EVALUATION OF THE ESRC RESEARCH SEMINARS SCHEME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction and Summary of the Review Process

This evaluation has examined past performance of the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme in order to provide findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertinent to ESRC's planning for the future. Since 1991-1992, the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme has had as its central role the support of Research Seminar Groups, "multi-institutional groups of academic researchers, postgraduate students and non-academic users who meet regularly to exchange information and ideas with the aim of advancing research within their field." (www.esrc.ac.uk) The long-lived, 750 award Scheme not only focuses on activity which lies at the heart of academic endeavour, it does so by promoting objectives which relate to the dynamics of change in social science and economics. Along with dialogue and publications, diverse objectives of funded Seminar Groups include networking, development of new ideas or even new areas, interdisciplinarity, engagement of non-academic stakeholders and capacity-building.

With a deep commitment to utility, this evaluation looks both backward and forward, addressing a range of questions related to:

- Operation of the Scheme
- Impacts and Outcomes – of particular grants and of the role played by the Scheme
- Lessons learned, insights gathered and further development of the Scheme.

The underlying conceptual model considers impact of research (including these Seminars) to be complex, involving multi-directional flows of knowledge, expertise and influence across developing networks and relationships. Heterogeneity was captured in processes, outcomes and views. A Framework of Core Questions made it possible to integrate analyses across multiple perspectives and methods: document analysis; a survey of PIs (265 responses); a survey of other participants (45 responses); 38 semi-structured interviews and four detailed case studies.

Key Findings: Operations

Applications and distribution

The Research Seminars Scheme has traditionally had a strong success rate (e.g. 28% in 2009-2010), with a high demand accompanied by modest funding (£15K or £18 including an international dimension). Individuals knowledgeable about the selection process feel confident of the validity of the process, such that –despite a tail of less impressive applications – good quality exists at the top end of the application spectrum. Only 18% of recipients received more than one Seminar award and renewals among those thirteen individuals receiving three awards or more took place primarily in the 1990's. ESRC's smooth and professional administration of the application process was highly praised.

Among the 750 Seminar awards, some disciplines in the social science portfolio were far more frequently represented than others, with Education and Sociology most frequent (just over 100 awards each), followed closely by Economics (96 awards) and Political Science & International Studies/Relations (76), then Management and Business Studies (69), Social Policy (57) and Human Geography (52). When this distribution is compared to "baseline" distribution (e.g. 2009-2010 Standard and Small Grants), several areas are well-represented in both, but interesting divergences include a far lower percentage of Psychology in the Seminar Scheme awards along with higher percentages of Education and Social Policy.

When examined closely, distribution of Seminar awards across research organisations showed some definite "winners" (six having more than twenty awards and another eighteen having between ten and twenty). Many of these overlap with Standard/Small Grant winners. Yet, in quite sharp contrast to Standard and Small Grants distribution, Seminar Scheme recipients reflected a very long tail of institutions (twenty-six received 6-10 grants; thirty-three

received 2-5, and forty-two received 1 grant). Clearly the Seminar Scheme has an extended reach across institutions.

Operational Factors

Most PIs agreed that their host research organisation had provided sufficient support for the management of their grants, but many also noted the heavy time and effort burden placed upon them to handle the administration personally. Formats of the Seminars varied, with some consisting of several half-day events, others one or two all-day events and many several all-day events. Although few if any PIs wanted to do more reporting, there was nonetheless a sense of disappointment that successes were not remarked upon or captured, particularly as it was thought that visibility of the Scheme's success stories would be positive for ESRC.

Key Findings: Impacts and Outcomes

Addressing Objectives

Most Seminar Grants addressed multiple objectives, with PI interviewees conveying a strong sense of personal commitment to them. Objectives cited most often by survey respondents (over three-quarters) are Generation of innovative research ideas and Development of interactions with research users. About two-thirds also cited Interdisciplinarity and Capacity-building, with fewer citing Development of international networks and Emergence of a new field/sub-discipline. For all objectives, by far most of those respondents addressing them saw either some or significant progress having been made (over 90% for all other than 68% for Emergence of a new field/sub-discipline). Many saw some of the progress as having been made after the grant. A discussion of ways in which Seminars addressed the various objectives is provided for each, illustrated by vignettes. The grants definitely generated new research ideas and even new research areas or sub-disciplines, with over three quarters of respondents seeing progress, and nearly three quarters advanced collaborations between researchers and research users. Two-thirds of the respondents saw progress in interdisciplinary research partnerships. Fewer (half) aimed for international networks, but over 90% of those who did so saw progress. Regarding capacity-building, just the 250 responding with estimated numbers to the survey (not the entire Scheme) involved some 3,380 junior researchers, on average 13.5 junior researchers per grant. Nearly 90% of the PIs themselves found the Grant valuable in their own careers. Finally, the Seminar Grants were productive in terms of conventional academic outputs, with at least 90% of respondents seeing their Grant as contributing to academic publications or conferences. Over three quarters of respondents also generated additional accessible outputs such as websites.

Types of Impacts

The two sorts of impacts of which respondents were most confident were Conceptual Impacts and Enduring Connectivity, which align well with the Scheme's aims of promoting innovation (Conceptual Impacts' "broad new understanding or awareness-raising") and networks (Enduring Connectivity Impacts' "longer-term collaboration by involved individuals in follow-on interactions"). Well over three-quarters of respondents cited Capacity building Impacts (e.g. "training of students or professionals"), clearly a key aim of the Scheme, and Attitudinal or cultural impacts (e.g. "increased willingness in general to engage in new collaborations"), such that subsequent participation in ambitious initiatives (perhaps involving interdisciplinarity and/or knowledge exchange) might constitute a ripple effect of Scheme funding. Not surprisingly, fewest saw Instrumental Impacts, infamously difficult to identify and not an explicit aim of these short-duration grants.

Clearly, the Seminars were productive along a variety of axes. To provide a flavour of the scope and nature of the diversified portfolio of accomplishments achieved by the series, the Report captures by related objective clusters of outcomes cited as those of which PI respondents were particularly proud. To complement this big picture view, the Report provides four detailed Case Studies, each highlighting one type of impact, capturing others and illustrating key processes and lessons learned.

Key Findings: Lessons Learned/Insights and Further Development of the Scheme

The central message, from across respondents and interviewees, is that participants value the Scheme very highly, seeing it as an important component of the social and economic research portfolio of the UK. While perceived strengths and weaknesses/issues of the Scheme are captured, it must be said that the former are seen to outweigh the latter. Almost to a person, the Scheme is seen as providing value for money. With the possible exception of the AHRC Research Networking Scheme, the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme is highly distinctive in the UK and beyond, and even envied internationally. Messages received for developing and improving the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme include:

- Continue the Scheme, perhaps with more funding
- Direct funding to "new" dimensions
- Provide follow-on opportunities
- Improve dissemination about the Series and their accomplishments
- Make the Scheme as "light touch" as possible, in terms of applications, administration and reporting
- Ensure HEI support/recognition
- Be careful not to impose unrealistic demands for "impacts".

Conclusions and Recommendations

Continue the Scheme

This report's central recommendation to ESRC is to continue the Scheme. Evidence of return on investment aligns squarely with emphatic views as to the Scheme's value for money expressed by the full range of interviewees and survey respondents.

Value the Scheme's multiple roles

In weighing continuance and/or development of the Scheme, ESRC is encouraged to see the Scheme "in the round" by recognising its value from multiple angles, as it plays multiple roles:

- Pump-priming
- Catalysis of innovation
- Enhancement of impacts on the economy and society
- Diversification of the research portfolio
- Extending the reach of the ESRC
- Enabling intellectual growth.

Encourage innovation and risk-taking

The Scheme plays a distinctive role, quite possibly world-wide, in its facilitation of innovation through sustained dialogue and exploration. With any dynamic promoting innovation comes risk. Echoing what so many Scheme participants have said, a key recommendation here is to let people take risks, (within reason) allowing them to explore. As a small but important component of the ESRC research portfolio, this Scheme can then act as a low-cost, low-risk vehicle for testing new possibilities. In any event, even if a particular Seminar does not fully reach all its objectives, constructive processes take place.

Don't complicate the Scheme

The Scheme is seen as "doing what it says on the tin", providing a mechanism for the pursuit of new ideas to which applicants feel committed, allowing dialogue to continue and grow over multiple events which deliberately encourage interactive discussions. Indications are that the review process works fairly and effectively (although exacting a cost in staff and panel time), with sufficient information to work with in the applications as currently composed. The Scheme's relative simplicity is valued by most, although even so a few individuals complain of bureaucracy involved in applications or administration. Particularly given that successful PIs will be doing a great deal of work to bring their Series to life, they

should not be burdened unnecessarily by such demands. While ideally host research organisations would provide administrative support for implementation of seminars, in these days of full economic costing it may not be realistic to expect much more institutional help "for free". ESRC might arm new PIs with: a) guidance as to types of institutional help they might be able to secure, even informally (e.g. a secretary's help with travel arrangements) and/or b) a summary of the valuable sorts of outcomes to which such seminars can lead, helping institutions to visualise their own "self-interest" in making seminar awards successful. ESRC might consider providing slightly increased awards to allow PIs to more formally "buy" administrative help—but if and only if ESRC remained able to give (at least) the same number (or fund at least the same percentage of applications). When all is said and done, despite the hard work, PIs deeply appreciate their awards. Indeed, these awards are often so vibrant that they could add even more value as a learning opportunity for ESRC about dynamics of development of new ideas, fields, networks or other impacts. If *extremely* light touch and constructive, involvement of a case officer during rather than only after a subset of awards might allow for first-hand learning. Ideally, such a person might bring together a group of *willing* PIs to share with each other what works and what doesn't, helping each other as a special community of change agents and at the same time immersing the case officer in issues, dynamics and good practices.

Appreciate the good-will of participants toward the Scheme

Attitudes toward the Scheme are extremely positive and genuine gratitude toward the ESRC is often expressed. While this may be intangible, the good-will of so many members of its community should be valued by the ESRC.

Recognise and communicate the value for money represented by the Scheme

The Scheme represents a highly favourable proportionality of extensive and varied outputs to quite modest input. Internally, the ESRC may want to factor this, and the large number and spread of individuals reached by the Scheme, into its decision-making regarding funding mechanisms.

Externally, the ESRC may want to make more of a public show of this Scheme, explicitly celebrating its roles and accomplishments. In addition to inspiring proposal-writers and their home institutions, a higher visibility of Scheme grants and their achievements could serve ESRC and its community well, illustrating as it would the connectivity between ideas, research and the development of both academic and non-academic impacts. Ideally, current end-of-award reports could be "mined" by staff for website highlights. One possibility—without significantly adding to the reporting burden—would be to ask each awardholder to include a summary paragraph of highlighted tangible and intangible accomplishments that is explicitly written for public viewing, in such a way that it could be added to easily should the ESRC, still with a very light touch, wish to "check in" with awardholders every 3-5 years to update their paragraph on academic and non-academic impacts and accomplishments.

Conclusion

Taken together, even the goals for the Research Seminar Grants of any one year, let alone several years or indeed the life of the Scheme, convey a sense of the vitality and imagination of the UK's social and economic research scholars. The ways in which the Seminars have addressed objectives such as networking, stakeholder engagement and capacity-building, as well as challenges such as interdisciplinarity, demonstrate their ability to help realise the potential of ESRC research for impact. Diverse innovative achievements across areas and dimensions represent real return on investment. Finally, at a time when morale may be a real issue in its community, the ESRC's support of an intellectual grass-roots activity enabling creative exploration and stimulating dialogue may be very powerful indeed.

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW PROCESS

Overview

This evaluation has examined past performance of the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme in order to provide findings, lessons learned and recommendations pertinent to ESRC's planning for the future. The ESRC Research Seminars Scheme has as its central role the support of Research Seminar Groups, "multi-institutional groups of academic researchers, postgraduate students and non-academic users who meet regularly to exchange information and ideas with the aim of advancing research within their field."[1] The Scheme is a rich focus for examination, on several counts. It has been running since 1991; even "just" the most recent ten years for which ESRC has detailed materials available represents a relatively long run for a scheme, providing an opportunity to search for development of awards' outcomes and impacts over time. The number of awards (a total of 750, some forty or so per year, across disciplines and institutions) constitute a significant volume of effort. Importantly, the Scheme focuses on activity which lies at the heart of academic endeavour – sharing of ideas and questions. This pro-active convening role has brought various formats to bear on a range of different foci.

Perhaps one of the most interesting features of the Scheme is the diversity of Seminar Group objectives or goals which can fall under the "advancing research" umbrella; in different ways all of these objectives can be seen as relating to the dynamics of change in the social sciences and economics. Some objectives entail focus on quite a specific niche within a discipline, perhaps developing new ideas or even a node for a new sub-discipline, whereas other objectives may have much more to do with interdisciplinarity. Objectives may be firmly anchored within academia, or they may be explicitly related to (various) societal challenges, sometimes with a key emphasis on inclusion of non-academic stakeholders and multi-directional knowledge exchange. Another core objective is to simultaneously ground and stimulate junior researchers. And, in fact, Seminar Groups tend to have multiple objectives each. With its framing of this Scheme and criteria leading to the selection of ambitious projects, ESRC may be viewed as an agent for change.

Against the backdrop of this distinctive Scheme, the evaluation reported here has addressed a range of questions related to:

- Operation of the Scheme
- Impacts and Outcomes --- outcomes/outputs of particular grants and roles played by the Scheme
- Lessons learned, insights gathered and further development of the Scheme.

In short, this evaluation: 1) provides an analysis of past Scheme activity, and outcomes arising therefrom, and 2) draws upon this and thoughtful insights from numerous participants to draw conclusions and offer recommendations for the future.

Summary of review process

Conceptual Approach

Well aware of the challenges inherent in impact evaluation generally, our approach has been to remain "purposeful, pragmatic and cognisant of the complexities involved", as

[1] http://www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/funding-opportunities/3677/research-seminars.aspx The specifications for the current call (bids due November 2011) are provided: http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Research-Seminars-Call-Spec_tcm8-4041.pdf

recommended in ESRC's 2005 Symposium (Davies et al. 2005)[2]. As Nutley et al. (2007, pp.283-4)[3] observe, many -perhaps most- impacts will be subtle:

> "research can contribute not just to decisional choices, but also to the formulation of values, to the creation of new understandings and possibilities, and to the quality of public and professional discourse and debate. Capturing these subtle and diverse impacts poses considerable conceptual, methodological and practical challenges."

We expect heterogeneity when exploring academic and non-academic impacts and the processes generating them. This observation of heterogeneity has been echoed by a large-scale examination of knowledge exchange between academics and the business, public and third sectors (Abreu et al., 2009)[4], among others. With this Scheme's wide range of topics and participants, we sought out multiple perspectives and explored different types of impacts, in what was essentially a forward tracking approach, moving from the Seminars onward. We were thus alert to instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building impacts of Seminar Groups and also to two additional types of process-embodied early impacts found to be important in other studies (Meagher et al., 2008)[5]: enduring connectivity between researchers and research users and attitudinal/cultural change regarding collaborations.

The evaluation was grounded in a conceptual model which considers impact of research (including these Seminars) to be complex, involving multidirectional flows of knowledge, expertise and influence across developing networks and relationships –as illustrated in the ESRC's Conceptual Framework for Impact Evaluation (ESRC 2011)[6] and also drawing upon our own flows of knowledge conceptual model (Meagher et al. 2008). We have been particularly alert to emphases we have offered in our own work elsewhere, including: interdisciplinarity, the role of knowledge intermediaries (e.g. PIs of many Series), and the processes/roles and mechanisms through which impacts and outcomes are generated over time. Finally, this evaluation has been guided by a deep commitment that evaluations should be useful, so that robust integrative analyses lead to helpful concluding recommendations.

Overview of Methods

This was a multi-method evaluation, with a Framework of Core Questions (Annex A) acting as the common spine for all the methods, ensuring coverage of the Brief's questions and a few additional questions, triangulating across findings, and facilitating the development of the integrative analysis. The evaluation gathered multiple perspectives (e.g. ESRC staff, Research Committee and selection panel members; grant holders; junior researchers, colleagues and stakeholders). In general, document analysis provided baseline data, e.g. as to types/distribution of awards; questionnaires provided quantifiable and/or aggregatable information on experiences, views, outputs and impacts so that patterns could be seen; and semi-structured interviews made it possible to dig deeper, encouraging interviewees to reflect thoughtfully on subtleties of questions. Case studies provide grounded illustrations of impacts, objectives met and processes employed.

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[2] Davies, HTO., Nutley, SM. and Walter, I (2005), *Approaches to assessing the non-academic impact of social science research* (Report of ESRC Symposium, on assessing the non-academic impact of research, 12-13 May 2005, Research Unit for Research Utilisation, University of St Andrews).

[3] Nutley, S., Walter, I. and Davies, H. (2007), *Using Evidence. How Research can Inform Public Services* (Policy Press, Bristol).

[4] Abreu, M., Grinevich, V., Hughes, A. and Kitson, M. (2009), *Knowledge Exchange between Academics and the Business, Public and Third Sectors*, Centre for Business Research, University of Cambridge, Cambridge. www.cbr.cam.ac.uk/pdf/AcademicSurveyReport.pdf (accessed 30 March 2011)

[5] Meagher, L.M., Lyall, C. and Nutley, S. (2008), Flows of knowledge, expertise and influence: a method for assessing policy and practice impacts from social science research. *Research Evaluation* Volume 17, Number 3, September 2008, pages163-173

[6] ESRC (2011b), *Branching Out: New Directions in Impact Evaluation* from the ESRC's Evaluation Committee http://www.esrc.ac.uk/_images/Branching%20Out_tcm8-14881.pdf (accessed 2 Sept 2011)

Document Analysis

Materials associated with the conduct of the Scheme, primarily those related with commissioning panel meetings and decisions, were reviewed. The ESRC also provided further papers related to a selected sample of awards, distributed across disciplines, institutions and years; these gave a more well-rounded understanding of individual awards and were in some cases used for case study development. Website information was also utilised, as in examining websites of some awards and approaches of some other schemes. In addition, the ESRC sent a commendably up-to-date database of awardees over the years of the Scheme. This made possible various analyses, such as distribution of awards across disciplines and across institutions.

Semi-structured Interviews

Inception interviews were held at ESRC with three staff members having different perspectives over the Scheme and four telephone interviews were conducted with individuals having overview perspectives, particularly of the Scheme's selection process. Twenty-three PI interviews were conducted, from two subsets: a set selected from the database as a distribution across disciplines/institutions/years and a set selected from survey respondents who demonstrated reflection in free text, while also representing diversity in disciplines, institutions and years. An additional eight non-PI interviews were conducted to flesh out case studies. Interview responses were coded and analysed in detail. (Annex B provides interview templates.)

