scale of global warming, but social science helps influence people's behaviours, increases understanding of the complex market mechanisms required for the exchange of pollution credits, and influences policies that will command the confidence of government, business and the public.

We also help to create a skilled workforce for the UK economy with significant numbers of the social scientists we train or fund entering the public and private sectors and civil society in research, development and other roles.

Our future plans

Our Delivery Plan is an ambitious programme of social science research with clear and powerful benefits for the UK economy and society. To achieve this we will:

- **Align and shape our strategic research investment on three priority areas.** Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth; Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions; and A Vibrant and Fair Society.
- **Contribute to the RCUK interdisciplinary research programmes.** The ESRC is one of only two Research Councils involved in all six cross-Council research programmes.
- **Focus our resources on longer, larger grants that deliver ambitious social science.** As part of this we will stop our small grants scheme and change the lower threshold for standard grants.
- **Invest in future leaders** by introducing a scheme for early career researchers.
- **Streamline existing funding opportunities** to ensure we meet our objectives while reducing administrative overheads.
- **Concentrate our PhD training in the best centres.** This will include an emphasis on exploiting our major data investments and funding students working in strategic subjects such as behavioural economics.
- **Protect our core investments in the national data infrastructure.** This includes our funding of longitudinal surveys and we will continue to champion the exploitation of under-used administrative data.
- **Continue to prioritise the generation of economic and societal impact.** Impact will continue to be an integral part of our funding schemes and we will develop innovative approaches where required.
- **Expand our collaborative activities with the private sector.** We will increase the proportion of our external funding generated from private sector partnerships, encourage more research that will directly affect business and build on our expertise in developing strong partnerships with the public sector and civil society.
- **Continue to encourage and promote international collaboration** by incorporating international perspectives across the full range of ESRC activities from an early stage.

The ESRC has for many years been a lean and tightly run organisation with low staffing numbers and careful financial management. We have been operating efficiently and effectively. We have always looked closely at our own administration and financial management and we will reduce our administrative costs even further. In the current economic climate we will need to achieve more with less. We are also

committed to achieving improvements in the efficiency of the science funding system to reduce time and the cost for the community in terms of applications and peer review, and to improve success rates overall. In partnership with HEIs we will introduce the most effective mechanisms for our community to control the level of demand for research funding in the social sciences. Our strategy will be to sustain the quality and reputation of UK social science research while realising even greater benefits from our research investments.

The ESRC's final allocation from the Comprehensive Spending Review 2010 is detailed in Appendix I. Our budget for the four years from 2011/12 is broken down into programme and capital spend. The programme allocation primarily covers responsive, methods and infrastructure, strategic, training and skills, knowledge exchange, and international. The capital allocation, alongside the methods and infrastructure budget, covers our core investments in the national data infrastructure, such as the *Understanding Society* study. The administration expenditure is not included as this allocation has not yet been announced.

2 INTRODUCTION

The UK is emerging from a financial recession and there is a pressing need to establish sustainable growth. The boundaries of public and private responsibilities and the balance between state intervention and individual responsibility are being redrawn. These national and international issues create new challenges relating to public services, welfare reform and civil liberties; social science is more valuable than ever to understand how people and organisations make choices and how behaviour can be shaped through different interventions.

Globally, we are faced with increasingly serious problems including climate change, greater threats to food security and increasing obesity. Social science contributes to the design of interventions that encourage sustainable living to help communities reduce their carbon footprint; that enhance food security by opening up trade between poor countries; and that help tackle obesity by identifying which socio-economic groups are most at risk and why.

Social science can contribute to such a breadth of complex questions because of the investments the ESRC makes in high-quality research, training, and creating and sharing unparalleled research resources. We generate vital knowledge that helps individuals, communities, government, businesses and other organisations. We are able to maximise the impact from our investments by engaging with the users of our research, through our commitment to knowledge exchange and our proven ability to work in partnership with a range of organisations. We are well-placed to address issues of national importance in partnership with a range of government, business and civil society organisations and we will continue to engage in joint funding of research.

Directly informing government policy

The importance of work to wellbeing is well established. Successive governments have reviewed the welfare system to find ways of moving people off benefits and into work. The 2008 Department for Work and Pensions White Paper drew on Paul Gregg's report *Realising Potential* and the new government's approach adds an emphasis on 'dynamic benefits' first modelled by Mike Brewer. Both of them work for ESRC Research Centres.

This Delivery Plan describes the leadership role the ESRC will continue to play to maximise the UK's strength in social science research and training, and to increase the benefits of publicly funded research to the economy and society. As the challenges facing the UK have become more acute we have sharpened our strategic focus to maximise the contribution we can make to national challenges over the next four years.

The ESRC is committed to supporting excellence and a large proportion of resources have always been allocated to the very best research groups and institutions. We will continue to support the pursuit of excellence with a move to longer, larger awards and a further concentration of our funding of postgraduate training.

We can only continue to provide world-class research, postgraduate training and research resources, and secure the impact of our investments, by streamlining our activities.

We have worked with other UK social science funders and international funding agencies to identify opportunities to work together to deliver our strategic goals. We have also worked closely with the other Research Councils and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) to produce a collective vision of how we deliver research on the inter-Council themes and objectives.

3 STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2011-2015

The ESRC's 2009-2014 Strategic Plan sets out our ambition to ensure that the UK has the capability to understand and tackle the most pressing economic and social problems. It describes our activities across seven social science areas: Global Economic Performance, Policy and Management; Health and Wellbeing; Understanding Individual Behaviour; New Technology, Innovation and Skills; Environment, Energy and Resilience; Security, Conflict and Justice; Social Diversity and Population Dynamics. Each area is supported by investment in research, people, national research infrastructure, partnerships, and international collaboration.

Since the ESRC Strategic Plan was developed the economic and societal context has changed. We have reviewed our activities, sharpened our focus and will concentrate our strategic funding on **three ESRC priorities** which will be crucial to the economy and society over the coming years. These priorities build upon the seven challenges for social science outlined in our 2009-14 Strategic Plan and direct our activities in each of the challenge areas:

- **Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth** – Enable the development of robust government and private sector strategies to ensure the sustainable growth of the UK economy.
- **Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions** – Create a better understanding of how and why people and organisations make decisions, and how these can be managed or influenced.
- **A Vibrant and Fair Society** – Develop ways to enhance the role and contributions of citizens, voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises to create a vibrant national and global society.

By spring 2011 we will sharpen the focus under each of these priorities with a set of specific multidisciplinary questions that will shape our research investments. These strategic priorities will be revisited annually to review our work and to allow us to respond to other important issues as they arise. Our investment across them will not necessarily be even and some aspects of the priorities may require new investment. In some areas we will focus our efforts on maximising the impact of our existing investments. And the scope of any required investment will range from short-term activities, such as expert seminars or fellowship awards, to longer-term investments.

3.1 Economic Performance and Sustainable Growth

Enable the development of robust government and private sector strategies to ensure sustainable growth

The collapse and fragile recovery of the world financial system will shape the research agenda for years as the extent of the damage to different countries and sectors becomes clear. Recovery from recession creates renewed pressure to understand how to build sustainable growth at local, regional and national levels, to develop new models that improve the governance and regulation of complex financial systems, and to prepare for future financial shocks.

Social science is vital to understanding the causes of the recession and the resulting economic and social problems. It also plays a fundamental role in finding new ways to address resulting social changes and enhance economic performance and growth, either through direct government action or by creating an environment that makes business operate more effectively. Social scientists also work directly with business to help people learn, enhance performance, innovate and deliver at speed.

Advice on the economic downturn

Research by the ESRC-funded Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy at the Institute for Fiscal Studies explains the shock to the public finances caused by the financial crisis and associated recession, informing government officials, opposition politicians and the media. Examples include briefing notes on the outlook for government borrowing and debt, and on the options for fiscal tightening (presented at the main party conferences and alongside an online tool for users to conduct their own 'Spending Review 2010').

Through ESRC research centres and grants, social scientists from a wide range of areas have created an extensive body of evidence but key questions remain. For example: How do we build sustainable private sector-led growth in the UK at regional and national level? How do we create a high-skill economy that enables businesses to compete in a more demanding global environment? How can the UK develop a greener economy that will reinforce economic recovery? What are the medium- and long-term consequences of the economic downturn and recovery for wellbeing, health and demographic change? And how can we ensure that our relations with rising global economic powers create sustainable and secure opportunities for economic growth?

We will address some of these questions through ongoing research investments with expertise in these areas, through reviewing existing evidence, or through selective new investments. We will also increase research skills in macroeconomics and behavioural economics through our postgraduate training infrastructure and targeted research funding initiatives.

We will work in partnership with key stakeholders to maximise the benefits of our research. This will include, for example, work with the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) and the TSB on securing the resilience of the UK economy by realising high value from global markets and supply chains. We will also extend our collaborations with the private sector and enhance our relationship with the financial services sector.

3.2 Influencing Behaviour and Informing Interventions

Creating a better understanding of how and why people and organisations make decisions, and how these can be managed or influenced

Understanding the behaviour of people, social groups and organisations, and how to influence it, is hugely significant for society.

Contemporary biology, medical sciences and a wide range of social sciences have increased our understanding of individual behaviour in the context of family, neighbourhood, or broader social networks such as the working environment. In all these cases, research demonstrates and evaluates how interventions can promote a beneficial change in the behaviour of citizens.

The impact of cohort research

Evidence from ESRC-funded longitudinal studies has been critical to interventions in the area of health and wellbeing, including major government initiatives such as the raft of measures to combat obesity outlined in recent government documents. These include *The Children's Plan: building brighter futures*, *Healthy Weight*, *Healthy Lives: One Year on* and *Be Active, Be Healthy: A plan for getting the nation moving*, as well as the recent public health campaign *Change4Life*, which was initiated and supported by the Department of Health.

Many recent government policies have assumed that people will rationally make the 'right' decisions when given better information on climate change, diet, or financial instruments but this approach has clear limitations. ESRC-funded research increases understanding of underlying reasons for different behaviours and therefore how people and groups might respond to different information and interventions. This creates opportunities to rethink the delivery of public services, influence consumer and corporate behaviour, and enhance wellbeing.

We will work with existing investments, make new investments and collaborate with businesses, government departments and civil society to answer questions such as: How can new better understanding of organisational and consumer decision-making enhance sustainable economic growth? How can environmental attitudes and behaviours be influenced to promote more sustainable use of resources? How can interventions to improve health and wellbeing draw upon advances in social science? And what is the appropriate role of public policy in terms of coercion through legislation, persuasion via incentives or social marketing, or coherent combinations of approaches?