Survey

An online survey for Principal Investigators (PIs)was designed based upon the Core Questions Framework. Invitations to respond were sent out by Survey Monkey to 581 individuals.[7] 265 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 45.6%. Particularly given the distant time of many of the projects (with the Scheme beginning in 1991/92) and the modest size of the grants, this level of response was far better than might have been anticipated and might in itself indicate quite a positive commitment to the Scheme. In this report the term "respondents" refers to those completing this survey. (Responses are provided as Annex C.)

In addition, ninety individuals were invited to a supplementary survey, the same as the original but intended for co-Investigators, academic colleagues, junior researchers and non-academic stakeholders.[8] 45 responses were received, for a response rate of 50%, similar to that of the PI's. Of these respondents, 6 designated themselves as non-academic stakeholders and 12 as junior/early career researchers, thus some 60% of the responses were from co-PIs (48%) or other academic colleagues. Analyses presented in this Report are based on the PI/awardholder survey described above, as the responses to this smaller supplementary survey were reviewed for meaningful departures from the main PI survey, but few if any were found, other than some slightly more positive views among supplemental respondents toward achievement of the new field objective, benefit to personal careers and development of cultural/attitudinal change.[9] (Responses are provided as Annex D.)

In terms of distribution of responses across years, just over two thirds of the PIs surveyed (69.2%) came from Seminar Series starting in 2004 or later. (Indeed 42.9% were from series starting in 2008 or later). However 17% were from series starting in 2000-2003, and even

[7] (This number is lower than that of the listed PIs in the full database provided by ESRC for several reasons: 1) individuals who had more than one award were sent only one survey invitation; 2) Survey Monkey screened out individuals who had previously asked not to be included in Survey Monkey surveys; 3) some email addresses were incorrect or no longer live, or not provided by ESRC.) With an encouraging cover letter from ESRC, the survey was sent out with a deadline of 6 June on 22 May 2011; reminders sent out on 1 June; after reminders, the survey was closed on 14 June.

[8] (Contact details and names were provided by PIs in their surveys.)

[9] Free-text comments from junior/early career researchers and/or stakeholders have been used occasionally (and so identified) to round out report discussions, as for example views of the Scheme's strengths and outcomes.

earlier series had some representation (7.3% from series starting in 1996-1999 and 6.6% from series starting in 1992-1995). The supplemental survey respondents were almost exclusively from more recent series, with 95% in series starting in 2004 or later.

Case Studies

Four awards were selected purposively for Case Studies, as appearing successful in some way, so that their descriptions can illuminate good practice and/or important considerations. As a set the awards illustrate different emphases on different objectives and different sorts of outcomes or impacts. The case studies have been structured consistently to enable key characteristics to be readily seen and compared.

In addition, to illustrate the highly diversified nature of the portfolio from which the case studies have been taken, a sheaf of outputs in the form of non-attributed examples was clustered from survey free text responses: networking, capacity-building, interdisciplinarity, stakeholder engagement, international dimension, publications and impacts.

Finally, short vignettes are provided to illustrate outcomes pertaining to some objectives.

Integrative Analysis

Integrated analysis used the Framework of Core Questions to draw together the various strands of evidence arising from the different methods and ensure coverage of key issues.

OPERATIONS

Applications and distribution

Individuals with an overview of the Scheme and/or experience in evaluating applications were asked to provide input into consideration of applications, their quality and distribution. Document analysis provided a factual basis as to distribution across research areas and organisations. Those with experience in evaluating applications for this distinctive Scheme point out that in some ways it is difficult to compare their quality with more conventional applications, as the Scheme's bids often require "a great deal of additional thoughtfulness". There is a sense of a spectrum of quality existing in applications, such that there is definitely a tail of bids that may be sloppily put together, not paying attention to the criteria or seeming to rest upon a sense of entitlement. However, there are clearly applications at the top end, such that "at the good end, yes, it is as good as other schemes". Some found the best applications stimulating to review: "I was very impressed by some that jump out at you, making you think 'why didn't I think of that?—there is a connection that could be interesting'".

The success rate for the Research Seminars is 28%, higher than that for Standard Grants (14%) or Small Grants (19%)—according to ESRC's figures for 2009-2010. This higher success rate appears to be connected to both the high volume of applications (146 applications in 2009-2010, for 41 awards) and the very modest size of the Seminars grants, at a maximum of £15K, or £18K with an international dimension. Despite the relatively high success rate, there are indications that even more proposals might well have been approved on the basis of quality and match with the Scheme's criteria, had more money been available. Minutes of one commissioning panel noted this explicitly ("The Panel noted that if the budget were larger, more applications could be funded. Applications were not just rejected on scientific excellence but also due to budget constraints, which can be frustrating.") Similarly underscoring the large pool of quality proposals, in other years quite often formal notes of panel deliberations over non-recommended projects in the lower end of the alpha/higher scores (calculated somewhat differently in different years) would use language such as ""the application was one the Panel wished to support in principle, but for which funds were not available" or "the Panel consider this highly worthy of funding, and in the marginal category where funds might be awarded". (Not all projects in this grey range received positive judgements and of course many projects did not achieve alpha scores and would have been rejected outright even had more funding been available.)

Those with an overview of the review process felt confident in its validity. "We could identify quite quickly a small number of outstanding applications." This was doubtless aided by the clarity of the criteria, explicitly posted. "In the panel discussions (we were) driven by criteria—that's the only fair way you can do it, particularly when you get down to the line drawing yes or no. In fact they help people write good bids". There is a sense that people on the commissioning panels do the best they can in thrashing out issues, such as those related to challenges of reviewing interdisciplinarity, for example. These interviewees, involved in fairly recent years' evaluation processes, did not evidence current concern over the issue of renewals.

Only 18% of Seminar grant recipients received more than one award:

#Grants	**#PIs**
1	616
2	46
3	11
4	1
5	1
	T=750

When the 13 recipients of 3 or more grants are examined closely, the 5 awards to one person were sequential renewals; the person receiving 4 awards had two sets of renewed grants separated in time, though with the same title; and of the eleven people receiving 3 awards: five had sequentially renewed awards, one had just a very slight gap in nearly sequential awards, two had one renewed grant and another separated by a gap, and three had quite differently titled seminars in non-sequential years. Interestingly, there has been a noticeable decline over time in the number of renewals. Looking just at renewals among those receiving 3 or more awards, all but three of the thirteen began during the 1990s.

#Grants/PI	**Renewal** (Sequential awards with same title)	**Start Years**
5 (one PI)	5 seq yrs	92-9
4 (one PI)	2X2seq yrs	94-96, 01-03
3 (eleven PIs)	3 seq. yrs	93-98, 94-98, 95-99, 96-00, 00-05
	2 seq yrs	93+96-98, 97-00+05, 03-06+10
Note: 3 had three separate grants		

It should perhaps be noted that continuity is not always viewed as a bad thing. For example, one respondent reflected on a longer history than a particular grant from the Seminar Series: "If I am being approached for having run 10 years of seminars … we ran for 10 years from 1980s to 1990s and had several ESRC seminar grants - then I would say we shifted the ground in many ways, including at a policy level". Similarly, another PI took the trouble to write a narrative describing a long history of building a field over multiple years of seminars (even before this Scheme began).

ESRC's administration of applications was seen to have worked very well, so that the process was well organised and "felt smooth". One experienced interviewee commented: "I have a lot of admiration for the office staff. I think they did a tremendous job. Things were processed in good time; we had enough time to do our job." More high praise was voiced by another: "The ESRC has struggled valiantly to be open, fair, transparent, honourable and maintain academic rigor". The processing by staff prior to the meeting of commissioning panels does take a fair bit of effort, often in a short time frame, for example setting up the panel itself, ideally including some with experience of the panel and/or Seminar awards and a spread across disciplines and sub-disciplines; obtaining assessments and summarising numerical scores prior to the meeting; highlighting issues and providing paperwork to panel members.

Distribution across the social science portfolio

As indicated in the Vital Statistics for Research in ESRC's *2009-2010 Annual Report*, Seminar Grant applications were received from across the social science portfolio in (at least) years 05/06-09/10. Input of awards into the social science portfolio was examined by analysing by discipline the Seminars award database provided by ESRC.[10] Clearly, some disciplines in the social science portfolio were far more frequently represented than others, with Education and Sociology most frequent, followed closely by Economics and then Political Science & International Studies/Relations.[11]

Distribution of Disciplines, Seminar Series Scheme

0-10 (seven)	**11-25** (six)	**26-50** (two)	**51-75** (three)	**76-100** (two)	**101+** (two)

[10] Multiple projects, or renewed projects, for one PI were counted separately as they were individual projects; however multiple listings due to one PI having moved institutions were counted as only the one project, making a total of 750 --- for both the analyses of Disciplines and of Research Organisations.

[11] When disciplinary distribution is looked at in the survey, Education, Sociology and Political Science & International Relations were still among the four most frequently claimed disciplinary affiliations, but Management & Business Studies "rose" to second most frequent and Economics "fell" to 8th place. This minor difference in proportion of disciplinary affiliation may be due at least in part to timing, as more of the respondents were from relatively recent projects whereas the database covered all years of the Scheme. (Human Geography, Psychology and Social Policy remained as "middling" frequent.)

Area Studies	Econ & Soc His	Psychology (42)	Mgmt & Bus Studies (69)	Economics (96)	Education (103)
Demography	Environment	Soc Legal Studies (30)	Human Geography (52)	Political Sci & Int'l Relations (76)	Sociology (106)
Medical Sciences	Interdisc Studies		Social Policy (57)		
Sci & Tech Studies	Linguistics				
Soc Anth	Stat,Comp, Method				
Soc Work	No Lead Disc				
Arts & Hum					

It may be of interest to consider the distribution of Seminar Grants compared to the distribution of Small and Standard Grants. As an illustration of "baseline" disciplinary distribution, ESRC's Annual Report 2009-2010 indicated the following subject areas as most frequently winning either Small/Standard grants, shown here in comparison with 1) the Seminar Grants for the same year and 2) the Seminar Grants awarded throughout all the years of the Scheme. Several areas are relatively well-represented in both the Standard/Small Grants, and the Seminar Series "top" listings (Economics, Sociology, Political Science and International Relations/Studies). There is some commonality also in that two more of the top 7 Seminar Series areas (Human Geography, Management and Business Studies) are also represented in the top list for Standard & Small Grants.

However, divergences are also interesting. In particular, Psychology —perhaps indeed because it receives such a high percentage of Standard/Small Grants (28.9%) -- receives only about 5% of the Seminar Series Grants. On the other hand, the two areas of Education (receiving about as many Seminar Series Grants as Sociology) and Social Policy (receiving slightly more Seminar Series Grants than Human Geography) are recipients of a distinctly lower percentage of Standard/Small Grants. It is also interesting to note that over a fifth of the 2009-2010 Seminar Series Grants are listed as "No Lead Discipline", perhaps reflecting a trend toward interdisciplinarity. Overview interviewees experienced in evaluation of Seminar Grant applications commented on some slight surprises, such as perhaps more Scheme awards in education or socio-legal areas and fewer awards in psychology than might have been expected --- but did not feel that differential uptake by disciplines was a matter of concern, that there is still "a good spread". A suggestion was made that perhaps researchers in areas which aim more for outputs such as books and chapters developing ideas and issues might be more likely to be involved in this particular deliberative scheme than, say, researchers in psychology aiming to publish articles on detailed analyses.

Comparison of Most Frequently Funded Areas

Subject Area	**09-10 Small & Std % of 218 Total Awards**	**09-10 Series % of 41 Total Awards**	**Pan-Scheme Series % of 750 Total Awards**
Psychology	28.9%		5.6%
Economics	11.9%		Also in top 4, Series awards 12.8%
Sociology	7.8%	2.4%	Also in top 4, Series awards 14.1%
Political Science and International Relations/Studies	6.4%	17.1%	Also in top 4, Series awards 10.1%
Management and Business Studies	5.9%	9.8	In top 7, Series awards 9.2%
Human Geography	5.0%	2.4%	In top 7, Series awards 6.9%
Linguistics	4.6%	4.9	1.7%

Economic and Social History	4.6%	4.9	2%
Education	4.1%	19.5	In top 4, Series awards 13.7%
Social Policy (not one of top-funded disciplines in Small & Std Awards, but one of top 7 Seminar Series disciplines)	2.8%	2.4%	In top 7, Series awards 7.6%
Total % of all Grants awarded in category	82%	63.4%	83.7%
Note: in this recent year, a high number (9) (or 21.9%) of Series grants were "No Lead Discipline"			

Distribution of Grants across Research Organisations

The award database provided by ESRC was analysed by distribution across research organisations.

Distribution Across Research Organisations: Research Seminar Scheme (Highest Numbers)

6-10 (twentysix)	**11-15** (ten)	**16-20** (eight)	**21-25** (two)	**26-30** (three)	**31-35** (none)	**36-40** (one)
Aberdeen	City U	Cardiff (18)	Edinburgh (24)	Birmingham (27)		Warwick (36)
Aston	Inst Ed	Keele (18)	Leeds (21)	London School Econ & Pol Sci (29)		
Bath	Kings College	Lancaster (16)		Manchester (29)		
Bradford	Loughborough	Leicester (17)				
Bristol	Newcastle	Univ Coll London (16)				
Brunel	Nottingham	Open U (17)				
Cambridge	Salford	Oxford & Colleges (19)				
East Anglia	Stirling	Sheffield (16)				
Essex	Surrey					
Exeter	West of England					
Glasgow	Bristol					
Inst Fiscal Studies						
Kent						
Liverpool						
Birkbeck						
Goldsmiths						
Manchester Metrop						
Middlesex						
Northumbria						
Oxford Brookes						
Queen Mary U London						
Queen's U Belfast						
Reading						
Strathclyde						
Sussex						
York						

Note: The full long "tail" of this distribution is not shown here. Out of the total of 125 research organisations (some are centres, institutes listed separately in the database provided), an additional 33 received just 2-5 grants and 42 received only one.

One way of thinking about the distribution shown among Seminar Series grants relative to the spread of expertise is to consider institutions also receiving high numbers of Seminar

Series Grants (in 2009 and over the Scheme) in the context of the distribution of more "conventional" response-mode grants awarded by ESRC. Certainly, in terms of a "quality check", just as the top institutions in terms of numbers of Standard/Small Grants include seven of the ten top institutions by ESRC Research Expenditure that year (ESRC Annual Report 2009-2010), so too do the top institutions in terms of high numbers of Seminars Grants. A thought-provoking difference is that the 2009-2010 Standard/Small Grants appear notably more concentrated than the Seminar Grants. The set of 17 institutions receiving 5 or more Standard/Small Grants represents 55% of the total, whereas that same set of institutions represents just under 30% of the overall Seminars Scheme (34% of the 2009-2010 Seminars grants). This picture reinforces the chart above, which *clearly indicates the Seminar Scheme's extended reach across institutions*. As one experienced overview interviewee observed, "There is a reasonable spread across HEIs – and, since applications usually involved several institutions, there is (even) more of a spread due to that".

Even when the additional 5 institutions receiving over 15 Seminar Grants are added into the picture, all the institutions receiving 15 or more Seminars Grants still comprise just under 42% of all the Scheme's Grants. Interestingly, when all these institutions are taken into account, they represent over half (53.6%) of the 2009-2010 Seminars Grants, closer to the percentage (58.8%) of the 2009-2010 Standard/Small Grants. This one (recent) year's sample might be suggestive of a tendency toward concentration of grants but cannot alone be interpreted as such a trend.

Comparison of most frequently funded institutions

Institution	**Top Institutions in terms of Numbers of Standard & Small Grants (5 or more) 2009-2010** % total awards (218)	**High numbers of SSG 2009-2010** % total awards (41)	**High numbers of Seminars Scheme overall (receiving over 15 grants)** % total awards (750)
Birmingham	3.7%	2.4%	
Manchester*	5.0%	4.9%	3.9%
Edinburgh*	4.6 %	4.9%	3.2%
Essex*	4.6%	7.3%	3.6%
Univ College London*	4.6%		2.1%
Oxford & Colleges*	3.7%		2.5%
Bristol	3.2%		
Exeter	3.2%	4.9%	
Sussex	3.2%		
Nottingham	3.2%		0.04%
London School of Econ & Political Science*	2.3%		3.9%
Plymouth	2.3%	2.4%	1.3%
Cardiff*	2.3%		2.4%
Warwick	2.3%	7.3%	4.8%
York	2.3%		
Lancaster	2.3%		2.1%
Glasgow	2.3%		
	55.1% of 09-10 Std/Small Grants	**34.1% of 09-10 Seminars Grants**	**29.8% of Seminars Grants**
			Additional Institutions w/ >15 Seminars Grants
Leeds 1/218	0.04%	4.9%	2.8%
Keele			2.4%
Leicester 1/218	0.04%	7.3%	2.3%
Open U 4/218	1.8%	2.4%	2.3%
Sheffield 4/218	1.8%	4.9%	2.1%
	Additional T = 3.7% 09-10 Std/Small Grants --- **58.8% of 09-10 Std/Small Grants**	Additional T = 19.5% 09-10 Seminars Grants --- **53.6% of 09-10 Seminars Grants**	Additional T = 11.9% Seminars Grants --- **41.7% of Seminars Grants**
Note: Asterisks indicate 7 institutions listed in ESRC's 2009 Annual Report as among the "top 10 institutions by research expenditure" representing 45% of the overall total			

Operational Factors

Support from Research Organisations

By far the majority of survey respondents (89.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that *the host university or research organisation provided sufficient support for the management of the Seminar Grant*. Almost 10% (9.2%) were Neutral, with just four respondents (1.5%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Three-quarters of PIs said with varying degrees of enthusiasm that institutional support was sufficient, and just a few firmly disagreed. On the positive side, space, administrative help, budget costings/updates and/or bookkeeping help were cited. However, it should be noted that many who said support was sufficient nonetheless went on to describe how they had to personally manage the administration, sometimes piecing it together with support from someone paid by another source but often simply doing the legwork themselves. Many mentioned the extensive time and effort taken to run the series, especially those who –even beyond conceptualising, selecting speakers and coordinating events –ended up personally managing small travel reimbursements invoices, ordering food, booking venues and so on. A suggestion for ESRC was that it ask bidders to describe what sorts of in-kind support would be available from the host organisation and then empower PIs to insist on that support. Figuring out financial arrangements ahead of time could be especially helpful when multiple institutions/locations are to be involved. In terms of receiving institutional help with publicity, the point was made that, by virtue of the fact that many of these awards are devoted to emerging or non-traditional areas, they are unlikely to be aligned with institutional priorities.