Many of the answers to these questions will come from the data provided by the *Understanding Society* study and our birth cohort studies. We will increase the opportunities for exploiting these and other social science datasets by creating research and training opportunities. Cross-Council collaborations will also help to answer a number of these questions, including how people adapt to climate change with the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), and changing health-related behaviour with the Medical Research Council (MRC). We will also need to invest in creating skills in behavioural economics to ensure we have the researchers to address these questions in the future.

3.3 A Vibrant and Fair Society

Developing ways to enhance the role and contributions of citizens, voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises to create a vibrant national and global society

We live in a democratic, diverse society which is facing increasing challenges, ranging from population growth to climate change. Citizens, voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises play an essential role in helping the UK address these challenges by promoting social inclusion and shaping our local, national and global society, often in partnership with the public sector and business.

Social science informs debates around social mobility, the impact of migration, the 'Big Society' and the role of civil society in relation to the state, and how we manage the consequences of an ageing population. It will answer such questions as: How can we create an open, free and diverse society while ensuring the security and safety of individuals, organisations and the UK? What are the roles of citizens, voluntary sector organisations and social enterprises in the devolution of powers to local and neighbourhood levels? How can we improve social mobility and community wellbeing through voluntary action and social enterprise? How can we increase engagement of citizens with the democratic process, and the future of the current party system? And how can the operational effectiveness of social enterprises, charities, and voluntary organisations be improved?

Improving older people's lives

The charity Age UK used findings from ESRC-funded research into older people and social exclusion to develop its 'Stop pensioner poverty now' campaign and for its work relating to fear of crime. The research team also led co-operation between Age UK and community groups in the study areas, leading to the charity's involvement with communities in Manchester and Liverpool to improve older people's living conditions.

We have an extensive portfolio in this area. We also have strong links with the voluntary sector and will work in partnership with key organisations. Our major investment in large-scale longitudinal datasets increases understanding of a range of related issues, including migration patterns and their consequences, and measures the extent to which people are becoming more involved in voluntary and community activities.

We will concentrate on investments that help society, government and business improve delivery of future public services so that they are both affordable and meet society's needs at a local, regional and national level. Our investment in the RCUK programme on Lifelong Health and Wellbeing ensures social science and interdisciplinary research in this important area.

4 DELIVERING OUR PRIORITIES

This section explains how we will streamline our activities to ensure we deliver excellence across the five objectives set out in our Strategic Plan 2009-2014.

4.1 Excellent social science research

Our strategy is to increase the impact of high-quality social science research and maximise the benefits that ESRC research has beyond the academic community.

We will deliver our research agenda by:

- **Realigning and shaping our strategic research portfolio to address the three new priorities.** We will also encourage greater flexibility and responsiveness to the changing economic and social context from our existing investments, and work with them to increase the impact of our research portfolio. Working in partnership with other stakeholders, where appropriate, we will develop new investments and initiatives.
- **Focusing our resources on longer, larger grants that deliver ambitious social science.** As part of this we will stop our small grants scheme and change the lower threshold for standard grants. We will support innovative research across all modes of funding as well as new interdisciplinary research – both within and beyond the social sciences.
- **Invest in future leaders** by introducing a scheme for early career researchers.
- **Ensuring that we have the right mechanisms in place to deliver these priorities in the most efficient way.** These mechanisms include ‘strategic’ and ‘responsive’ funding processes. The three priority areas will primarily be addressed through strategic research initiatives. Our responsive-mode schemes will remain open to applications from across the social sciences with quality the primary criterion for awards. However, we also anticipate that fields important for our three focused priorities will receive significant support in responsive mode.
- **Streamlining existing funding opportunities to ensure we meet our objectives while reducing administrative overheads.** We will reduce the number of schemes we offer and focus the remaining schemes to ensure that the ESRC achieves more value. Although this includes discontinuing the small grants scheme and mid-career fellowships, we will be combining existing schemes for early career researchers to create a Future Research Leaders scheme, and integrating our large grants and centres competitions. These decisions have been informed by a range of evidence, including our own evaluations and qualitative feedback from assessment panels that identify which awards/schemes have generated the highest quality outcomes and the most impact. We will introduce methods to manage demand and improve submissions.

Future Leaders grants scheme

The ESRC remains committed to offering opportunities for both excellent established researchers and future potential research leaders. We will introduce a new Future Leaders grants scheme for the social sciences, which will replace our current postdoctoral fellowship and first grants schemes. We have worked with the British Academy (BA) to ensure this scheme complements their Early Career Fellowship scheme.

Main features:

- The scheme will provide grants of up to two years to support clearly defined projects.
- It will seek to develop future research leaders in the three priority areas identified in this plan as well as in areas where there is an identified skills shortage.
- It will be open to new researchers within six years of their PhD.
- The scheme will support 50-80 new grants per year.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council, the BA and the ESRC will publish a joint statement on provision on early and mid career support.

Our streamlining plans will shift funding away from smaller projects towards fewer but larger and longer awards for ambitious social science that makes a long-term and fundamental contribution to our priorities. Our contribution here is vital as no other social science research funder creates opportunities on this scale. We will continue to include a mix of funding mechanisms with distinct objectives and our responsive research spend will be the largest part of our budget. We will support researchers through all key stages of their career, from those just starting their academic work to world leaders in social science research.