Formats

A third of survey respondents (32.4%) selected "several half-day events" as the list entry closest to the format of their grant, and a quarter (26%) selected "one or two all-day workshops" but just over a third (36.6%) selected "Other". Since two thirds of interviewees held 4, 5 or 6 all-day or longer events, many survey respondents selecting "Other" may have done so because they too held *several* all-day events (more than the "one or two" option listed). In discussing the format, many interviewees went into some detail about the care they had taken to make the events achieve objectives. Many cited particular tactics involved in careful matching of format with the aim for their series and its various events. (Annex E) Perhaps more important than any one particular format was the devotion of significant effort to ensuring that discussion took place, and that events brought together individuals with diverse perspectives. Interview reflections and free-text survey comments often highlighted the distinctive advantage conferred by the Scheme's support of continuing dialogue over multiple events rather than only one event.

Administration, reporting and review arrangements

Not surprisingly, when survey respondents were provided with the statement "ESRC should require more extensive reporting from Research Seminar grant-holders and develop more extensive end-of-grant reviewing to gather insights and impacts", more than half (53%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. Nearly a third (30%) were neutral, and just under 18% agreed or strongly agreed. The light touch nature of required reporting was certainly appreciated by interviewees, and seen by many as at the right level, although some complained about bureaucratic load. Report formatting was sometimes raised as an issue—either in being so open that the writer had to decide for him or herself what to write, or in being so structured as to leave no room for lessons learned or intangible achievements. Given that these series often break boundaries so that some outcomes may be intangible, one person emphasised the need for guidance so that both tangible and intangible achievements could "count" toward the value for money returned by a series.

In interviews, surprise tinged with regret was frequently expressed over the absence of any feedback from ESRC following submission of reports (the "resounding silence").

> "There was no feedback at the end of award report, which kind of disappointed me. We felt what we did was pretty impressive, thought it was really value for money and hoped to get

> some outstanding feedback—(but) got none. ….About six pages would take someone thirty minutes to read and give a paragraph of comments."

At least one PI would have appreciated some helpful discussion as to how the new theme might fit into ESRC's interests in the future.

Two "losses" for the wider community were pointed out as stemming from the lack of review:

1) inability to pass down insights gained ("Surely the idea of this report is (or should be) so that people in the future can learn")
2) absence of helpful examples as "lovely success stories" for ESRC to cite.

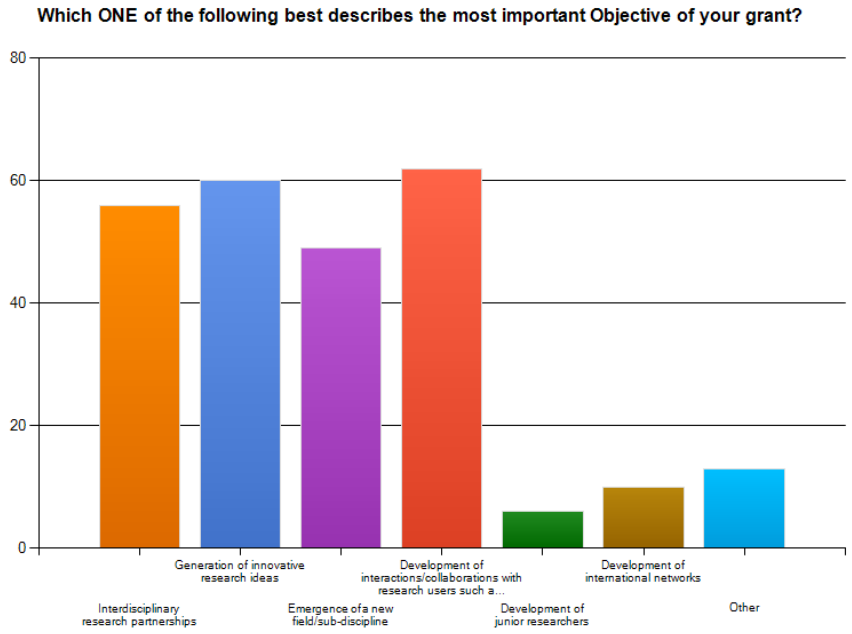
Overview interviewees certainly expressed a desire for visibility of outputs. Yet at the same time, they (like some PI interviewees) were cautious as to balancing this value with the cost of burdens on not only PIs but also ESRC staff and external assessors.

An intensive examination of the "historical legacy" of the Scheme was sometimes articulated as desirable, rather than imposing additional reporting requirements for modest grants. In part, such an approach (unlike tick box reporting) could help to identify long-term impacts of the Seminars, "like planting a little thing and seeing what happens … you may not see for some time". Several interviewees discussed the thorny issue of timing of outcomes or impacts, which can have "a weird temporality" such that "long-term good hasn't yet begun to be cashed in" when a report is submitted. In similar vein, another interviewee suggested bringing PIs from this and other schemes together to reflect and capture stories of outcomes and impacts. Probably none of the overview interviewees would disagree with the one who said "We don't realise the potential role of the Seminar groups' contribution. We should celebrate, build on and learn from them. Maybe this evaluation can help."

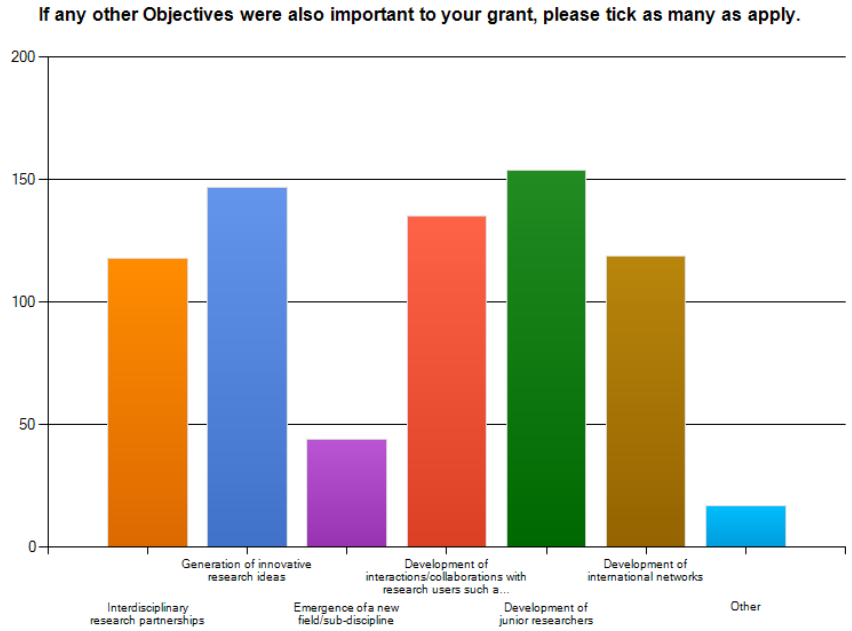
IMPACTS AND OUTCOMES

Stated Objectives

The Scheme does appear to *attract, support and facilitate new research groups or networks*. Almost all (95.1%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "the individuals brought together by the Research Seminar Grant would not have come together without the Research Seminar activity – the grant enabled a new group or network". Furthermore, the Seminar activity appears to have had a lasting effect on interactions…nearly all (95.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that some of the individuals brought together by the grants stayed in contact past the grant. More specifically, respondents were asked to choose from a list which **one** objective best described their own grant's most important objective:



Then, respondents were allowed to tick any additional applicable objectives:



Readiness to identify additional objectives conveyed *the multi-dimensionality of nearly all the grants* (just 3 fewer responded to this question than responded to the preceding question). If percentages from the two questions are added to gain a sense of relative "standing" of the different objectives, the ones cited most often are Generation of innovative research ideas and Development of interactions with research users, though about two-thirds also cited Interdisciplinarity and Capacity-building.

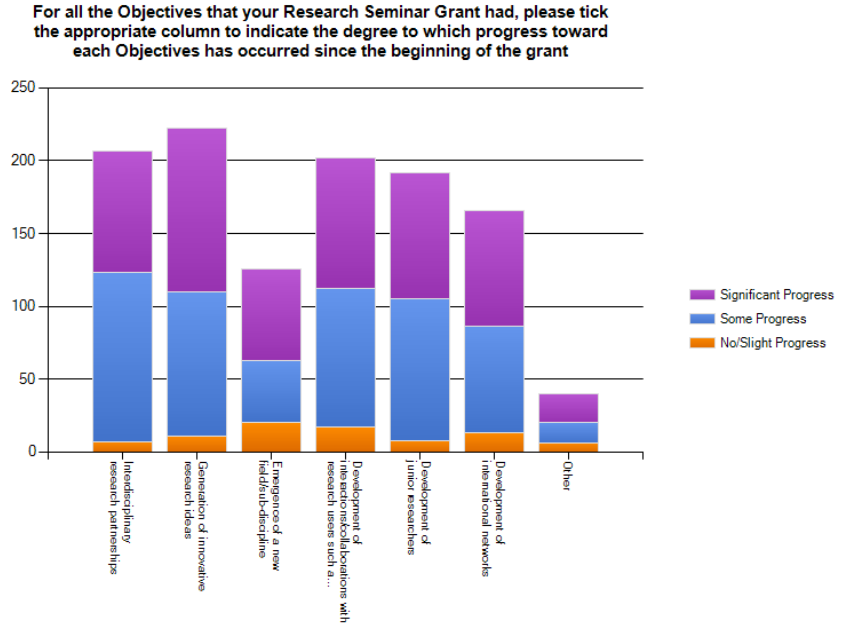
Relative commitment to different objectives

Generation of innovative research ideas	81.5%
Development of interactions /collaborations with research users such as policymakers or practitioners	77.6%
Interdisciplinary research partnerships	68.5%
Development of junior researchers	63.2%
Development of international networks	50.9%
Emergence of a new field/sub-discipline	36.5%

Interviewees also described multiple objectives. When asked if goals had changed, interviewees conveyed instead a sense of continuity between objectives stated in their proposals and objectives addressed throughout their projects, although naturally some projects evolved. This continuity may have been due in part to the finite duration of the awards but, importantly, *PIs undeniably conveyed a strong sense of personal commitment to their original objectives*.

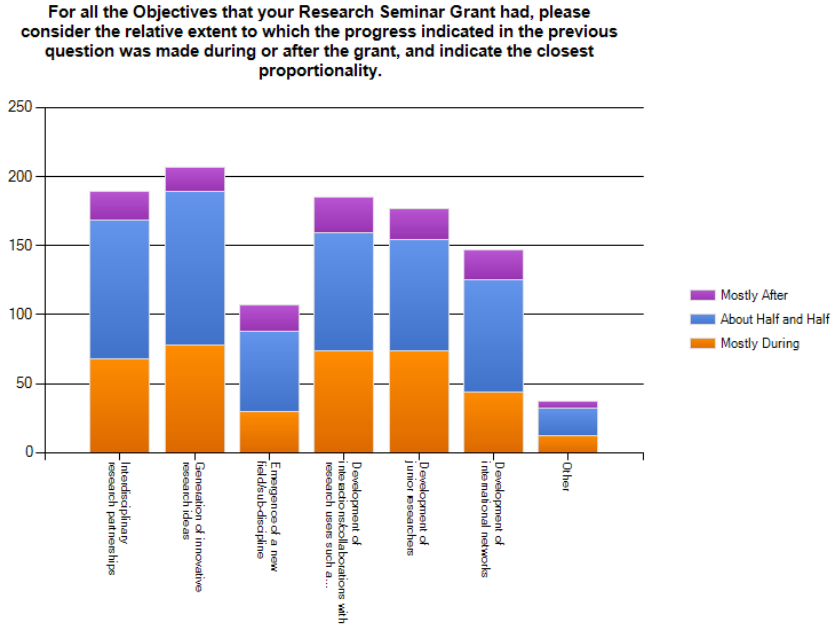
Emergence of outcomes over time

The development over time of outcomes related to the various objectives was explored through two survey questions. *For all objectives, most respondents saw either some or significant progress as having been made*. Indeed, over 90% of respondents saw either some or significant progress, with most split fairly evenly between these two levels of progress for all of the objectives other than the challenging "Emergence of a new field/sub-discipline", and even that was ranked by over half (50.5%) as having made significant progress and by a third (34.1%) as having made some progress (34.1%).



Digging more deeply into dynamics of outcome development, respondents were asked about the relative extent to which the progress they had just indicated was made mostly during the grant, mostly after the grant, or split about evenly between the two. Roughly half (ranging

from 45.2% to 55.1%) saw progress as split about equally between during and after the grant, for all objectives. Of the remaining respondents, most saw progress as having been made mostly during the grant. The highest percentages seeing progress as occurring mostly after the grant were related to Emergence of a new field/sub-discipline (17.8%) and Development of international networks (15.0%).



Interviewees sometimes discussed timing of impacts. One experienced PI from a research centre that habitually works in partnership with practitioners, charities and local authorities, so that knowledge exchange is "kind of a natural habitat", observed: "So much impact has to do with personal relationships and networks, they often don't happen when expected to; they lie dormant and then come back to life later".

Addressing Objectives

Ways in which Series addressed objectives follows are discussed here, illustrated by brief "vignettes".

<u>Scheme's production of innovative new research ideas and research areas</u>

Vignettes:

Based around a new area of research, humanitarian aid, a PI and colleagues have created a new Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute (http://www.hcri.ac.uk/) at the University of Manchester involving seven disciplines (some as disparate as drama and emergency medicine along with other social sciences and humanities); the seminar helped give them a high profile as they did so ---very timely as there are now about twenty centres around the world. There is a new association ELRHA (www.elrha.org) for this type of studies, even though it is not yet fully recognised as an academic field. "It is quite interesting to watch a field emerge; there is a coagulation point where things just happen… A couple of years ago things were fluid. Now, networks are coagulating and consolidating around the world. Things are happening at the UN and at an academic level. It is a fascinating moment historically, the creation of a field between 2005, really 2009 and 2011….it happens very quickly!" It would seem that the seminar series came at a crucial time, and helped position British researchers in this new arena. "Humanitarian Relief and Conflict Response in Interdisciplinary and Applied Perspectives" Professor Bertrand Taithe, University of Manchester ("No Lead Discipline") 2009-2011
One Seminar helped to refine and circulate the emerging concept of 'body work', which the PI and a co-organiser (Professor Julia Twigg, University of Kent) had been developing in parallel. In 2011, some of the Seminar papers were included in a special issue and monograph of *Sociology of Health*

and Illness; this led to a conference organised by the British Sociological Association's Ageing, Body and Society Study Group. In addition, two Seminar organisers and two participants organised a stream at the Annual International Labour Process Conference in spring 2011 and have responded to an invitation to submit a proposal for an edited book with 17 contributors. "Rather than body work research being associated only with single authors, it is now 'owned' by a growing community of scholars with shared interests."
"Body Work: Critical Themes, Future Agendas"
Dr Carol Wolkowitz, University of Warwick 2007-2009

The Research Seminar Series grants definitely generated new research ideas and even new research areas or sub-disciplines. Of those 81.5% of the respondents citing innovative research ideas as an objective, 95.1% claimed either some or significant progress. Regarding the emergence of a new field or sub-discipline, a far more modest number claimed this as an objective (only just over a third of the respondents, 36.5%); unsurprisingly achievement of this more ambitious change was a bit lower; 84.1% claimed some or significant progress. This still represents a substantial number of PIs, particularly impressive given the higher order of challenge involved in helping a new field to coalesce. (Interestingly, a higher percentage of respondents to the supplemental survey (62.1%) saw this as an objective, with 100% seeing progress having been made.)

Interviewees too described emergence of new ideas and areas made possible by ESRC. Some respondents cited related achievements as outcomes of which they were particularly proud. (See Impacts/outcomes Section) Several emphasised the series' role in "bringing together key ideas and people to develop a new field" or contributing to "creation of significant new academic sub-community" or "the emergence of a new field and the energy of new researchers in its pursuit". Many of the series went on to consolidate the emergence of new research ideas or areas through the conventional currency of publications, often described with phrases like "definitive text" or "field-shaping". Sometimes too series' publications provided opportunities for young researchers to position themselves. Other follow-on activities, such as collaborative proposal development or even running/inspiring subsequent seminar series or other dialogues, have helped to consolidate new ideas and areas as their development takes place over time. A seminar series can take place at a key inflection point. One PI spoke of being

> "conscious of bringing people together, capturing a new set of voices working in what was essentially an emerging field … we were conscious that there were a number of people working academically on this area (in different disciplines). So it was more a re-emergence, a consolidation of a massive widening out of what used to be a very esoteric field that very few people worked on. So, it was an emerging area in that sense."

Not all strategies were to generate new fields; some PIs simply wanted to ensure that particular emerging issues or ideas were given consideration by a variety of researchers. One spoke of "shining a new theoretical lens" on target issues. One used the seminar series to bring people from different disciplines together around a new concept; the series consolidated acceptance of this concept sufficiently that it has been approved as a conference track at a key annual European conference. One conceived the series around a debate, with the aim of creating an interdisciplinary network to examine a broad, diverse research approach and "try to find some common ground both methodologically and theoretically". One interviewee said the objective was not to create a new sub-discipline area but rather to "seed" certain issues across disciplines, using the seminar series to "scope opportunities and create a body of people invested in them". Even though the series successfully led to the launch of a working group at a learned society, this PI suggested that the early interest and uptake catalysed may yet take five to ten years for full impact.

<u>Scheme's impact on developing collaboration between Research Organisation-based researchers and research users such as policymakers and practitioners</u>

Vignettes

A PI respondent illustrated how research can benefit from collaboration: "We grappled with the

conceptual as well as practical meaning of access for people with learning disabilities. We did this in an inclusive way with people with learning disabilities, practitioners and academics and the reciprocal learning was more than we had hoped for - this pushed forward inclusive analysis of data and ideas into new territory". The PI has subsequently secured an ESRC grant developing understanding of inclusive research *("*Developing Quality and Capacity in Inclusive Research with People with Learning Disabilities").
"Concepts of Access for People with Learning Disabilities: Towards a Shared Understanding"
Professsor M.A.E. Nind, University of Southampton 2005-2007

The timely topic of a series, along with deliberate efforts to include non-academics, led to good links with what was then the Equal Opportunities Commission (now the Equality and Human Rights Commission), then to a piece of research done for the Commission on flexible work and older workers, then to work by the PI and seminar-organising team for the Department of Works and Pensions that informed policy on Extending Working Life and was part of a series of work referred to by the DWP in other publications. The PI's connections with stakeholders continue, for example she now does some work with The Age Employment Network (TAEN), a member of which had written a foreword for a book arising from the Seminar Series, *The Future for Older Workers: New Perspectives* (Policy Press, 2007).
"The Employability of Older Workers"
Professor Sarah Vickerstaff, University of Kent 2004-2006

Over three quarters (77.6%) of the survey respondents cited interaction or collaboration with non-academics as an objective; when asked, 91.6% indicated that either some or significant progress had occurred toward that objective. In other words, *nearly three-quarters (approximately 71%) of the Seminar Series appearing in this survey advanced collaborations between researchers and research users*.