Delivering excellent social science research

We will:

- Seek opportunities for collaborative research initiatives to address focused priorities.
- Consider some limited new investment to address focused priorities.
- Work with existing investments to address questions in focused priority areas.
- Develop a wide-ranging programme of activity to generate impact from existing and recent past investments.
- Terminate existing schemes for small grants, postdoctoral fellowships and mid career researchers on 1 February 2011. All applications presently within the system will still be considered.
- Change the lower threshold for standard grants to £200,000 from spring 2011. Applications for standard grants up to £200,000 will be accepted until 1 February 2011.
- Introduce a new scheme for Future Leaders for early career researchers in spring 2011.

4.2 National capability

As the main UK provider of PhD funding across all areas of social science we develop skilled social scientists to contribute to a competitive, knowledge-based UK economy, and help create the next generation of world-leading academic social scientists.

We achieve this by providing the highest quality postgraduate training across the UK social science community, and ensuring postgraduates and postdoctorates develop the skills that employers need. We also provide opportunities for researchers at all stages of their career to work with government, business and civil society organisations.

We enhance the quality of postgraduate training by influencing the content and delivery of training through our relationships with selected HEIs. We are also making significant changes to how we deliver postgraduate training with the introduction of a national doctoral training network.

Few institutions have strength in all social science fields so this new concentrated network of Doctoral Training Centres focuses our resources by drawing together the best social science training.

We will only allocate studentships to those doctoral training pathways within institutions or collaborations we accredit. We will replace accreditation of postgraduate training in future with a quality assurance process in line with the approach taken by most of the other Research Councils.

HEIs will only be able to obtain ESRC studentships through the network and we will discontinue separate competitions for studentships. We will also work closely with HEIs to allocate a proportion of studentships to strategic priority areas to ensure we have sufficient capacity.

This concentrated collaborative network will increase the efficiency of postgraduate training in social sciences across the UK and ensure that students have access to the very best training.

We will develop national capability through:

- **Concentrating the majority of our studentships in strategic areas**, including the three priority areas identified in this plan. We will increase capacity in priority disciplines such as economics, management and business studies, language-based area studies; and in strategic areas such as behavioural- and macroeconomics.
- **Work with other partners to tackle skills shortages.** For example, we will be working with HM Treasury to increase skills in macro-economics, and the Funding Councils to increase quantitative methods skills. We will also support students to train in the creation and exploitation of our major datasets.
- **Ensuring all students have the opportunity to spend time during their PhD in a different environment** by increasing the number of collaborative studentships and flexible short-term student internships with the public and private sectors, and civil society. We will create partnerships with businesses to ensure that we build a skilled and adaptable workforce to support future economic growth.
- **Broadening the skills of all social science PhD students** by emphasising transferable (employability) skills training throughout our network. We will require institutions to provide training on core topics such as impact, public engagement and media training to encourage co-production of research among future generations of researchers.
- **Continued commitment to the development of early-career researchers**, both to develop the skills to benefit the wider economy and to ensure the continuing pipeline of excellent researchers for the Nation. As a result we will continue to invest in the RCUK Research Careers programme, continuing to support the implementation of the Concordat for Researcher Development and managing the transition of the Vitae programme towards a self-sustaining position.

National strategy in quantitative methods

The ESRC has worked with the Funding Councils and Nuffield Foundation to develop a national strategy for increasing skills in quantitative methods. Over the next four years this joint strategy will:

- Strengthen the teaching of quantitative methods at the undergraduate level across the social sciences.
- Increase the supply of quantitatively trained postgraduates by relaxing the overseas eligibility criteria for full stipends in this area, as recommended in the Smith Review. We will enable networks to provide full funding for international students in economics and for those using Advanced Quantitative Methods. Each year, approximately ten per cent of all new studentships are in these two areas and as we do not anticipate this changing significantly in 2011 the proportion of international students with full ESRC studentships is unlikely to exceed ten per cent of each new annual intake to the networks.
- Double the number of studentships using quantitative methods and concentrate these in networks with leading QM training provision.
- Continue enhanced PhD stipends for postgraduate students using quantitative methods.
- Target studentships and early career researchers on secondary data analysis programmes using our major datasets and other longitudinal studies.
- Extend mid-career opportunities to learn skills in quantitative methods through the National Centre for Research Methods and further investment in our Researcher Development Initiative.

We will reduce the overall level of studentships we currently support from around 750 to 600 students and concentrate our funding on increasing the quality of training to generate highly skilled social scientists to work both within and beyond the academic sector.

Delivering national capability in the social sciences

We will:

- Continue to support postgraduate training across core social science disciplines with focus on strategic areas.
- Maintain a strong leadership role over the quality of postgraduate training and fund around 600 new students from the 2011/12 academic year.

4.3 Research infrastructure

The ESRC makes a major capital investment in, and leads development of, the national social science research infrastructure that provides data for social scientists, policymakers and practitioners to answer some of the most pressing questions facing our economy and society. We also fund the development of pioneering research methods to mine these data.