Non-academic participants ranged from policymakers at various levels, to practitioners of various sorts, to community members, beneficiaries, third sector and the private sector. Many respondents described outcomes of which they were particularly proud (See Impacts/outcomes Section). Many interviewees as well as respondents described successful engagement of prospective research users, often making a point of involving them actively as speakers, chairs or discussants, or even co-planners and/or contributors to subsequent publications. Interactions during seminars were seen as important in themselves. The interdisciplinary tone of many series meant that prospective users engaged with diverse disciplines, in many cases an unusual experience for them. The seminars often involved not only different disciplines but also different non-academic roles, affording them all a rare opportunity to explore issues together and sometimes "empowering" some stakeholders such as community-based practitioners to interact with others, such as policymakers.

PIs of Seminar series appeared committed to genuine Knowledge Exchange, in the sense of multi-directional flow of understanding and benefits, with participants learning that research can be moved forward through interaction with non-academics. For example, an interviewee observed a change in academics' understanding of stakeholders:

> "We tend to see from universities' perspective ---'My work would have impact if only someone would listen to me' --- but through this process (things are) seen from others' perspective, for example pressures they (stakeholders) are under and their need to justify spending time, being able to feed back something to others. When it did happen, it was quite good as participants shared perspectives and (an academic) could say 'Oh, now I see why it has become a policy objective.'"

It seems fair to say that in many cases the series laid foundations for future knowledge exchange or impact-oriented work by involved academics. For example, an interviewee now pursuing funds for follow-on projects with non-academic participants acting as involved critical friends, observed that such valuable contacts "in and of themselves justify the work in the project; building those relationships is incredibly hard and time-consuming". In terms of long-term impacts, it is also important to note that in nearly all cases, series which engaged prospective research users also engaged junior researchers. Even beyond providing

policymaker/practitioner perspectives and contacts, these experiences may well have encouraged junior researchers to participate in subsequent knowledge exchange activities. (Nearly all respondents to the supplementary survey –including junior researchers—cited attitude/cultural change impacts such as increased willingness to collaborate.)

Challenges still exist. One posed by an experienced PI interviewee was to increase academics' understanding of "how practitioners learn and develop, and the part that research plays in the development of their practice". Another noted that policymakers are under increasing pressure for (only) quantitative evidence, although they were "happy to be engaged in the critical reflection" of the series. Difficulties exist in persuading non-academics to take the time to participate in what might seem to be "merely academic" activities; also, often frequent turnover with non-academic champions suddenly changing posts can disrupt relationships and networks. Reflecting on the way in which non-academic impacts can be generated by research, one interviewee discussed the "completely different timescales and attention cycle" of industry or policy versus academia, when there might be a window of only two or three months during which research findings could make a difference. Seminar series that inform and stimulate debate over policy issues can help prepare people (academic or non-academic) so that they are ready for such windows.

Scheme's impact on fostering interdisciplinary research partnerships

Vignette:

The PI attended events in the International Polar Year (2008-2009) at which people would bemoan the absence of social scientists interested in the area… yet he knew there were in fact many individuals "dotted about" who did not have a collective presence by "reasons of disciplinary conventions". More recently such individuals were beginning to speak in an interdisciplinary way, due to the complex problems being considered. The Seminar allowed him to bring individuals (including junior researchers) together from across countries and disciplines into a network in "a 'new field' that 'old hands' argued did not exist". The Seminar captured a "new set of voices working in what was "a re-emergence, a consolidation of a massive widening out of what used to be a very esoteric field that very few people worked on…. a more sensitive political and human understanding of the implications of climate change in the polar regions." Individuals with background in political science, geography, history, tourism, economics, anthropology and international law took part. A participating policymaker commented on how refreshing it was to hear from individuals who had spent a long time working in the area and could talk about the interesting questions and political ramifications in an interdisciplinary way.

"Knowledges, resources and legal regimes: the new geopolitics of the Polar Regions"
Dr Richard Powell University of Oxford (formerly University of Liverpool) 2010-2011

Clearly, there is a strong tendency for the Research Seminar series to be interdisciplinary. Over two-thirds of respondents held "interdisciplinary research partnerships" as among their objectives. Of these, very nearly all (96.6%) had made either some or significant progress; in other words *two-thirds of the Seminar Series appearing in this survey advanced interdisciplinarity*.

Rather than interdisciplinarity being pursued for its own sake, many of the series tackled complex ideas or issues consisting of multiple dimensions that need to be explored: "it is inevitably interdisciplinary". Also, the early stage of development of areas being explored by many of the series seemed to lend itself to interdisciplinarity. As one PI said about his emerging area, "there has been a bit of a tendency over the past couple of years for people to be more interdisciplinarity because they have to be". Many of the interviewees saw interdisciplinarity as exciting and motivational, critical to their series. "If a seminar series is not doing interdisciplinarity, I wouldn't be interested in it". Seminars often juxtaposed diverse approaches to issues as well as diverse disciplines. For example, one PI observed, "The interdisciplinary part wasn't difficult, but the tensions we exposed were conceptual… different approaches, different world views…the lines of division aren't by discipline." While on the one hand early career researchers were seen as likely to be interested in interdisciplinary issues, and indeed to need spaces for rich conversations, the paradoxical career challenges posed by the REF-driven climate were also noted, since leaders of "units

of assessment" being judged by REF panels usually feel under pressure to ensure that individuals they hire or promote can perform well in submissions to mainstream journals which tend to be based in single disciplines and in competition for funding, for which reviewers tend to be based in single disciplines.

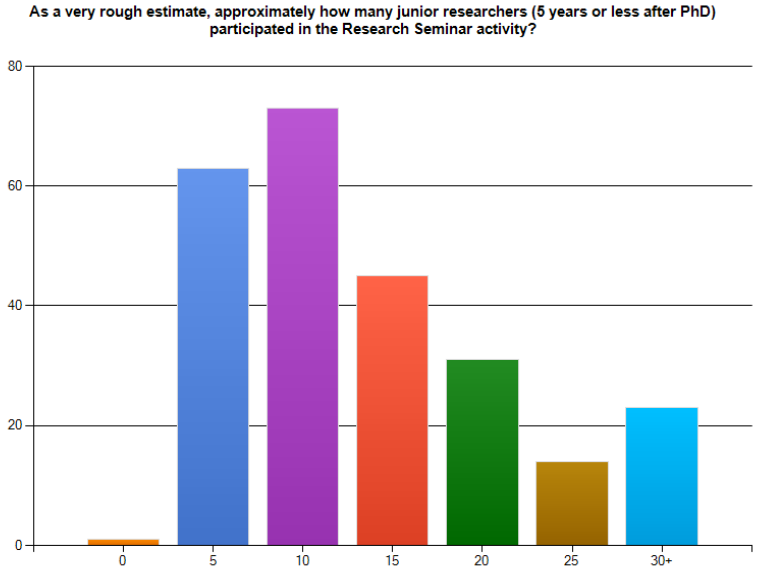
Scheme's encouragement of participation of junior researchers

Vignette

One project, which included a postgraduate co-I applicant, established a Reading Group to provide continuity between seminars for core members of the group. Postgraduate and Postdoctoral researchers took the lead in developing this into a Research Group, and came up with the idea of generating a book, framed around the new methodological approaches the series was trying to develop. A single-author chapter by each of these early-career researchers was included in the edited book, *Rethinking the Public* (Policy Press, 2010). A possible model for seminar series involving early-career researchers, this book project provided the basis for the integration of early-career researchers into the seminars themselves and provided them with a sense of community and involvement in the project. The PI felt that this aspect of the series amounted to "a collective postdoc" experience. Participants in this early-career group are still affiliated with the Publics Research Programme at the Open University and have proceeded onto ESRC Postdoctoral Fellowships, research posts and academic positions.
"Emergent Publics"
Dr Clive Barnett, the Open University, 2008-2010

One multi-institutional series involved at least four early career researchers or PhD students from each of three universities in its core team. Two early career researchers and two PhD students were supported by the PI to edit one of the two special journal issues that came from the seminars, *Improving Schools10 (1)*. They jointly published a book chapter on the pedagogies of publishing a special issue. One is now on the editorial board of the journal *Improving Schools* and a number of participating early career researchers have maintained the series' topic, pupil voice and participation, as part of their own research agendas.
"Engaging Critically with Pupil Voice: Children and Young People as Partners in School and Community Change"
Professor Patricia Thomson, University of Nottingham 2004-2006

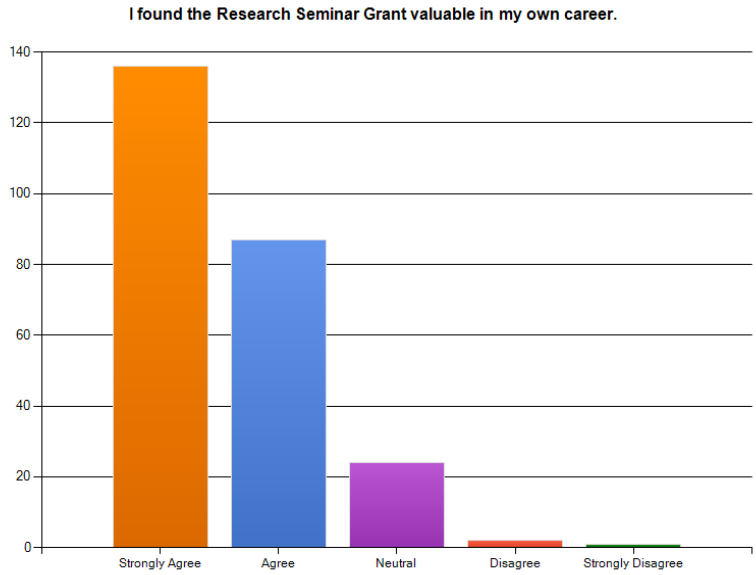
Inclusion of junior researchers was a theme running throughout the Scheme. *The 250 respondents to this question thus reported involvement of an estimated 3,380 early researchers ---on average, 13.5 junior researchers per grant*. By going so far as to estimate numbers of involved junior researchers (defined in the survey as 5 years or less after PhD) respondents unambiguously confirmed participation.



Interviewees also described commitment to involving junior researchers (including PhD students). One even embodied a legacy effect – noting that their series involved early career researchers because: "My involvement in a seminar series when I was starting out was absolutely critical to the formation of my understanding." Various tactics included engaging early career researchers in planning seminars, writing up notes and reflections, working on blogs and helping to come up with tough questions. In small groups, early career researchers were able to "realise that professors and big names are just human beings… and see their heroes as real human beings --- you get that only in seminar series." Bursaries were often provided for PhD students to travel to seminars. Many series deliberately included early career researchers as speakers. For example in the case of one series in which a mix of young academics, PhD students and established academics were always invited and the last seminar was dominated by young academics, with postdocs, PhD students and very junior academics as speakers; the PI suspects this will become a lasting network of cohorts in that academic 'generation'. Some interviewees discussed the appropriateness of the match between this sort of seminar series and junior researchers. For example, one PI noted that it is good to expose junior researchers to the kinds of dialogue being fostered between academics and non-academics by the series, particularly because in their own futures "they will have to live with impact". Another PI also noted the more open mindset of early career researchers –and has seen some of them forming a network since the series -- but then described the current REF-influenced academic world as a force counteracting interdisciplinarity.

> "The age-old problem is that as students are doing and coming out of PhDs, as long as the supervisor doesn't discourage it, social groups arise but then sometimes people are told to crack down on a specific question… So, there is a moment where people are very open to different ideas but they can be stamped on very quickly by the brutality of trying to find a position."

In considering the Scheme's role in career development, it is important to recognise that some PIs were themselves junior researchers, with the experience of leading a seminar series often playing an important part in their own career advancement. (Similarly, some grants deliberately placed an early career researcher as a co-PI.) *Whatever the career stage of the PI, it is clear that the Research Seminar Grant made a difference: just under 90% of the PIs responding to the survey found the Research Seminar Grant valuable in their own careers.*



(Interestingly, respondents to the non-PI survey showed an even higher agreement (97.4%) with this statement.) For example a PI who had been two or three years into a postdoctoral position when starting to lead a Series, said

"It has been really significant in terms of my career development…. So fantastic for me to be organising a series with top people in academia and practice and government research programmes, so good for confidence and learning".

Scheme's impact on developing international research networks

Vignette:

In tackling the "large, broad and incredibly diverse" area of Narrative Inquiry, one Seminar series aimed to create a network and bring people together from a range of disciplines, countries and career stages to try to find some common ground theoretically and methodologically. The series led to special issues of three different journals (*Qualitative Research 2008*, *Sociological Research Online 2009* and *Life Writing 2010*) and multiple publications, many by students, as tangible outcomes. Perhaps less tangible, but striking was the international Letters Network generated among European, Scandinavian and Nordic scholars across multiple disciplines who feel that they have a common basis for working together, as illustrated by the 500-person mailing list now in use. The Series' international participants will contribute some of the chapters in the edited book collection based on the Series' final event, *Documents of Life Revisited*, to be published by Ashgate in 2012.
"Narrative Studies in Interdisciplinary Perspective: Theories, Methodologies and Revisions"
Professor Liz Stanley, Centre for Narrative and Auto/Biographical Studies, University of Edinburgh
2007-2009

Clearly many responding to the survey felt that the Scheme had helped with international networks. Although only half (50.9%) of the respondents claimed this as among their series' objectives, those who did so nearly all (92.2%) claimed either some or significant progress.

Several not mutually exclusive aims appeared to guide inclusion of international guests, usually as (often keynote) speakers:

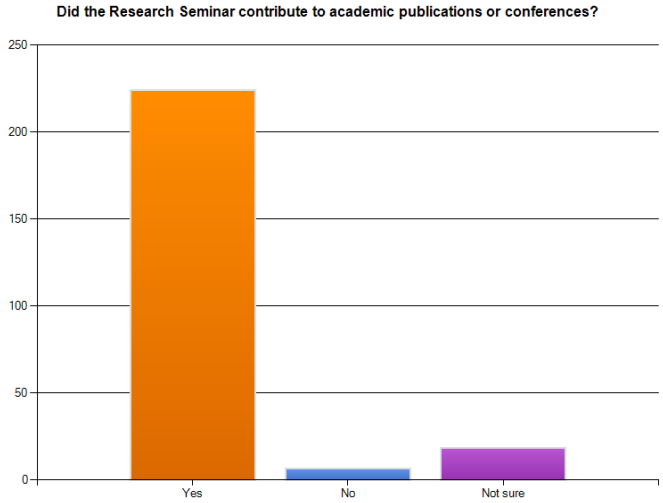
1) advancing a new area by bringing some of the best thinkers together to deepen thought or extend boundaries;
2) positioning UK individuals while building an international network that would carry on in future explorations of the topic;
3) affording junior researchers the opportunity to get to know international leaders and to themselves "step up" into an international network.

Two quite contrasting attitudes toward international invitations were apparent in interviews and survey comments. For some, involvement of international colleagues seemed to be quite natural, especially if the PIs felt they were positioning the UK in topics that were inherently international or simply including senior colleagues already part of their own network. Other PIs viewed the chance to involve international leaders as a rare opportunity. Whatever the level of novelty for the PI, ESRC's enablement of international activity does appear to have had some lasting effects, with interviewees mentioning, for example: making a number of contacts; the seminar series cementing previous connections into more ongoing conversations; international speakers writing for follow-on publications such as books or special issues; providing an unusual opportunity for international policymakers interested in a niche topic; providing a gathering point around an emerging area for scattered individuals internationally; creating/jumpstarting international networks; helping junior researchers to meet international "legends" in their area and personal professional positioning such as being asked to join the editorial board for a key American journal --- as well as, of course, learning from colleagues in different countries.

Publications and related outputs

The grants have been productive in terms of conventional academic outputs: at least 90% of respondents saw the Research Seminar Grant as contributing to academic publications or conferences, with 7.3% not sure. A large number of PIs (161) even took the trouble to cite multiple outputs and publications in a free text survey question –with many of these, of course, appearing some time after the project's end.

Academic Publications



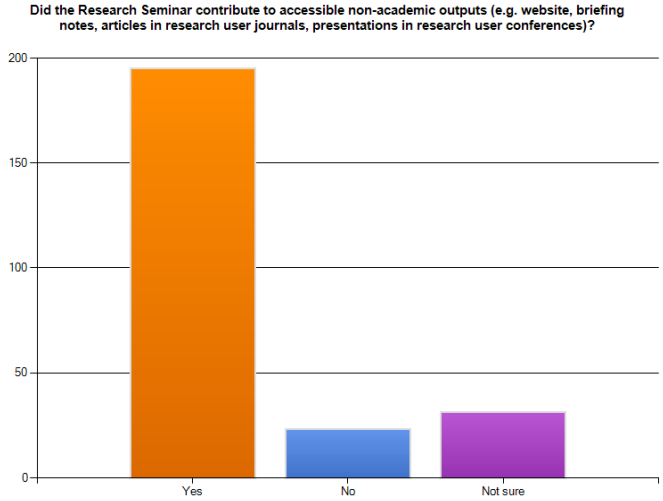
Interviews also provided different snapshots in time elapsed subsequent to a project. Motivation certainly exists to shorten the time lag till publication; even some of the PIs of in-progress or just-finished projects articulated upcoming tactics for publication of seminar content, themes or presentations. End-of-award reports illustrate a range of types of publications and outputs, including articles in academic journals, articles in professional/ policy/practice journals, books, book chapters and journal special issues each capturing multiple presentations from a series. Even with as many outputs as were cited, many subsequent publications clearly could not be captured in those reports.

While individual journal articles and book chapters are doubtless to be expected, it is possible that innovative seminar series lent themselves particularly well to a third type of publication: special issues of journals. For example, 12.5% of survey respondents took the time to cite one or more special issues from their projects; 25 projects had one or more special issue published already (several had 2-3, one had 5), another 8 had plans for special issues. (Again, not all PIs responded to the survey, and not all respondents completed this question, so there may very well be others who also generated special issues.) Given the known challenges for interdisciplinary or otherwise non-conventional work to be accepted by journals, it is intriguing to speculate that special issues may offer a useful conduit for the very sorts of exploration often undertaken through the Seminar series. Particularly since many of the series were based around complex issues or emerging themes, special issues may also provide the opportunity to engage others in the sort of sustained, multi-layered thinking that seminar participants enjoyed. There can be downsides to the tactic of publishing special issues in journals, in the form of long lead times or competition to secure a slot, as well as likely page limits. As another channel for academic dissemination of innovation, publishing books rather than special issues may provide more “freedom” to pursue broad and multi-layered ideas in depth. Certainly, a great many seminar series cite books, especially edited collections stemming from seminar presentations, as key outputs.