We steered the development of the cross-council *National Data Strategy* which identifies the data needs of the academic, policy and practice communities. We established the UK Data Forum which brings together stakeholders from the public and private sectors, and civil society to improve access to existing data resources and to co-ordinate co-funding of future data priorities to deliver the cross-council national strategy. This partnership reduces duplication and waste (for example in data creation and collection), and is an effective way to develop the UK data infrastructure, particularly at a time of limited financial resources.

We have developed world-leading longitudinal studies such as *Understanding Society* and the birth cohort studies. These studies follow individuals through their lives and improve understanding of individual and collective behaviours. We have also made strategic investments in studies based on routinely collected administrative data such as the Scottish Longitudinal Study. These use anonymised existing data and provide the exceptionally large samples required for the analysis of rarer conditions.

These and other large-scale data resources provide powerful tools for charting social and economic change, enabling researchers and policymakers to, for example, assess the effects of the economic downturn upon individuals and groups. They can be used to identify what policy instruments are needed to accelerate recovery and address social imbalances.

The world-class data infrastructure created by the ESRC is exploited across the social sciences and beyond. There are over 41,000 registered users of our data services including more than 4,000 users from outside the academic community.

As part of this we will:

- **Give priority to our investment in longitudinal datasets** such as *Understanding Society* and the existing Birth Cohorts as they are critical to the delivery of top-quality social science research and policy analysis. We will continue to seek co-funding from UK Data Forum partners to sustain the investment required and to improve efficiency of data collection strategies.
- **Develop proposals for a new birth cohort study.** The Cohort would be the largest ever UK-wide study of babies and young children and will provide a wealth of information on the health, development and life circumstances of a new generation.
- **Rationalise investment in our national data services** that maximise access to social and economic data resources, including the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS). We will rationalise and integrate other specialist data services with ESDS where possible to improve efficiency.
- **Improve links between existing administrative and other transactional data**, while safeguarding personal identities. This is an economical way to create a range of rich new datasets

with huge benefits for social science researchers and policy analysts, and to enhance existing data such as the longitudinal studies through the addition of extra information.

- **Sustain minimum investment in our *National Centre for Research Methods* to develop leading-edge research methods.** This is critical for researchers to link and integrate data, and to develop new statistical analysis techniques for exploiting data resources.
- **Ensure widespread use of our UK data infrastructure.** We will direct a proportion of our research and training awards towards the use of existing national datasets to create opportunities for researchers to realise the analytical potential of these resources.

Delivering a national data infrastructure

We will:

- Sustain a basic national ‘core’ infrastructure by investment in key data facilities, longitudinal datasets and methods.
- Protect all essential core elements of our data resources. We will rationalise these investments, scaling them back to the minimum level compatible with maintaining and developing a high quality national data infrastructure.

4.4 Partnerships

We create evidence for policy and practice by funding high-quality independent research. In many areas we deliver that evidence in partnership with a range of organisations, increasing the potential impact of the research and creating opportunities to secure funding from outside the research base.

Our partnerships include co-funding of research and people exchange with public, private and third-sector bodies; joint initiatives with other research councils, funding councils and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB); work with our academic community, HEIs and learned societies; and promotion of our research to the public. Partnerships are so central to our work that our standard investment model is collaboration and co-funding through our Venture scheme.

We will focus on addressing gaps in our portfolio through new research or by supporting knowledge exchange and impact, and we will direct our partnerships towards fulfilling targets in our three priority areas. We will develop our partnerships through:

- **Delivering a comprehensive co-funding strategy** to ensure that our resources are directed most effectively. In order to diversify our funding sources we will work to raise the proportion of private sector co-funding. We will increase our engagement with business by developing high-level relationships, particularly with the financial services, green business and retail sectors to generate co-funding and collaboration. The number of social scientists working with the private sector through student placements will also increase. By continuing to support our successful relationships with the public sector and civil society, we will ensure our research evidence informs policy and practice.
- **Working with the TSB** and strengthening the contribution of social science within the TSB's activities. We will build on the co-funded Knowledge Transfer Network for financial services, and our extensive portfolio of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, of which the TSB is the largest sponsor.
- **Strengthening strategic relationships with HEIs.** We will build on our regular dialogue with HEIs at Vice Chancellor level, to ensure clear understanding of our strategic objectives and how they complement the ambitions of individual institutions. This will include managing demand for grants, the establishment of doctoral training, and increasing the impact of research.
- **Involving the public with the ESRC and social science.** The ESRC is committed to communicating with and involving the public in the development and management of research initiatives and through their reporting, dissemination and evaluation. We continue to train and fund ESRC researchers to raise awareness of the value of public engagement with academic research. We will continue to support the RCUK integrated programme aimed at engaging the public with research. The detailed programme will be finalised in early 2011. The new Concordat for Public Engagement provides a key focus for this activity. We also manage our own public engagement programme to increase the public's engagement with, and understanding of, social science research: the largest ESRC activity is the Festival of Social Science which enables ESRC researchers to bring their work to the UK population.

We will:

- Increase our engagement with business through our delivery of a comprehensive co-investment strategy.
- Strengthen the contribution of social science within the TSB's activities. Our financial commitment for the period will be about £10.5 million.
- Continue to hold the ESRC festival of Social Science to increase the public engagement and awareness of social science research.

4.5 International collaboration

Many of the issues identified in our strategic priorities and cross-Council programmes are international in scope and therefore a global research response is required to address them. International comparative studies also enable insights from the many national experiments being conducted around the world. UK research needs to work with the best minds, organisations and facilities to thrive in this global effort. International collaboration provides additional resources which offer perspectives on UK issues, and increase the potential for UK research to have an impact on foreign governments and international organisations, and to play a significant role in international collaborative responses to global issues.

We enable UK social scientists to work with the best international researchers and many of our recent strategic initiatives have encouraged and promoted international collaboration.

We have developed an innovative new way of enabling international collaborations through the creation of an Open Research Area (ORA) in partnership with our counterparts in Germany, the Netherlands and France. The ORA has removed the hurdles of applying for multi-country funding. The new Rising Powers Initiative seeks to understand the regional and global impacts of the rising powers. We have also participated in multi-national funding initiatives or joined partner agencies to address areas of mutual interest. An example of this is our participation in the US-led work on Understanding and Reducing Health Disparities/Inequalities (with the National Institute for Health). By pooling our resources with international partners we extend the scope of research, and avoid duplication of research effort internationally.

Collaborators and competitors are no longer confined to the obvious, developed nations. Research in Brazil, China, India and South Africa has grown rapidly and how these countries decide to tackle the challenges they face will have important implications for the UK. There could be an impact on global financial markets, investment and business opportunities with these countries, and poverty reduction or responses to climate change and global security. We aim to be a partner of these countries so that the UK social science community can benefit.

We will develop international collaboration through:

- **Developing our international partnerships in Europe and beyond.** We aim to enhance the UK's international standing in research and to be the partner of choice in the target countries and regions of Brazil, China, Europe, India, North America and South Africa. We will also work in close partnership with the RCUK Overseas Offices and the Science and Innovation Network to achieve this objective.
- **Maintaining our successful and long-standing partnership with the Department for International Development in poverty alleviation.** This exciting partnership has attracted hundreds of high-quality proposals involving universities in the UK and across the world.
- **Rationalising our existing targeted schemes** and taking steps to include international perspectives in all ESRC and cross-Council activities from an early stage.
- **Encouraging UK social scientists to take advantage of international funding opportunities** such as those under the Framework Programme and the European Research Council. We will achieve this through our support of the UK Research Office in Brussels and the hosting of the National Contact Points for the Science and Society, and Social Science and Humanities Programmes.
- **Ensuring researchers have the necessary skills, methods, data and opportunities** to collaborate internationally or undertake international comparative work through, for example, the International Co-Investigators Policy.

Delivering international collaboration and leadership

We will:

- Maintain current strong links and opportunities with a range of international partners.
- Influence the restructuring of the European Science Foundation and the Heads of European Research Councils.
- Streamline existing Bilateral Agreements and International Exchange Schemes.
- Promote the International Co-Investigators Policy as the main vehicle for supporting international collaboration, particularly in the responsive mode.

5 SUPPORTING CROSS-COUNCIL THEMES

Social science research is an essential part of all the cross-Council themes. The ESRC's contribution to the programmes under each of these themes is around 18 per cent of our funding in 2009/10. The ESRC's three priority areas and the research we will fund complement the cross-Council themes well.

We contribute to the RCUK programmes through:

- **Global Uncertainties** – Realising greater security for all (individuals, communities and organisations) in a changing world. (ESRC lead)
- **Living with Environmental Change** – Understanding how people respond to environmental change and developing strong economic responses, including new business models, smart regulation and sustainable global poverty alleviation. (NERC lead)
- **Ageing: Lifelong Health and Wellbeing** – Realising economic, social and health gains of healthy ageing while reducing dependency, costs and inequities later in life. (MRC lead)
- **Digital Economy** – Understanding how technology affects lives, changes the way society interacts, offers new government services and revolutionises business. (EPSRC lead)
- **Energy** – Understanding connectivity of energy systems, including supply technologies and energy demand. (EPSRC lead)
- **Global Food Security** – Funding social science research to create a sustainable, affordable supply of good-quality food for the world's growing population, from less land and fewer inputs. (BBSRC lead)

For our contribution to the RCUK programmes see Appendix II. The ESRC contribution comes from across the responsive, strategic, training and knowledge exchange budgets; for details on the Programmes led by other Councils see their individual Delivery Plans.

5.1 RCUK Global Uncertainties Programme: security for all in a changing world

The threat of terrorism led to the development of the Global Uncertainties Programme and its vision of making the world a more secure place for individuals, organisations and states. The Government's National Security Strategy (NSS) notes that economic security is only possible if national security is ensured. The Programme has identified six areas to achieve impact: ideologies and beliefs; threats to infrastructure; terrorism; cybersecurity; proliferation of chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive (CBRNE) weapons and technologies; and transnational organised crime. It brings together academics and other parties to define, implement and promote the Global Uncertainties activities, including international work where we will build on our relationship with the US Department of Homeland Security. The Programme's early investments are already delivering results, such as the work of one of the GU Fellows on organisational change and military learning in the UK campaign in Afghanistan. This has led to a restructuring of UK inter-agency operations in Helmand.

The themes of the Global Uncertainties programme cover the security context described by the NSS. The NSS recognises the complex and connected nature of global and national security – a central feature of the Programme.