It seems that PIs made deliberate attempts to ensure some level of accessible outputs from their grants. Asked if the grant had made a “contribution to accessible non-academic outputs (e.g. website, briefing notes, articles in research user journals, presentations in research user conferences)”, 78.3% of survey respondents said Yes, 12.4% were Not Sure, and only 9.2% said No. At least a quarter of the respondents developed or contributed to websites, as some 70 respondents noted websites in response to the question asking for articles, formal articles or websites reflecting the grant activity. (Of course, many more respondents may have websites but simply not have responded to this question, and many non-responding PIs may have had websites.) Some websites are devoted strictly to the Seminar Series, some to a related area or a follow-on activity; some are researcher’s own sites providing

information. (Some respondents noted that a website was no longer 'live'.) Some projects are developing podcasts or similar approaches to making the seminars available.

Accessible Outputs

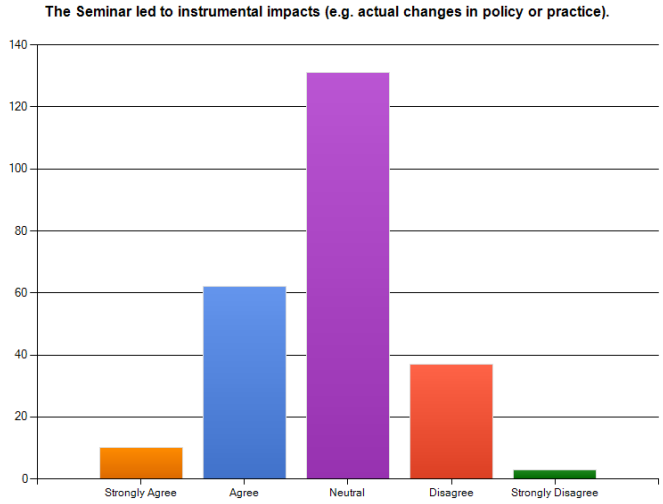


Types of Impacts

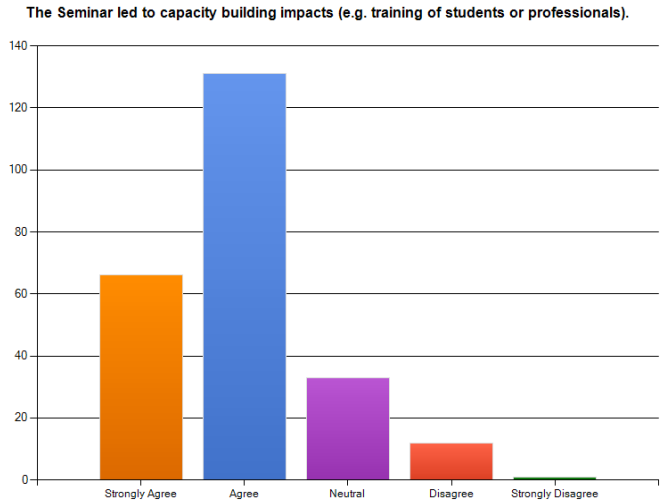
Through surveys and interviews, we explored the types of impacts generated by the various Seminar Grants, considering instrumental, conceptual and capacity-building impacts[12] and also two additional types of process-embodied early impacts we have found to be important in other studies (Meagher et al., 2008): enduring connectivity between researchers and research users and attitudinal/cultural change regarding knowledge exchange. As illustrated below, some cases of each kind of impact were perceived by survey respondents, who could indicate as many as applied. The two sorts of impacts of which respondents were most confident were Conceptual Impacts and Enduring Connectivity, which align well with the Scheme's aims of promoting innovation (Conceptual Impacts' "broad new understanding or awareness-raising") and networks (Enduring Connectivity Impacts' "longer-term collaboration by involved individuals in follow-on interactions"). Well over three-quarters of respondents cited Capacity building Impacts (e.g. "training of students or professionals"), clearly a key aim of the Scheme, and Attitudinal or cultural impacts (e.g. "increased willingness in general to engage in new collaborations"), such that subsequent participation in ambitious initiatives (perhaps involving interdisciplinarity and/or knowledge exchange) might constitute a ripple effect of Scheme funding. Not surprisingly, fewest saw Instrumental Impacts; this may reflect one or both of at least two factors: 1) seminar series were not set up to lead to a particular result that could be passed along to users for implementation, whereas they were very much set up to increase conceptual understanding; 2) instrumental impacts are infamously difficult to track and attribute unambiguously to one bit of academic work, even when that work is a defined research project.

[12] Although other definitions exist for types of impacts, we use the following definitions (Nutley et al. 2007, p.36): "Broadly, *instrumental use* refers to the direct impact of research on policy and practice decisions. It identifies the influence of a specific piece of research in making a specific decision or in defining the solution to a specific problem, and represents a widely held view of what research use means. *Conceptual use* is a much more wide-ranging definition of research use, comprising the complex and often indirect ways in which research can have an impact on the knowledge, understanding and attitudes of policy makers and practitioners. It happens where research changes ways of thinking, alerting policy makers and practitioners to an issue or playing a more general 'consciousness-raising role'. Such uses of research may be less demonstrable but are not less important than more instrumental forms of use".

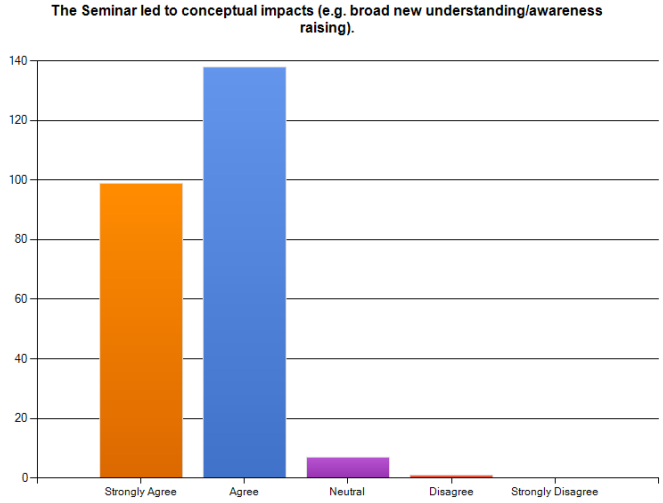
Instrumental Impacts



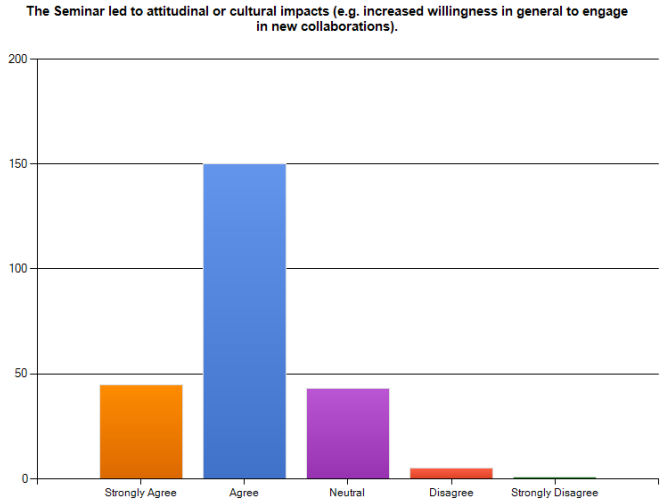
Capacity-building Impacts



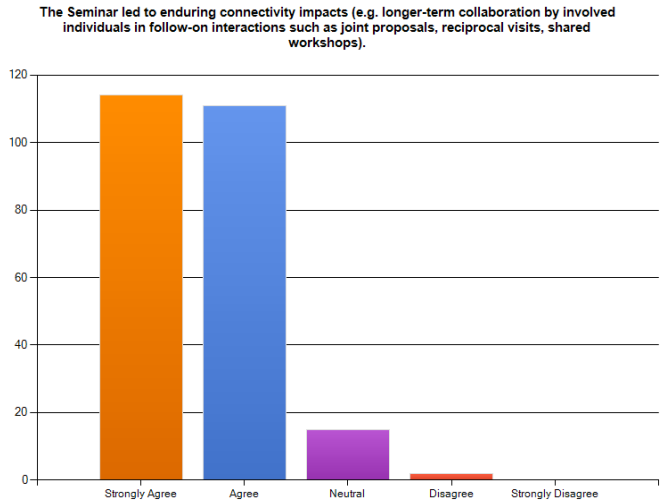
Conceptual Impacts



Attitudinal/Cultural Impacts



Enduring Connectivity Impacts



A diversified portfolio of impacts: Outcomes cited with pride by awardholders

A way to view the Scheme's portfolio of outcomes

One way to consider impacts of the Seminar Series Funding Scheme is to view them as a portfolio of different categories of outcomes related to objectives of PIs and the ESRC: networking, capacity-building, stakeholder engagement, international interactions, stimulus of new areas, interdisciplinarity, non-academic impact and, of course, publications. One window providing such a view can be provided by eliciting from PIs the outcomes of which they are the proudest.

A free-text survey question elicited brief descriptions of outcomes about which the PIs felt most pride; the analysis of answers here thus provides some sense of the range and distribution of types of outcomes generated by the Seminar Series Scheme. It does **not**, however, capture real numbers. The numbers provided in the chart below come with two serious caveats. First, and most importantly, this is not a complete set of outcomes for the Scheme, as it is based on only those responding to this question on the survey (235) and some of those simply commented that it was too early for their series. Nor is this a complete set of outcomes even for respondents, as PIs were asked to list just one favourite outcome whereas in reality many series have had several outcomes, as indicated by those PIs who

strayed from the question's directive by enthusiastically mentioning multiple outcomes. (Indeed some 130 individuals made the additional effort to also respond with additional outcomes to the subsequent free-text survey question.)

Nonetheless, a picture emerges: *clearly, the Seminars were productive along a variety of axes*. A sense of the range of outcomes achieved which gave awardholders a sense of satisfaction is provided by the chart below.[13] A central aim of the entire Scheme, to promote networking –contacts, collaborations and even new communities – was singled out the most frequently, followed closely by evidence that the Seminars led to valued academic 'currency' – articles, special issues, books. Many respondents took pride in achieving some level of stakeholder engagement, often citing relationships that have continued. Others were particularly proud of their Seminar's role in building capacity among early career researchers; while others found great satisfaction in their Seminars' facilitative role in the development of new ideas or even new areas.

Distribution: Clustering of Free-text Outcomes of which Respondents were most proud

Capacity-building	*38*	11.6%
Stakeholder engagement	*48*	14.7%
International dimension	27	8.3%
Networking	***77***	**23.6%**
Publications	***74***	**22.7%**
Impacts	13	4.0%
Interdisciplinarity	12	3.7%
New ideas/areas	*37*	*11.3%*
Total Categorisations of outcomes (some cited more than one)	326	

The following selected, certainly not comprehensive, "taster" of outcomes cited should give a flavour of the portfolio of accomplishments achieved by Seminar Series. Clustering of entries can create false distinctions, as many outcome categories will in reality affect each other. For example growth of "networks" or development of strong "publications" can be closely if not causally associated with development of "new areas" or "non-academic impacts" (itself only a grey line removed from "stakeholders"). In a later section, Case Studies will provide detailed examples of individual series giving rise to multiple outcomes.

Publications (Examples)

Journal special issue Many cited this sort of achievement, for example:

- Production of two proposed special issues - only one was enviasged in the original application, but the quality and originality of the papers exceeded expectations
- The Children & Society special issue, which is widely quoted in the field of children and young people's participation.
- Special issue of Human Resource Management Journal on Putting Skills to Work (2003 13:2) which captured many of the emerging skills issues for policymakers and academics. This was covered in the practitioner journal People Management.
- Special issue of Advances in School Mental Health Promotion, January 2010

Book Many cited this sort of achievement, for example:

- An edited book derived exclusively from the papers/discussions facilitated by the Seminar that seems to have been well received.
- The publication of our edited book representing the seminar papers and the coming together of a range of scholars and their ideas.
- Bebbington, A. and W. McCourt (eds) (2007) Development success: Statecraft in the South, London: Palgrave Macmillan - a tangible outcome which would have been impossible without

[13]The chart was generated by examining 235 responses only to the question "As you look back on the Research Seminar activity, what one outcome (tangible or intangible) makes you most proud? Please describe briefly" and noting as many outcome dimensions as each indicated. Inevitably this 'dissection' and clustering of free-text responses depended on judgement of the researcher, but the relative frequencies may be of interest.

the seminar grant. This has inspired a number of authors to try to understand instances of international development policy success. It is reflected in at least one major initiative taken by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) - so there has been some policy influence.

- The edited book that originated from the seminar series (three conferences on integrating research and practice in the domain of literacy) was the most sold book of the publication series for 4 consecutive years.
- A well-received volume: Rioting in the UK and France (published by Willan). This was edited by myself and my two co-applicants, and included contributions by all the seminar participants.
- The edited volume we produced from the series: Allan, Ozga and Smyth (2009) (Eds) Social Capital, Professionalism and Diversity. Rotterdam: Sense. This book was faithful to the structure of the series, contained original work and included work by professionals and new researchers as well as some established figures ... It is a book which appears to be read and used.
- Publication of an edited book "The Rise and Fall of Neoliberalism".

Portfolios of publications For example:

- The publications - an edited collection and a special issue of a journal - both of which are highly cited and contain cross national studies with editorials that make comparative connections.
- The series of publications arising from the seminar series - 3 special issues of journals and an edited book.

Other For example:

- Co-authorship of book chapters and a paper with researchers from Philadelphia
- All the papers lodged on a web-site, together with transcriptions of all the discussions, and these remain a rich source of information and ideas.

Networks (Examples)

Interaction

- What I enjoyed most thoroughly about the seminar series was the opportunity to meet with other scholars and users in different locations in the UK. Our work is increasingly conducted online and I really value these opportunities for face-to-face interaction. I know from talking with participants that they also enjoyed this, especially those attending from the wider user community.
- The bringing-together of an interdisciplinary group of researchers and policy-makers in a format that encouraged exploratory and innovative thinking, effective networking, and open-ended discussion.
- Above all the day long seminars … have enabled researchers to find some space to engage in debate and exchange of ideas and to work on new methodologies (eg visual / photographic evidence / new sources). The opportunity to meet face to face has been, quite simply, wonderful.
- The tangible buzz at every event as peoeple were excited by the ideas they were discussing (documented in the evaluation form)
- Involvement of new people in the field of study
- As our series is at the mid point, I am most proud of the way in which we have been able to bring previously isolated single researchers and other interested participants together for high quality discussion

Continuing Benefits

- The mix of participants and legacy of continuing discussion and contact with scholars who wouldn't have otherwise met or shared ideas.
- The creation of the 200+ strong network we now have - and the creation of the inVisio "brand"
- The development of a network of scholars working in the field of digital cultures/ popular culture/media and literacy who are still collaborating nine years later.
- The development and establishment of a network in a field of growing importance
- It really helped to cement a partnership which had already been established in principle, but not made sufficiently concrete due to lack of funds. The research seminar activity helped to give the collaborative research agenda momentum, and this has continued after the end of the grant.
- Continuing (loose, informal) network
- We have a network of researchers who still maintain regular contact/meetings 3 years after the grant ended.

- Bringing together a range of scholars and practitioners who did not realise their shared interests and who ultimately contributed to a book collection and a number of journal articles.
- Making unlikely partnerships happen. Published out puts and new ideas that have been generated since the Seminar Series.
- The fact that we got a special issue, which was also issued as a book, out of the seminars - and the fact that people who hadn't really met or even interacted before came together and became aware of each other's work.
- New links developed by people attending the seminar series. Edited book published. Special issue of Social Science and Medicine in prep.
- The seminar contributed to the development of gender analyses of post Communist transitions. The network of scholars remained in touch for some five years after the project and helped to plan further events on the same subject which led to some important publications.
- Promotion of collaborations which led to further grants and publications
- Developing ongoing research collaborations with individuals met at seminars
- The first seminar addressed a theme - and brought together the academic team - for a successful bid for a one million Euro EC FP7 programme (GUSTO)

Stakeholders (Examples)

Engagement of Policymakers and Others in Dialogue, Debate, New Ways of Viewing

- Bringing together scholars from different disciplines, together with policymakers, stakeholders and practitioners, to discuss and further debate
- The interaction of researchers and practitioners in the series, and the extent to which we appeared to learn from one another
- The range of participants from HEIs, public and voluntary sector
- The active involvement of industry and parliamentarians
- The award has only just finished so it is too early to say what has come from the award in the long term. In terms of what happened during the grant, we have had numerous emails praising us for the bursary support which the grant enabled us to offer to unwaged members of the public, students and activists and of the open way in which the seminars allowed engagement with non-academic participants.
- The connections and capacity building opportunities that were established among academics, practitioners, professionals and activists.
- I chaired six two hour seminars on a very sensitive issue (terrorism) and saw senior policy makers interact with civil libertarians, with judges, with politicians and with academics. They did not meet each other in their own worlds - these seminars made these meetings possible. I am sure that the quality of the discourse impacted on the professional engagement of those present
- Bringing challenges from fields beyond education to bear on the work of researchers, practitioners, policy makers and thus changing views of the horizon and ways in which people are interacting with these
- Informing and enhancing the policy and conceptual debate around cohabitation and the law; bringing together different traditions of research with policy shapers
- Stimulating key policy decision makers & practitioners to think differently about their work

Practitioners & Community

- We brought together teachers from community language schools (complementary schools) with mainstream educationalists, researchers and educational policymakers. The practitioners gained access to research knowledge and were able to interact directly with policymakers. These community-based practitioners would not otherwise have had a voice.
- Active involvement of community based organisations and increased capacity of them to contribute to research agendas

Follow-on activity, influences

- A network of researchers and practitioners that continued to meet for 3 years after the end of the series
- Links between policymakers, practitioners and academics inputting directly into greater impact orientation in research and funding applications
- Sustained collaboration with the London Probation Service that let to further international networks and policy based activities.

- Establishing relationships with those working in regulatory bodies which have since been maintained and which have proven mutually beneficial
- We are proud of the production of a new 'thinking tool' that we have designed to support educators and policymakers think long term and strategically about education.
- New book about to be published linking both the academic and practitioner communities. High level of engagement and interaction with a range of stakeholders including business, government and NGOs.
- The edited journal/book which incorporated two practitioners as joint authors and captured key aspects of the initiative

Capacity-Building (Examples)

Nurturing early career researchers

- Special attention was devoted to giving space and time to PhD students and Post-Docs, this way benefiting from the expertise of a strong audience that they would not have encountered in their home universities. This latter training part of the seminar series was a very important component, which makes me most proud.
- Impact on careers of junior researchers
- Nurturing research talent
- Training of early career researchers
- Developing junior researchers through early career seminar
- Providing a platform for junior researchers to test out ideas in before a well-informed but supportive and informal audience
- Comments from participants the best thing that could have happened to clarify my research direction!
- I still hear back from students who got training as part of the series to say how they are now working in X or Y and how much of a benefit the training was - given they didn't really get proper training during their PhD - I get asked if I am running similar courses now for them to send their students on...and I have to say 'no'...
- These collaborations, of students and supervisors, continue years later.

Embedding early career researchers within networks, debates and emerging areas

- Having helped developed an international network of scholars, combining research students, early career and advanced academics
- The creation of an network of international scholars, practitioners and policy makers with a common interest - this led to exchange of ideas, opportunities and resources - and was particularly useful for the early career researchers.
- Connecting with junior researchers and policymakers/practitioners
- I guess I'm proud of two things one tangible and one intangible. First, the large number of PhD students, teachers and early career researchers who were supported by participating in the seminars. We brought people together with care and provided spaces for people talk both inside and outside of the seminars to build relationships. Second, the edited collection from the seminar series. Again this was a collaboration that supported some who were relatively new to writing and sets out an agenda in relation to identity in mathematics education.
- The collaborations of many kinds (many of which were not predicted) which were facilitated by the interactions. Some of these networks have become more formalised and have led to other activities (eg a forthcoming conference). I am particularly proud of how students and junior researchers were built into these evolving networks from the beginning.
- The research seminar brought together beneficiaries, practitioners and scholars of humanitarian aid in an environment which enabled continued and substantial exchanges. Students were an integral part of these debates.
- Development of vast research network of PhD students and early career scholars across UK, Europe and further afield in a 'new field' that 'old hands' argued did not exist
- The most successful outcome is to promote the area of research for dissemination of research outputs and create an opportunity for young researchers to exchange with established researchers.
- We generated an edited book, Rethinking the Public, that records the most impressive achievement, which was to develop an ‘Early Career Group’ of researchers on public issues during the duration of the grant.
- 3 journal special issues publishing a very wide range of people from PhDs to super star

New Areas (Examples)

Bringing people together to create new areas/communities/fields/sub-disciplines

- One aim of the series was to raise the profile of the subject matter in a part of the UK where existing work and research was piecemeal and patchy. We attracted far larger numbers than we had anticipated from across the UK and beyond and brought people together in a way that would not otherwise have occurred.
- Bringing together key ideas and people to develop new field
- Contributed to creation of significant new academic sub-community
- The emergence of a new field and the energy of new researchers in its pursuit
- The clear research agenda we developed for cross-cultural trust research
- The sense of gaining some collective legitimacy for an emergent intellectual concern
- The increase in awareness of grantmaking/philanthropy as a field of study
- Really established a whole subfield in the sociology of education and produced the first book to map the field of boys' and schooling.
- The contribution to developing gendered analysis of welfare

Publications and solidifying of new areas

- Some excellent publications (at least two edited books, one special issue of a journal and a number of other high quality outputs) were produced and they contained new research that has helped to shape a new and genuinely interdisciplinary research programme in the social sciences.
- Producing a journal special issue that develops the area of research
- Editing a volume of papers from the seminar series that led the way in establishing the field and that allowed several young researchers to publish for the first time.
- The production of an edited collection of research papers that has subsequently been cited as a definitive text in defining the challenges and opportunities of investigating and responding to the threat of 'transnational organised crime'.
- Articles contributed to high quality academic journals The fact that the series initiated a debate on Human Resource Management and performance which is still on-going in the management practitioner and academic literatures.

Stimulus of follow-on activity

- The networks, exchanges and community-building activities enabled by the seminar series (5 day-long seminars over 2 years, 2009-2011) contributed significantly to the formation in 2011 of an Energy Geographies Working Group within the Royal Geographical Society-Institute of British Geographers. This will take forward some of the ideas, research partnerships and research training begun during the series and provides a 'life beyond' the seminar series itself.
- New conceptual and follow-on research developments - the formulation of a critique of 'methodological nationalism' in mainstream citizenship analysis and the construction and fielding of the first-ever cross-European public attitudes survey on citizenship at the sub-state 'regional' level.
- I was able to develop a second seminar and these led on to subsequent seminar series led by other colleagues encouraged by the first two …I see this as having started a sub-discipline at the very least.

International networks (Examples)

Interactions, development of networks and/or understanding

- Crucial to the development of a 250 strong international network
- Making contact with academics from outside the UK, who have had/will have an impact on research projects.
- Being able to listen and talk to two US academics who are leaders in their field, that otherwise would have been very difficult to do
- Joint work with colleagues in Britain and from outside Britain, especially Russian researchers who otherwise could not have come to Britain for such academic meetings (the seminar theme was women and gender in Russia and East-Central Europe).
- The seminar series has helped the academic community in the UK and other countries to understand the key issues in the transitional economies

Follow-on

- Development of international collaborations

- Ongoing national and international networks, with folks still working together
- Networks built and maintained with other researchers and research users, in UK and internationally
- That we were able to bring researchers from Brazil, the USA and India to two of the seminars giving them the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with UK colleagues. That some of the seminar participants continue to meet.
- The previous series culminated in the first international conference on bullying at work, representing some 30 countries. … The fact that the participants from the first series now participate with new colleagues from related fields shows that solid relationships have been built, and people value the thinking space these seminars provide.
- The development of the work into a large European research network where some of the participants continue to collaborate and work together on different projects and initiatives to progress the intellectual ideas and work begun during the seminar series - we have only this year published a book which links directly back to the original seminar series.
- The research seminars were a starting point for a long-term international collaboration on a major empirical study.
- Links with international criminologists - genuine new opportunities for publishing and collaboration
- Creating a quality event, considered the best in the area of Emerging Markets Finance in Europe, where people attend from all over the world.
- Major international conference with successful conference volume published by Cambridge University Press
- Strong international network new ideas and ways forward for research 3 major edited volumes with Springer Publishers Well visited website Already a follow up seminar in Sweden this month (not part of the ESRC funding, but with roughly same participants)

Interdisciplinarity (Examples)

(Note: many outcomes captured in this report as emphasising other categories also mentioned interdisciplinarity as a contributing feature.)

Interactions

- Promoting an emerging inter-disciplinary approach that connected scholars from different disciplines and universities, many of whom had not met even if they knew each other's work.
- It provided a genuine exchange across disciplines (economics, law, political science) on a subject of mutual interest, providing a basis for continued interaction and enduring research relationships.
- The range of participants from a diversity of research disciplines that participated
- Series is not yet finished but we are generating interdisciplinary and inter professional links and discussions

Follow-on

- The development of a number of research grant submissions, one funded by the EPSRC, to develop an interdisciplinary approach to forecasting processes.
- Military and society research received a key boost and gave me ideas that later on led to major cross-disciplinary collaboration - one that is ongoing.
- Careers and Migration series: special issue of Journal of Vocational Behavior in which we got diverse authorial groups to work together to generate something truly novel

Non-academic Impact (Examples)

(Note: some outcomes captured in this report as emphasising other categories also implied that impacts had occurred/were developing; impacts are described in detail within case studies as well)

- Connections between academics and practitioners working in the countries of the North East African region, especially in emergency conditions; many of these have become long-term, and our ESRC series of 6 workshops between 1993-95 helped make lasting contacts also with nationals of those countries, again both academics and practitioners. I myself and a few other colleagues have since been drawn into discussions at the FCO; and several have played quite high-profile roles in peace-making and development/humanitarian initiatives. On the academic

side, it was very productive for anthropologists to be working alongside historians, political scientists, and media specialists.

- The seminar allowed us to develop a multi-faceted body of research work which was critical of mainstream policy, but nonetheless engaged with it. This has subsequently resulted in a shift in emphasis in mainstream policies.
- The research seminar series generated a whole range of activities, including input in the National Equality Panel report.
- We organised a day for academic presentations on the linkages between poverty and maternal health and the second day was devoted to policy dialogue. We invited officers from DFID and NORAD (among others) and the outcome was very positive. The meeting contributed a briefing note to the UN Secretary General on the priorities for research for women's and children's health.
- The development of collaborative relationships with participating international development NGOs has been a particular success of the series. Working across Northumbria and Newcastle Universities, collaborative doctoral studentships and a significant research bid have been developed with VSO as a formal partner organisation. The series has also led to a research collaboration with the international NGO CAFOD, which is drawing upon and developing some of the themes and findings of the series.

Illustrative Case Studies of Impacts

The breadth and flavour of the Scheme's portfolio of outcomes achieved provides a a big picture view of the extent to which the Scheme and its component Seminar Grants met their various objectives. In this section of the Report, four detailed Case Studies will be provided to convey both specific information as to impacts and outcomes, and a sense of how individual Seminar Grants can lead to desired academic and non-academic impacts, tangible and intangible. For each Case Study, a main type of impact is highlighted and other types of impacts are captured as well. The fact that each Case Study led to multiple types of impacts illustrates the interwoven nature of impacts and the pathways through which they are generated. Key processes leading toward impacts and knowledge exchange lessons are captured in order to shed light helpfully on impact generation.

Case Study
Pioneering: Capturing a Trend in the Process of Becoming

Project:

The Europeanisation of British Politics and Policy-Making (2002-2004)

Principal investigator:

Ian Bache, University of Sheffield

Research summary:

Objectives of the series were to: test the value of the concept of 'Europeanisation' in relation to British politics and policy-making; engage academics and policymakers in debate over relevant issues; and contribute to a wider comparative debate regarding Europeanisation.

The project consisted of five seminar meetings and a final conference emphasising end-user engagement. Some 38 participants, from 15 universities, reflected a mix of disciplines and of career stages (professors, early-mid career, and postgraduates) in the series. Additional universities as well as stakeholders were represented in the concluding conference.

Academic outputs included presentations and panels at major conferences, multiple refereed articles and collections by not only the PI but also other contributors and at least two books. Now a key reference point in the field, the edited book, 2006, *The Europeanisation of British Politics* (Bache, I. and Jordan, A. (eds.) 2006, Palgrave Macmillan) was a collective output incorporating some seventeen chapters by participants, edited by the awardholder and another participant. The main theoretical framework generated by the series continues to benefit outputs today, such as the more recent *Cohesion Policy and Multi-Level Governance in South East Europe* (Bache, I. and Andreou, G. (eds.) 2011 Routledge). The series website had numerous hits and included information about the series and participants, as well as all 22 seminar papers and 15 conference papers available for downloading. The awardholder created an email distribution list of more than 150 interested academics (in the UK and abroad) and practitioners.

Disciplines:

Politics/Government/International Relations (nearly two-thirds of the participants); Business; Environmental Sciences, European Studies; Management; Political Communication; Education; Industrial Relations; Law; Town and Regional Planning

Users & stakeholders:

(nearly half of the participants of the concluding conference) UK Government, European Commission, European Parliament, regional development agencies, local government, voluntary sector, EU-focused interest groups, other interest groups. Keynote speakers included an MP, Minister for Europe; an MEP and Member of the Constitutional Convention; and an ex-MEP and then-Westminster Parliamentary Candidate—Nick Clegg.

Seminar Series Dimensions:

Networking, New idea/area, Interdisciplinarity, Capacity-building, Stakeholder Engagement, International dimension

Key types of impact:

- Capacity-building
- Conceptual impact
- Enduring connectivity

Highlighted impact:

Conceptual impact

The edited book developed from the series (*The Europeanisation of British Politics*) was seen as "a key book" in the emerging literature on Europeanisation of British politics.

"The network definitely had an effect on conceptual development. … it allowed a group of academics already working with the concept to discuss issues of definition and operationalisation over a sustained period, which would not otherwise have happened."

Sure that in 2002 he would not have gotten a small grant for an area that would have been deemed as 'not yet ready for mainstream funding', the awardholder notes that by 2007, the concept had become more established; the Seminar Series network building was an important part of this establishment process in the UK and probably internationally as the series propelled the concept forward in British academia. Before the series, there had been disparate academics scattered across the UK, without a unifying conceptual framework; the process of the seminar series meant that "people could look at their own work through a lens of Europeanisation and then… the whole became more than the sum of the parts." Not only the website but also subsequent workshops, a conference and panels at other

international conferences grew directly out of the series (which in turn had been preceded by an early meeting funded with about £1K by the University Association for European Studies (UACES). In fact, building on the seminar series, the awardholder later worked with colleagues who had been involved to secure a large ESRC grant recognising the conceptual focus and theoretical framework as legitimate for mainstream funding. ("Multi-level Governance in South East Europe")

Other non-academic impacts:

Capacity-building

The series brought together very senior people and PhD students. Most of the then-young people are now in the field. The awardholder has stayed in touch with many of them; many have gone on to become academics, one works at the House of Lords, another is head of policy for a large private sector association. For example, one individual, now a Senior Lecturer, participated as an ESRC CASE Studentship PhD student, gained the experience of presenting to both academics and practitioners at an event and also of publishing in the book stemming from the series, both building up a professional profile and stimulating a process of drawing new links between the PhD topic and Europeanisation.

As was often the case for seminar grants, capacity-building also took the form of career development for the awardholder. As a new senior lecturer, now a professor, his profile was raised by coordination of the network, the series' events and editing the collection of work from the series. "It was definitely helpful in my career."

Enduring Connectivity: "People were dotted about the country doing similar things, but were never brought together". Finding it "very surprising" that such a network did not exist, the awardholder was able to put out feelers, find out who was doing work on Europeanisation of British politics and identify quite exhaustively all those doing work in this area. ESRC funding enabled "a focal point for a range of activities that just wouldn't have happened", making it possible to bring people together and suggest some possible collective outputs. Some participants (including the awardholder) continue to collaborate; the series was a "process of breaking down barriers" among people who had never met but who have gone on to work in the same field for years.

Routes toward Impacts

Processes

With the awardholder himself a former practitioner, the concluding conference deliberately sought to engage non-academics, including senior politicians and UK and EU policymakers, some acting as discussants for academic papers presented. "It was an interesting tactic to combine smaller core academic meetings with a (concluding) 'impact' outreach meeting in a different mode….it came at a stage when a reservoir of papers and intellectual ideas could be brought to a larger audience while at the same time inviting speakers of prominence and making a bit of a splash."

The series did not simply succeed automatically; the awardholder "put an enormous amount of effort into it"."

Role of the ESRC Research Seminars Scheme

"This is one of the most important things about this scheme … If you're on the edge of a research field (as with the concept of the effect of Europeanisation in relation to British politics) … that's where you get real return…. to be able to do that and say, 'We just need some time to pull people together who are headed in the same direction but in some ways are not quite sure where they are going.' This is a really good way to generate some time to kick around ideas and see how they might offer traction in relation to new empirical fields. It's a good argument for the Scheme; there is not a great deal of risk and the pay-offs are potentially huge."

Key knowledge exchange lessons:

For Projects/Academic Researchers

- You have to be really committed to it (running such a seminar series).
- Organisation skills are a distinct advantage! Be persistent with setting an intellectual agenda.
- Aiming for a joint output -- an edited book or journal special edition – is valuable in getting people to stay engaged and allowing a coherent approach to emerge. Having practitioners involved (sometimes as discussants) meant thinking about different ways in which information had to be presented and brought some very useful insights that helped shape the final edited collection.
- To some extent it is about people, their capacities, skills and knowledge – finding that balance….. bringing together academics and practitioners around themes that link them both.

CASE STUDY
Embedding Research into Policy and Practice: Health and Social Care

Project:

Partnership Working in Health and Social Care: Building Capacity for Change (2005-2007)

Principal investigator:

Ailsa Cook, now University of Edinburgh
With: Alison Petch now IRISS (Institute for Research and Innovation in the Social Services); Jon Glasby, University of Birmingham; Caroline Glendinning, University of York

Research summary:

The overall goal of the seminar series was to build capacity in research and practice regarding partnership working between health and social care – a new policy area and a new field of research. Specific objectives addressed were:

- Establishment of a network of researchers, policy makers, practitioners and service users engaged in health and social care partnerships and with related expertise.
- Identification of key issues facing policy makers, practitioners and service users engaged in health and social care partnerships.
- Development of a conceptualisation of partnership working between health and social care that is grounded in the experiences of those planning, commissioning, providing and using partnerships and informed by broader theoretical understandings of partnership working and community care.
- Refining and development of methodological approaches and tools to research the nature and effectiveness of partnership working between health and social care.
- Setting an agenda for future research and practice in the area of health and social care partnerships and within that agenda develop a number of research proposals.
- Dissemination of the series' findings widely to research, policy, practice and service user communities.

The series consisted of four one-day seminars held in different locations across the UK; the first three followed the same format of equal time for presentations and group discussion but the final event emphasised network members pulling together learning into an agenda with recommendations for future research, policy and practice to improve health and social care partnerships. (At least four papers came from the series; one of two *Journal of Integrated Care* papers arising from the series published this agenda in August 2007.) In addition, each seminar's discussions were captured in summary reports, disseminated to network members and also wider policy, practice and research communities through the Intermediate Care Network --- this proved helpful in engaging wider policymakers and practitioners in debates subsequent to the series. A strong multi-disciplinary, multi-professional and cross-national network was formed, with a core subgroup taking activities forward. In addition, the series led directly to ongoing instrumental impact as the PI and a colleague worked collaboratively with the Scottish Joint Improvement Team and partners in practice to develop a new approach that became central to the work of the Scottish Joint Improvement Team. The researchers' contribution to this approach, called "Talking Points", has led to impacts on a variety of policy documents and numerous implementing organisations.

Disciplines:

Social policy, sociology, health policy & social work, public health, psychology, medicine, occupational therapy

Users & stakeholders:

Policymaker/influencer, health and social care practitioners, service users or carers

Seminar Series Dimensions:

Networking, stakeholder engagement, interdisciplinarity, new area/ideas, capacity-building

Key types of impact:

- Instrumental Impact
- Conceptual Impact
- Capacity-building
- Enduring Connectivity

Highlighted impact:

Instrumental Impact

Directly through contacts made in the series, Awardholder Ailsa Cook and another network member were commissioned by Scotland's Joint Improvement Team (JIT), itself a partnership between the Scottish Government, NHSScotland and COSLA, to carry out three phases of consultancy work to implement research findings in practice. This became a significant five year improvement programme

focussing on outcomes for service users and carers, “Talking Points”. With a key priority of the Joint Improvement Team to “combine user and carer involvement with an outcomes approach to planning, delivering, evaluating and improving services”, Talking Points has included development of a range of tools, resources and guidance --- all part of “an outcomes approach to assessment, planning & review (which) aims to shift engagement with people who use services away from service-led approaches”. (http://www.jitscotland.org.uk/action-areas/talking-points-user-and-carer-involvement/)

Talking Points has had an impact on well over 70 organisations, including local organisations, in Scotland and beyond. It is also embedded in key Scottish policy documents, such as, for example a strategy on Reshaping Care for Older People, Dementia and one on Carers. There is support from very senior leaders for the contribution of Talking Points and associated Outcomes Approach to facilitate health and social care integration.