Global Uncertainties alignment with national security risks

Tier 1 National Security Risk	Relevant GU core area
International terrorism	Terrorism Ideologies and beliefs (particularly pathways to terrorism) CBRNE
Cyber attack	Cyber security
International military crises	Ideologies and beliefs
Major accidents or natural hazards	Threats to infrastructures

The Programme also explores transnational organised crime. Global Uncertainties will continue to work in this area because of the role crime has in financing terrorism and the potential impact on cyber security.

RCUK commitment to the Global Uncertainties Programme

RCUK will:

Invest £134 million – selectively addressing priority stakeholder needs through focused initiatives and networking activities

6 ECONOMIC AND SOCIETAL IMPACT

The ESRC makes a significant impact through its funding for research, training and data resources. Our social science research and evidence is applied widely, ranging from our extensive co-funding and collaboration with partners outside academia, to our successful knowledge exchange schemes.

Social science impact includes direct and quantifiable economic benefits, wider social impacts that benefit society such as effects on the environment, public health or quality of life, and impacts on government policy, civil society and professional practice.

Maximising the benefits of our investment in social science is central to our Strategic Plan 2009-14. This measures success through five objectives: impact through excellent social science research; impact through enhanced national capability; impact through better national data infrastructure; impact through partnerships; and impact through international leadership.

As our Strategic Plan illustrates, creating, assessing and communicating impact is not a separate part of our strategy – it is central to all our activities.

6.1 Embedding impact as an integral part of our funding schemes

Creating impact is at the heart of ESRC research funding and assessment, from postgraduate training through to large-scale investments. Evaluation shows that sustained contact with users is often the best way to increase impact and we will ensure this engagement is central to the research process. We will also work on increasing the impact of our current large investments, particularly in the areas of our three focused priorities.

We are committed to:

- Continued emphasis on impact as part of all research projects, from application (Pathways to Impact) to dissemination, monitoring and support during and after research activities, and post-award data collection and evaluation.
- A wide-ranging programme of knowledge exchange activity to create impact from existing and recent investments around our three key priorities, including seminars, people exchange awards and follow-on funding.
- Work in collaboration with other partners to tackle skills shortages (eg, with HM Treasury on macroeconomic; with voluntary sector on research skills through capacity-building clusters).
- Increase the impact from *Understanding Society*, our birth cohort studies and other social science datasets through targeted research and training opportunities.
- Increase the number of collaborative studentships and flexible short-term student internships with the public and private sectors, and civil society.
- Deliver benefits to social science researchers and policy analysts through better links between existing administrative and other transactional data.
- Broaden the skill set of all PhD students across the social sciences by concentrating on transferable (employability) skills training throughout our training network, including development of collaboration and engagement skills.

6.2 Commitment to innovative approaches and efficiency

As the ESRC continues to extend its collaborations with policy, business and civil society organisations we will be innovative in our funding mechanisms for knowledge exchange and impact. We have a strong track record in this area and we will continue with our commitments.

We are committed to:

- Streamline our knowledge exchange schemes to provide more opportunities for collaboration and networking.
- Develop dedicated knowledge exchange and impact initiatives in existing and new research centres, and support impact generation from past and current research investments such as the Advanced Institute of Management Research.
- Develop and promote our impact toolkit to offer guidance and support for researchers.
- Increase external funding from private sector partnerships (particularly the financial services, green business and retail sectors) to five per cent and generate research which will directly benefit business.
- Increase our impact on the private sector by building the co-funded Knowledge Transfer Network for financial services, and our extensive portfolio of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships.
- Work with the TSB and the EPSRC on increasing the manufacturing contribution to the future resilience of the UK economy by creating sustainable value from global markets and production chains.
- Work with the TSB to set priorities for areas such as LWEC business engagement, Entrepreneurship, Energy, Digital Economy, and Extraction of value from data.
- Promote structural change within research institutions to increase research impact in areas such as career incentives, development and knowledge exchange support services.

6.3 Evaluation and communication of impact

We will continue to evaluate ESRC-funded research through our expert Evaluation Committee, including assessing the impact of people and data investments, and we will ensure that the results are widely disseminated. Our communication of the value and impact of social science research will cost-effectively present the results of our investments directly to potential users and to the public.

We are committed to:

- Extending the ESRC impact studies portfolio, including assessing the impact of people and data investments.
- Continuing to develop tools to identify economic and societal impact and evaluate new approaches.
- Improving our understanding of how impact is achieved and what environmental factors are critical, and integrate this into ESRC policy development and support for our community.
- Continuing to demonstrate and promote our impact through a variety of communication tools.
- Promoting and disseminating our research through a new ESRC web portal.

7 DELIVERY ANALYSIS

The ESRC has for many years operated as a lean and tightly run organisation with low staffing numbers, and careful financial management. In the current economic climate we will need to achieve more with less. We have been operating efficiently and effectively and have always looked closely at our own administration and financial management and we will reduce our administrative costs even further. Throughout the 2010 spending review period we have met our agreed targets for cost savings including controlling the proportion of our budget spent on administration, and have identified ways to meet the new requirement to reduce our administrative costs even further. We will work closely across RCUK and with the funding councils, HEIs, and other funding agencies to increase the return on the public's investment and avoid duplication of effort. In addition we, like many other public sector organisations, have made cost savings on recruitment and pay, and across our communication activities, and we will continue to work creatively and effectively to provide good value for money.

Administration budgets

The Research Councils are committed to ensuring that their administration costs are as low as possible so that the maximum amount of public funds can be invested in research. Setting up the Shared Service Centre (RCUK SSC Ltd) is one of the mechanisms that the Research Councils have put in place in order to do this. The Research Councils are working with each other and RCUK SSC Ltd on how to deliver the necessary administrative savings while minimising the impact on our activities. This will be an important part of our efficiency programme and will be subject to close scrutiny to ensure we receive maximum value for money.

RCUK collaboration/integrated activities

The ESRC will continue to be at the forefront of cross-Council working – whether scientific, strategic or operational – including greater harmonisation across all activities. We will continue to support a collective approach to public engagement, careers and diversity, and international collaboration. To achieve the best results from reduced administrative resources, we are keen to ensure that the RCUK Strategy Unit is focused on adding value to our collective activities. We will work with the other Research Councils on opportunities for more strategic collaboration in India, China, the United States and the European Union where RCUK has a presence.

Controlling research costs and demand

The Councils have accepted the recommendations of the recent Wakeham report and are committed to working with research organisations to reduce the cost of research while retaining the commitment to funding research on the current FEC basis. In the light of the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review, Research Councils are looking at further options to increase efficiency savings with HEIs which will then be reinvested in research.

We are also committed to achieving improvements in the efficiency of the science funding system by working with HEIs to manage demand. This will reduce time and the cost for the community in terms of applications and peer review, and also improve success rates overall. The Research Councils have agreed the following set of principles to manage demand and improve submissions. Research Councils will:

- Work with universities to help them self-manage demand and increase quality control of research proposals.
- Discuss plans for demand management with stakeholders.
- Develop and share data and best practice for managing demand across RCUK and universities and strive for ongoing improvement.
- Monitor and review the effects of management of demand on the community.

We will introduce the most effective mechanisms for controlling the level of demand for research funding in the social sciences. We are already sharing information about success rates with HEIs to encourage greater quality assurance of research funding applications. However, we will need to move from self regulation to other measures to reduce the overall volume of applications we receive. We aim to significantly reduce the number of applications we receive which do not reach the quality threshold for ESRC funding.

APPENDIX I – PROGRAMME RESOURCE AND CAPITAL ALLOCATION 2011/12 TO 2014/15

£000's	Baseline 2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15
Responsive Research	53,000	48,000	48,000	48,000	48,000
Strategic and Collaborative Research	34,800	33,429	35,058	37,058	38,058
Training and Skills	50,000	48,000	47,000	45,000	44,000
Knowledge Exchange, Impact and Evaluation	8,200	8,200	8,200	8,200	8,200
Methods and Infrastructure	4,300	10,300	7,300	7,300	7,300
Other Programme and International	7,761	7,761	7,761	7,761	7,761
Programme	158,061	155,690	153,319	153,319	153,319
Depreciation/Impairments		247	316	167	167
Capital	13,400	18,700	13,700	12,700	12,700
Total	171,461	174,637	167,335	166,186	166,186

Footnotes:

1. The 2010/11 baseline figure is the original allocation for that year and not the projected expenditure.
2. These figures represent the ESRC's current planning assumptions but are subject to further adjustment and revision beyond 2011-12.
3. The ESRC received in 2010/11 £10.5 million from the Large Facilities Capital Fund, for primarily *Understanding Society*. This is not included in the baseline figures above. Over the budget period the Programme allocation for Methods and Infrastructure, together with the Capital allocation, will support our prioritised core infrastructure, including longitudinal studies such as *Understanding Society*.
4. The projected budget for 2011/12 for methods and infrastructure from both programme and capital allocations shows a one-off peak, reflecting specific data collection costs for *Understanding Society*. After 2011/12 we will rationalise our portfolio to ensure we can sustain our core infrastructure.
5. The capital allocation from 2012-13 onwards is indicative at this stage.
6. The spend on training and skills decreases over the period primarily reflecting the reduction in the number of studentships we currently support.
7. Administration Expenditure, ie, ESRC office central running costs for the four years from 2011/12 are not included as this allocation has not yet been announced.
8. Allocation for Depreciation/Impairments has not yet been announced. Figures quoted are indicative, and based on current fixed asset portfolio only.
9. The above allocation from The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills does not include co-funding from other organisations. Current forecast income from other bodies in 2010/11 is £28.3 million. We will continue to aim for similar levels over the spending review period.
10. Our forecast programme income (excluding co-funding) will be £45,000 per annum.

APPENDIX II – ESRC COMMITMENT TO RCUK PROGRAMMES

	Baseline					
£000's	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	Total
Living with Environmental Change	9,900	9,800	9,600	9,600	9,600	38,600
Energy	3,200	3,200	3,100	3,200	3,200	12,700
Ageing: Lifelong health and wellbeing	10,000	9,900	9,800	9,800	9,900	39,400
Digital Economy	2,800	2,800	2,700	2,700	2,700	10,900
Global Uncertainties	8,800	8,700	8,600	8,700	8,700	34,700
Global Food Security	2,100	2,100	2,000	2,000	2,000	8,100
Total	36,800	36,500	35,800	36,000	36,100	144,400

Footnote:

1. The ESRC contribution to the RCUK programmes comes from across the ESRC responsive, strategic, training and knowledge exchange budgets as detailed in Appendix I.