As the PI observes, “This work would not have happened had I not made the initial connection and had the opportunity to develop the idea with the policy contacts made through the seminar series.” Also crucial was a preceding rigorous programme of research. As a non-academic partner observes, “What was useful was being able to connect in and recognise the potential for how we might connect the research with practice. We know there is often very good research, but practice goes down another road.” Serendipity also entered the picture (“A number of factors that were fortunately coming together”.). For example, at a key meeting with the Community Care Outcomes Framework, the PI “made a passionate case for including research outcomes”, which in turn give the Joint Improvement Team “a much more solid mandate for Talking Points”. Also, when the contact was made through the Seminar Series, the Joint Improvement Team was relatively new, and therefore both open to discussion and able to be flexible in terms of what they did and where they could invest, so that Talking Points could evolve with a strong research dimension. While it built on academic research, a non-academic stakeholder/knowledge intermediary reflected on the approach that had developed from a programme of action research and knowledge exchange: “Maybe it was not hardcore research in terms of academia, but in terms of influencing, it was hugely valuable”.

Other non-academic impacts:

Capacity-building

The series clearly helped the awardholder (then just 2-3 years post-PhD) and other colleagues build their own professional capacity. “This seminar series has made a significant impact on my career. Aside from the increase in knowledge and opportunity to be part of a network taking understanding forward in a key area, the connections and collaborations with policymakers and practitioners have opened up new opportunities and led to the development of a significant programme of research and knowledge transfer activity.” Another junior researcher colleague noted that the series allowed her to make links with academics and practitioners elsewhere, with a direct professional outcome of being put on an editorial board due to contacts made then.

Postdocs, PhD and Masters students (often working professionals) attended. Three postgraduate students were involved in the series who were actively researching partnerships. In addition to building networks, future researchers could absorb emphases from the seminars, such as ensuring that messages from research are being tested out in practice and further developed.

Conceptual impact

The series played a contributing role as a new area coalesced, that of partnership working between health and social care; the series helped to build capacity in terms of thinking about how such partnerships could be evaluated, often in the case of very complex interventions, and how better partnerships could be built, by understanding what makes for excellence in partnership working across health and social care. The series was able to invite speakers who were leading academic institutionalisation of the area, so that participants saw directly what was happening. A key feature lay in comparing approaches in Scotland and in England; this was “hugely productive from a conceptual point of view” as the policy landscapes and learning were evolving quite differently.

Enduring Connectivity:

A strong multi-disciplinary, multi-professional and cross-national network was formed of key stakeholders within the field of health and social care partnerships; informally the network continued for some time post-funding, in particular a core subgroup coordinated by a colleague at Strathclyde University to take forward initiatives making the link between research and practice, including a subscription database disseminating good practice through newsletters. Individual connections (e.g. reviewing papers, external examining) continue. A ‘good practice’ exchange took place between practitioner members of the network, even including exchange visits. Contacts made through the series led to the awardholder and another network member being commissioned to help implement research findings in Scotland, in an ever-widening circle of connections.

Culture Change

In a sense, through the follow-on work with Talking Points, the researchers contributed to a type of culture change as to how to frame conversations with applied users, especially when undertaking assessment and development. Talking Points is very deliberately an *approach* around how people are supported, "rather than a tool or mechanistic box".

Routes toward Impacts

Key roles

In this arena, quite a few of the academics and representatives of non-academic agencies have a natural orientation to knowledge exchange. Individual academics often act as "lone knowledge intermediaries" doing work, including consulting, that is directly related to policy and practice. The non-academic stakeholder/knowledge intermediary was crucial to the process of impact generation, by following up with the academics and establishing an avenue through which their research could be translated into policy and practice.

Role of the ESRC Seminar Scheme

"If not for the Seminar Series, we would not have this (Talking Points) work, no question. And the policy and practice landscape in health and social care would look different without this series."

"ESRC funding makes it legitimate to address issues and has high prestige, so it is easier to bring policymakers and practitioners to address conceptual issues, when they are so busy --- the kudos definitely helps attract people."

Processes

Very deliberate efforts were made to engage diverse participants. For example, the awardholder team developed a list of 60 stakeholders for individual invitations, with some invited to present as well. Also, key network members with contacts in these areas disseminated information about the series to relevant groups of service users and practitioners and research students, so that 15-20 more individuals joined the network. Finally, each seminar was publicised to groups and networks in the location of the event (each was held in a different part of the UK); this tactic was particularly useful in gaining representation from actual service users and their carers, who did not have to travel long distances. A non-academic stakeholder, also a knowledge intermediary, appreciated the constructive tone set by the awardholder and colleagues: "Their style and approach made such a difference".

Continued, active engagement of Scottish and English stakeholders ensured both academic interest as far as comparisons and also opportunities for shared learning across nations regarding policy and practice. Supplemented by individuals local to a particular event, a cohort of academics came to all the events and, impressively, nearly two-thirds of the stakeholders attended at least two events. In their feedback, many participants commented that this series had been their first opportunity to be part of such a multi-stakeholder network. (Network members from all groups reported that being able to claim expenses for attendance was key to ongoing involvement in the series.)

The format of the events was carefully designed, each including a session on experiences in using, delivering or making policy for services provided in partnership, two sessions on conceptualising and researching partnerships, and a final session lead by a key commentator drawing together the day's messages into the context of recent developments in research, policy or practice. The fourth and final event organised intensive group discussions to develop an agenda for research, policy and practice.

Key knowledge exchange lessons:

For Projects/Academic Researchers

- The mix of participants is important, including but not limited to well-known academic names.
- Include service users and carers, practitioners, to make sure key messages can get tested out after the series. A key way to see if there is impact is to involve such people in the process.
- Combinations of participants can really help to drill down to key messages, for example from and across different geographical areas.
- Communication is important—for instance, circulating readings ahead of time, keeping people up to date and providing reports letting participants know what had come of their efforts.
- Being able to provide travel and even accommodation can make the difference for some.

For Non-academic Partners

- It is about having the time to have the conversations. Often you hear something good but then you are back at base and lose the opportunity… so being able to follow up is key.
- The important thing is making it (research) practically applicable and making it part of people's current priorities…. We linked it to current issues and priorities that local people were wrestling with at the time --- how would learning from research influence the work people had to do then, locally.
- Practical work with partners does not happen overnight.

Case Study
Academic Entrepreneurship: Putting a New Area on the Map

Project:

Rethinking Arts Marketing (2005-2007)

Principal investigator:

Daragh O'Reilly, formerly University of Leeds, now University of Sheffield
(and 7 colleagues, at 7 different institutions)

Research summary:

The key objective was to re-think marketing, adding conceptual dimensions and theoretical development to push the field on and reframe what it could be. It had been "very niche and framed in a rather mainstream way --- our job was to take hold of it and open up the doors and the windows and let in the winds of change".

The Seminar Series brought together scholars and practitioners working in the area and other relevant areas. "We had our individual enthusiasms as a starting point and then the idea was to allow us to make connections with new ways to frame things." Themes tackled in the six workshops included: Social Arts Marketing, Customer Insights available from Arts Marketing, Creative Methods of Enquiry, Creativity and the Art Enterprise, and the concluding Creative Futures: Driving the Cultural Industries Marketing Agenda. At least two workshops structured sessions promoting interaction between arts marketers and practitioners to discuss potential collaborative research projects, thus clarifying practitioner priorities in the research agenda. Some 200 individuals participated overall, of which three fourths were academics or postgraduate students; at least one international speaker had a strong influence. With "an increased sense of the importance of art and its relationship to capital, the media, political ideologies, social issues, the market and consumption", core group members and others were able to "re-think arts marketing" in terms of connecting it to a wide variety of disciplines and bringing in promising methods of inquiry.

The Series funding enabled people to work on a project together and become very focussed on the development of the field. Since 2005, the group has delineated further what the field is and "constructed it socially" amongst themselves – and others. Various stages of "institutionalisation" of the newly framed area have occurred over time, for example: the core group took on leadership of a Special Interest Group of the Academy of Marketing ("gelling people .. and leading to other collaborative activities"), multiple conference tracks and journal special issues were dedicated to the area, and a new journal was launched in June 2011, *Arts Marketing: An International Journal*, with one member of the core group a driving editor of the journal and the ESRC imprimatur having contributed: "that brand has respect and garners you respect that you can use as leverage. Publishers are aware of that." By stimulating theoretical development of the field, the Seminar Series helped editors to see the field as more theoretically advanced, so that individuals could get their work published and advance their careers, and "alongside that, more theoretically informed work in the long run will have a more robust effect on practice as well".

Disciplines:

Arts and other marketing, tourism, cultural policy, arts governance, creative enterprise, visual arts, performing arts

Users & stakeholders:

Arts practitioners, arts consultancy, marketing research, publishing

Seminar Series Dimensions:

Networking, New area/ideas, Interdisciplinarity, Stakeholder Engagement, Capacity-building

Key types of impact:

- Conceptual
- Capacity-building
- Enduring Connectivity

Highlighted Impact:

<u>Conceptual impact</u>

The key conceptual impact was the development of arts marketing as a dynamically growing field with a theoretical, research and methodological base. "The Rethinking Arts Marketing seminar series lent significant focus and drive to an emerging area, and thereby helped to transform it as a field and make it attractive for the next generation of researchers. Directly or indirectly, it has led to a significant number of scholarly projects, including five journal special issues, one edited book, a new journal

launch, and a 50-chapter reference book, *The Routledge Companion to Arts Marketing* (due 2013). There is, as a result, a strong sense of community within arts marketing, clear international connections and a range of other new projects. The seminar series helped to make arts marketing one of the strongest Special Interest Groups within the Academy of Marketing. There is now an enduring network of younger researchers. The area has undergone significant conceptual and methodological development as a result of all this effort. The ESRC seminar series was the catalyst."

Other non-academic impacts:

Capacity-building

As he and most of his leadership team members were recent or not-quite finished PhDs when they began the Series, the PI himself felt that the crystallisation of this new area has been beneficial to his career and has also seen the Series be positive for the careers of some junior researchers breaking through to senior lecturer. He thinks "we would all agree the series was seminal for us, for the field and for our sense of who we were as scholars and what contribution we could make". The success of the Seminar Series led to the core group taking leadership of the Special Interest Group within the Academy of Marketing. This role expanded to deliberate building of doctoral capacity in arts marketing, for example with events on research methodology increasing plurality of approaches to research in the area. "More doctoral students are beginning to flow… small clusters of PhD students are growing". The PI's current university, the University of Sheffield, has launched an MSc in Management (Creative and Cultural Industries), with 35 students demonstrating demand; as the academics teach about their research, they are "plugging the next generation into our newly constructed approach".

Enduring Connectivity:

Individuals are still in regular connection with each other, and are all in the field of arts marketing in different ways.

Routes toward Impacts

Key roles

The PI and colleagues from different institutions came together through the learned society, the Academy of Marketing. Years ago, in 1999, the PI ("trying desperately to see if anyone shared my interest in arts marketing") had set up the first JISC arts and heritage marketing e-list for 140 members internationally, so he and others could become aware of what each other were doing. When he put out feelers for others interested in bidding for the Seminar Series, the core group came together; in their bid they were able to cite support of £1K from the Arts & Heritage Marketing Special Interest Group of the Academy of Marketing.

Processes

Six day-long workshops were held, with team members running them at their home institutions, making the Series widespread geographically. Seminars were led off by one or two headline speakers to get people's thoughts going, with discussion after each and then plenary discussion and reflection at the end of the day.

"We thought quite carefully in the beginning about who the stakeholders would be, so that informed who we wanted to be there, speakers, and how we wanted to frame the subjects we wanted to cover." The focus included quite a bit on method "so we could always have in the back of our minds that this would help us do better research, and publish it". "We tried to go into it in a way that was conscious of the legacy we would create… with a conscious focus on where this would go concerning outputs."

The series was promoted widely to diverse scholars and practitioners, through international electronic discussion lists, personal networks, notices and a feature article in *Arts Professional* - a key magazine for practitioners, a website, and newsletters of the Academy of Marketing.

Follow-on Activity toward Outcomes

The core group and other colleagues followed up the Series with a series of pro-active developmental steps. While they would not claim that all subsequent successes came solely from the series, there is a very strong sense that "the series catalysed these by giving us the confidence and sense of togetherness and sense of impetus to go out and look for things." The core team members: "took over the running of tracks at as many conferences as we could, encouraging people to submit. Then we thought, 'let's try some special issues in journals". Between 2009-2011, they put out five special issues (about 30 articles) in different journals, and launched a dedicated new journal in the summer of 2011. While contributors went far beyond the original team, the team members' Seminar experience was critical: "without our confidence and impetus those issues would not have happened. It is a testimony to the ESRC brand and also work done within the learned academy's Special Interest Group. We were trusted, and it worked. We were entrepreneurs! Every time we succeeded in something, we used it to

persuade people about the next."

ESRC Research Seminars Funding Role

The Seminar funding was hugely appreciated as playing a critical role, especially since the applicants were aware that they were innovative and trying to go for something new, not mainstream: "We didn't think we had a snowball's chance in hell!...but may they be forever blessed." Without the Series enabling so much to be done, things would not have developed "so quickly or imaginatively or interestingly".

ESRC's Seminar Series is credited with having played a critical role in this emerging field of direct relevance to key economic and cultural sectors: "There is no doubt that, without that £15,000, the entire field of arts marketing would not have developed as well as it has done. Seen in the context of the political and economic importance of the creative and cultural industries, it was money very well spent."

Key knowledge exchange lessons:

For Projects/Academic Researchers

- Systematically put the power of the ESRC brand to work to attract speakers, and open the doors to journals, conference tracks and also to unlock goodwill and resources from one's own institution – internal marketing.
- Have quite careful initial conversations about where the series might go. Choose topics of seminars in a way that anticipates acting as a springboard to publications.
- In terms of academic literature, special issues can be a very good way of getting new ideas quickly embedded. Getting special issues in different journals can spread the influence of the work.

For ESRC/Funders

- Even with a catalyst such as the Seminar Series, clearly consolidation of a new area or field takes place over time, for example from the PI's first e-list in 1999 through the Seminar Series of 2005-2007 to a new dedicated journal launched in 2011.

Case Study

Innovation: Networking toward a new area coalescing around novel materials in society

Project:
New Materials, New Technologies: Innovation, Future and Society
Principal investigator:
Susanne Kuechler, University College London (January-December 2008) With: Mark Miodownik (King's College, Engineering); Victor Buchli (UCL)
Research Summary:
Developing the fledgling area of social science materials research, this interdisciplinary seminar series debated the new material relationship between people and things emerging from within cutting-edge industrial research and design. In the context of the twenty-first century's creation of rapidly increasing numbers of new materials and new technologies, the series identified a range of concerns and interests across stakeholder groups and mapped social and cultural issues. This created the opportunity to feedback into design, implementation and uptake of new technology. Deliberately developed in sequence, the series' four seminars were based upon: Social History of the Prototype (18th century to the present); New Materials (perception of materials in society and materials innovation in relation to long-term change); New Technologies (radical changes in technology and manufacture, including, for example, nanotechnology); and Innovation, Future and Society (wrapping up with examination of emerging challenges to long-held Euro-American understandings of objects in our social worlds). The series built upon and expanded/strengthened existing UCL and KCL networks; "our core group was already ready and hungry for it; the series played a reinforcing role, giving people the chance to formalise things and move onto the next stage". Furthermore, the series involved stakeholders throughout, exposing them to the value that anthropologists and others could offer to their work.
Disciplines:
anthropologists, engineers, material scientists, historians, philosophers
Users & Stakeholders:
product designers, artists, archivists, curators, architects, professional practitioners
Seminar Series Dimensions:
Networking, New area, New ideas, Interdisciplinarity, Stakeholder engagement, Capacity-building
Key types of impact:
• Capacity-building • Conceptual • Enduring Connectivity
Highlighted impact:
Conceptual impact The series had a conceptual impact in terms of helping to build a new area. "I can't tell you how important that seminar scheme was; it was an absolute catalyst…not just for us who ran it but for others." The series helped to coalesce thinking around a new area, prior to recognition as a formal research domain. It "definitely did catalyse a new subfield". One example of the timeliness of this area in the non-academic world lies in the growing phenomenon of "materials libraries" or government funded and private resource centres, whether related to manufacturing, the creative industries or sustainability, for example; more work is needed to improve transfer of knowledge around ever-new materials that are making a difference in society. Yet, the area is still "young" and vulnerable: "Materials and new materials are still very much virgin territory in the social science field." There was also a conceptual impact on non-academic stakeholders as they learned about what anthropology (and other fields) had to offer: "It introduced us to this idea that the real science and knowledge and learning behind the anthropology side of materials and applications was something that was relevant to designers and to innovation. It has had kind of an intellectual impact in a way, though that sounds a bit posh." A specific example, manifesting itself some three years after the series, was the invitation of the PI to speak at the second event of two exploring the idea of weight in design; the event organiser had been deeply involved in the seminar series and, with the first event's participants, realised that there was a need to understand the anthropology and psychology of weight, and how it is perceived in various goods. The primarily private sector participants were exposed to an

anthropological approach by the PI's presentation. Proceedings of that short series, including an account of the PI's talk in the event report section, will be published (Rightweight) and distributed to numerous young designers. So, multiple designers and companies were exposed to anthropology that would not have been had the organiser not been influenced by the earlier ESRC seminar series. "We would really like to think business people would be affected."

Another example of a later "ripple effect" emanating from the series is still undergoing development: after the series, the PI and an academic colleague from the series introduced the field of contemporary waste archaeology to a private sector-based "knowledge intermediary" in interested helping a group come together to explore materials in landfills. Now thinking about the importance of understanding patterns of disposal, the private sector individuals "are having really interesting discussions we would never have had had we not met the UCL people".

Other Non-academic Impacts:

Capacity-building

Ph D students were involved and also at least 3 MA students during the series later became PhD students in related areas as UCL developed doctoral training involving materials science and social science. The series "seems to have kick-started a growing number of students interested in materials." Aware that they are defining a new field for themselves, the PhD students have launched their own reading group. By participating in the series, one MA student came across her topic, the growing phenomenon of materials libraries, which then developed into her PhD topic. "The seminar series got me interested in this whole topic…it was definitely a turning point…I really like the interdisciplinary angle…I had never come across something so directly combining arts and sciences." The student also met non-academic contacts now playing supervisory roles in the student's AHRC Collaborative doctorate award, as well as finding informants for her research through the series.

A new Masters course, MA in materials culture, has been developed at UCL—the fact that this appears to be attractive to stakeholders, suggests a relevance and timeliness to the niche kicked off through the seminar series. (Referring to private sector informants, one researcher observed "this (new course) appeals to the kinds of people I work with…. I could be researching alongside them!")

Enduring Connectivity:

A robust network around social science materials research exists at UCL and neighbouring institutions such as V&A and the Royal College of Art. UCL and Kings College London continue to submit joint bids and to interact, particularly through the latter's new Institute of Making led by Kings College collaborators in the series, with a co-founder and the Creative Director having been a PhD student involved in the series (while also curator of Kings College's Materials Library). For example, the Institute will provide access to its Materials Library materials for UCL's new Masters students.
There is an intangible sense of connectedness, with individuals subsequently encountering each other still mentioning the series. One interviewee, a junior researcher, has already seen two projects come out of people meeting each other at the series, one with the design department of Goldsmiths and one helping a V&A contact from the series develop a book on theatre materials---that has happened this year, despite the series finishing in 2008. ("These things take time.") Furthermore, the series "jumpstarted an international network", including a follow-on EU proposal.

Ties also continue with non-academic stakeholders, as with the Materials and Design Exchange (MADE) group within the Technology Strategy Board's Materials KT Network: "We have stayed in touch with the UCL thing and involved Susanne and colleagues in a lot of work we've been doing (such as speaking at an event three years after the series). And they in turn have involved us. For instance, a colleague and I are Associates of the new MA they're setting up, and we have been involved in discussions as they set that up. And we're also great chums now."

Routes toward Impacts:

Key roles

The key knowledge intermediary of the Materials and Design Exchange (MADE) group had been approached by the PI and supported the series by promoting it to their private sector membership, finding non-academic speakers and participating. Other individuals involved also acted as conduits, bringing their non-academic networks into contact with the series.

Processes

Deliberately, a wide range of speakers and participants were invited, with each seminar involving two academic and two non-academic speakers. In fact this approach itself made an impact elsewhere, on

a knowledge exchange group with many private sector members: "We've realised the best things we do is when we have really quite extreme cross-disciplinary, cross-cultural mixtures of people and speakers. We were quite possibly inspired by Susanne's series to do that, as it had an extraordinary mix of speakers."

Individuals were encouraged to attend more than one seminar, so that understanding built up over the year. "It was a great opportunity to carve out a formal space to bring academics and non-academics together over the nice period of year… you rarely get a chance to build over a year….there were lots of repeat participants." "There was a definite arc through the year. It was really nice to spread out through that time, and be able to build relatively sustained relationships, especially in the core group. This was reinforced by repeated attendance; 50% came to two or more seminars. And once they came, attendees 'got' what we were trying to do."

The series benefited from a core group focussed on the development of the series. "The core group physically met and talked about it (the series) –carving out some time so we could talk about ideas first and think who could contribute to this debate…it was really stimulating to have those meetings."

The series also helped build or fortify broader networks (including stakeholders) by allowing the organisers to think about how people they met in other situations could potentially contribute to the next meeting. "It's great to have an excuse up your sleeve to invite someone to something."

As an innovative twist to the format, different objects (videos, pieces of work or materials) were used to engage both non-academic and academic participants. "Another great thing we did –at the first couple of events we had real physical things…the object itself was interdisciplinary".

Key Knowledge Exchange Lessons:

For Projects/Academic Researchers

- Keep everything quite varied, not just in content but in how things are presented.
- Don't be afraid to try something new or invite a speaker someone else might not think is relevant; have confidence in your choice.
- Move out of the comfort zone of only inviting people to speak or listen from your own world… Also bring in knowledge intermediaries or people in a specialised world that only slightly overlaps the circle that your conference is in….Just to hear their take on what you're trying to do, which might be quite different from what you're used to.
- Be inclusive of different audiences – make invitations as wide as possible. You never know who will turn up. Get word out to as many as possible….people won't turn up unless they are interested. You never know who might come or what ideas they might share.
- Make sure to allow time to ask questions and talk at the end as a group…create a tone so that everyone feels comfortable talking.

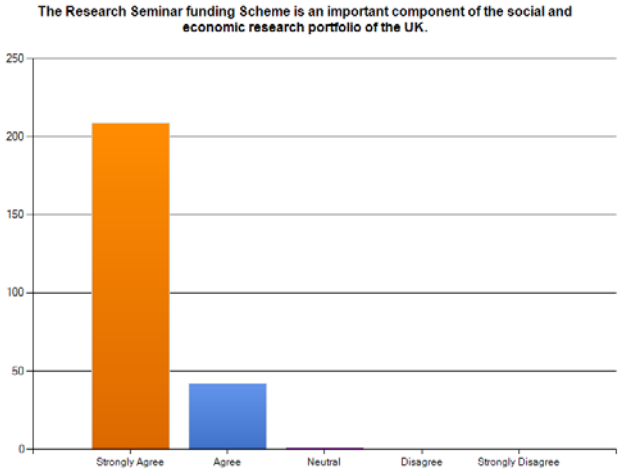
For ESRC/Funders

- This Scheme's cross-disciplinary, risk-taking approach is relevant to groups beyond academia.

LESSONS LEARNED/INSIGHTS AND FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHEME

Overall Positive Reaction

The short message is*: participants value the Scheme very highly*. Almost to a person, interviewees and respondents alike, they see it as an important component of the social and economic research portfolio of the UK, with nearly all emphatically agreeing with this view, as demonstrated in survey responses.



Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses/Issues

Perceived strengths and weaknesses (or issues faced) were elicited from participants and responses then clustered. To flesh out perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, a short "narrative" about each cluster, drawing upon representative quoted comments from free text survey responses, is provided in Annex F. Survey respondents articulated a wide variety of strengths, often associated with the roles played by the Scheme.

Perceived Strengths

- Stimulus for Innovation/New Thinking
- Convening Role
- Networking/Collaboration-Building
- Linkage with Stakeholders
- Flexibility/Openness
- Value for Money
- Capacity-building

When asked, respondents also provided weaknesses or issues facing the Scheme, although it must be said that the positive nature of the strengths' comments far outweighed negativity expressed toward the Scheme itself. (The single most repeated answer to the question asking for weaknesses was "None".)

Perceived Weaknesses or Issues

- No weaknesses
- Finances (future and per-grant)
- Lack of follow-on support/continuity
- Burden of Work Required, Need for Institutional/Administrative Support
- Impact Issues

Other Schemes

Attuned to seminar schemes though they are, interviewees could only very rarely come up with any somewhat similar schemes, when asked. Sometimes a scheme would be mentioned, only to point out ways in which it is lacking relative to the Seminars Scheme. For instance, one person mentioned the Mellon Foundation but then noted that its Distinguished Professor talks revolve around just one person, and that other foundations may do things that are somewhat along the Scheme's lines, but much more focussed. Some examples given were extremely specific in focus, for example the MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning Program or the Hewlett Packard Catalyst Program.

The sequential meetings over time enabled by this Scheme are highly valued, and rare. For instance, it was mentioned that the British Academy used to give Conference grants, but these were one-off. "Study groups" in some associations/learned societies or "streams"/special events funds in some annual conferences may allow periodic returning to discussions, but usually these will be attended by people with a largely similar intellectual outlook, not the mix of perspectives deliberately gathered by most of the Series. Some EU funding for special interest groups, "though clunky to apply for", was cited as possibly close to the Scheme, and one interviewee cited Leverhulme as doing some funding of international networks that is "vaguely similar", although another interviewee says Leverhulme tends more to fund single big conferences – a very different phenomenon.

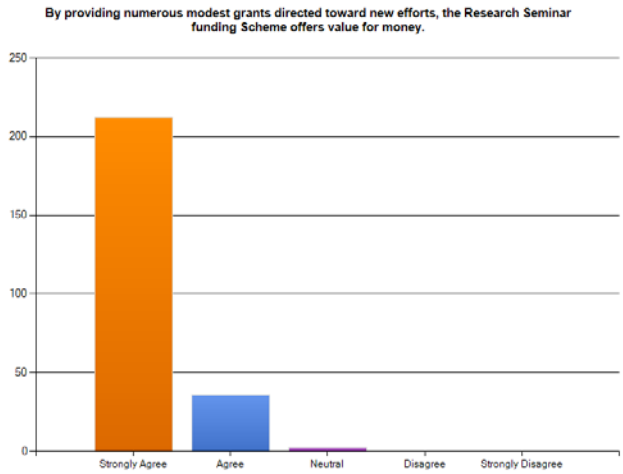
Perhaps the only scheme apparently similar to Research Seminars is the AHRC Research Networking Scheme. Offering up to two years funding for a total of £30K (with the possibility of an additional £15K in full economic costing to add an international dimension), this Scheme appears to aim to accomplish pump-priming in somewhat similar ways, encouraging new networks, interactions, areas and debates.[14] The AHRC incorporates some "Highlight Notices" within this Scheme, to accelerate attention paid to key future-oriented themes.

Overall, other than the AHRC Scheme available to a somewhat different constituency, there is a strong sense that ESRC's Research Seminars Scheme is highly distinctive internationally. There is even a sense that other countries are envious of the Scheme, and perhaps surprised that this model exists as it does, particularly in the social/economic sciences, without a political angle.

Value for Money

The Research Seminars Scheme is definitely viewed as providing value for money. For example, with the exception of two individuals, survey respondents were unanimous in their approval of the statement "By providing numerous modest grants directed toward new efforts, the Research Seminar funding Scheme offers value for money" – and 84.8% of the 99.2% agreed strongly--- a ringing endorsement.

[14] "The Research Networking Scheme is intended to support forums for the discussion and exchange of ideas on a specified thematic area, issue or problem. The intention is to facilitate interactions between researchers and stakeholders through, for example, a short-term series of workshops, seminars, networking activities or other events. The aim of these activities is to stimulate new debate across boundaries, for example, disciplinary, conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and/or international. Proposals should explore new areas, be multi-institutional and can include creative or innovative approaches or entrepreneurship. Proposals must justify the approach taken and clearly explain the novelty or added value for bringing the network participants together. "http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/ResearchNetworking.aspx funding



Yet more feeling emerged during interviews, when answers to the question, "Does the Scheme provide value for money?" were resoundingly positive. Even allowing for the fact that these individuals had for the most part been beneficiaries of the Scheme, there was an undeniable force of conviction to their responses. Arguments included the Scheme's seed corn role, its support of an exploratory element, willingness to support innovation, and "growing" of new areas. "It enables adaptability within the science base to try new things, exploration, and creates a vitality within the academic community that I haven't found in other places."

Proportionality of investment to return is often cited as well. "I can't prove it, but every part of my body screams that for fifteen grand they got a hell of a lot!" Conventional, tangible outputs such as publications are cited, along with personal professional development and the growth of new networks and even niche areas, enabling a forward-looking agility within the UK's social science community. "Relatively small amounts of money per series enable a very large group of people to create a network or community to explore up and coming questions or to adapt the UK research base to take advantage of opportunities." Through each series engaging with a network of different academics and practitioners, there is scope for ripple effects and impacts of various kinds. "In terms of impact, pound for pound, this has had more impact than anything else I've ever done!"

Interviewees would often spontaneously reflect on the special importance of the Scheme against the backdrop of the funding situation for the social and economic sciences, including but not limited to the current absence of the Small Grants Programme. Some worry that concentrating more money in fewer, larger grants will limit diversity, whereas the Seminars Scheme fits with a complex systems view of social sciences allowing multiple opportunities for innovation. "It is fantastic for exploring new ideas and bringing researchers together, for taking risks, for trying things out, for creating spaces for things that there is not necessarily already broad agreement on – especially important in the current climate." Yet, the point was also made that pathways leading onward from Seminar Series will be important to careers.

Messages received for developing and improving the Scheme

Respondents and interviewees were offered the opportunity to send messages to ESRC on the future of the Scheme. Suggestions for further development can be clustered into several emphases –and *the strongest message by far is to continue the Scheme.*

Messages

- Continue the Scheme, perhaps with more funding
- Direct funding to "new" dimensions
- Provide follow-on opportunities
- Improve dissemination about the Series and their accomplishments
- Make the Scheme as "light touch" as possible, in terms of applications, administration and

reporting
- Ensure HEI support/recognition
- Be careful not to impose unrealistic demands for "impacts"

Continue the Scheme, perhaps with more funding

Most frequently, respondents emphasised, often with feeling, that *the main point for the future was that the Scheme continue, and perhaps even be expanded, prioritised in the face of financial pressures*. "PLEASE don't axe this as well --- it's a foundation of social science research !!! … the seminar series is the last bastion of academic engagement that is actually taken seriously by everyone". Similarly, "this kind of thinking and taking time in HE is under threat and the scheme protects and values it."

> "This is a valuable scheme that gives researchers at different career stages and in different disciplines and institutions to work together, often with policy makers and practitioners. These smaller resources and pots of money can benefit scholars in furthering their research objectives and agendas. This is useful in a context where funding is increasingly for large sums and large projects. Often these smaller projects/networking activities can be as, or more, effective and I would be disappointed to see the ESRC discontinuing or significantly changing this scheme."

Some suggested that ESRC provide more funding to cover costs such as the time PIs put into administration. Others suggested more funding for specific features, such as international travel, or perhaps video-recording for web dissemination. Travel expenses (for all participants who need it, not just members of a 'club') are cited as important. (Another suggestion is to allow flexibility for series to take place over longer periods.) Probably very few if any would want to see a smaller number of grants awarded, however.

Direct funding to "new" dimensions

Respondents often stressed that the Scheme should remain distinctive in its support of innovations, addressing a diversity of objectives, for instance by supporting new/non-traditional areas, interdisciplinary explorations, development of junior researchers or enabling new dialogue with policymakers and practitioners ("the benefit of the seminar series is that it can fund conversations that might not otherwise happen"). Reserving the Scheme for new, cutting edge foci is often recommended. ESRC is encouraged to fund innovative, even a bit speculative bids and "acknowledge that this is a form of 'venture capital' on a modest scale and accept that much will fail". Despite this "risk" investment role, as noted above, the Scheme portfolio is widely perceived to offer value for money.

In terms of the future research landscape, the Scheme awards can enable visionary explorers, for example, as one respondent observed "They are particularly useful for early- and mid-career researchers who want to challenge conventional thinking in a subject or on a topic." The Scheme can make a difference to how ESRC is viewed:

> "It is important that ESRC is seen as a brand that is in touch with innovation and reaching down to young scholars, rather than being inaccessible".

Provide follow-on opportunities

Respondents demonstrate a desire for the series to "go somewhere", ideally to further funding from ESRC, perhaps incentive money available for subsequent activities consolidating the network or potential impacts, or the opportunity to apply for follow-on research or knowledge exchange grants. One suggestion suggested that ESRC provide some sort of critical friend input during and at the end of the grant, to discuss follow-on activity and/or tactics such as, perhaps, securing agreements from book publishers.

Improve dissemination about the Series and their accomplishments

Although few if any would ask to do more reporting, a frequent suggestion is that the ESRC capture and publicise more about the Series and their achievements --- "maintain a visible record of all the activities supported by the Scheme, to enhance the Scheme's visibility over all".

Respondents (like the evaluator) recognise that all outcomes do not occur by the end of a series: “extend reporting over a longer time-scale (perhaps annually for three years) so that all outcomes can be tracked”. Another suggests “funding of a follow-up, say 5 years later, to review what emerged and developed.” Whenever the outputs are captured, there is a suggestion that ESRC do more about publicising them.

Along with capturing achievements, a common website across the seminars might be useful. When series PIs do post papers or summarise meetings as part of their activity, perhaps the ESRC would post those (or links to them) on a dedicated page in its website.

Some suggest that very light-touch advice to awardholders be made available. One suggestion was that vignettes and examples of past approaches would be helpful; another suggestion was that “lessons learned” from previous seminar coordinators be made available somehow to new coordinators; another suggestion was for a start-up event at which PIs could share approaches, strategies and so on; another suggestion was some coaching on dissemination articles aimed at non-academics.

Make the Scheme as “light touch” as possible, in terms of applications, administration and reporting

While respondents are willing to go the extra mile to make an award work, there is considerably less enthusiasm for expanding additional effort toward what would be perceived as bureaucracy. “Don’t be tempted to monitor and evaluate too closely and attach strings in a misguided attempt to secure value for money.” In terms of applications, while some think the process could be simpler with fewer questions, in general the Scheme’s flexibility and “openness to creative interpretation” are praised.

Ensure HEI support/recognition

Respondents sometimes suggested that ESRC should ensure that HEIs facilitate the organisation of seminars, if they have agreed to do so for the bid. Others raised the hope that ESRC would somehow encourage institutions to recognise fully the significance of the award, despite its low monetary value.

Be careful not to impose unrealistic demands for “impacts”

Respondents voice the hope that the ESRC will have appropriate expectations for awards of short duration that emphasise exploration. “It is not realistic to expect them to have impacts in the same way as a research grant”. For the most part, respondents would agree with the suggestion made for “wider consideration of what impact means in this context”, particularly as they note many sorts of achievements of which ESRC could be proud. As just one among many diverse examples, one mentioned that, “the international dimension… is particularly valuable in raising the profile of British social science”. Clearly, any one individual series is not likely to address equally strongly all possible objectives.

Further Development: Evaluator’s Summary Recommendations to ESRC

Continue the Scheme

This report’s central recommendation to ESRC is to continue the Scheme. Evidence of return on investment aligns squarely with emphatic views as to the Scheme’s value for money expressed by the full range of interviewees and survey respondents.

Value the Scheme’s multiple roles

In weighing continuance and/or development of the Scheme, ESRC is encouraged to see the Scheme “in the round” by recognising its value from multiple angles, as it plays multiple roles:

Roles played by the Scheme

- Pump-priming
- Catalysis of innovation
- Enhancement of impacts on the economy and society

- Diversification of the research portfolio
- Extending the reach of the ESRC
- Enabling intellectual growth

- *Pump-priming*

There is a dynamic to the emergence and evolution of new ideas and new fields, and the Seminar Series are often credited with launching, shaping or accelerating that dynamic. Frequently-used phrases like "pump-priming" or "seed corn" or "kick-starting" reflect a key process role of the Scheme, sometimes in terms of developing networks, collaborations, bodies of collective research, new ideas or even new areas, and sometimes in terms of individuals' careers (for example moving on to larger grants or toward extended interaction with diverse academic or stakeholder colleagues).

- *Catalysis of innovation*

The Scheme has allowed Series participants to explore new ideas or approaches. Such innovation contributes not just to academia but also to the world beyond. A private sector knowledge intermediary active in knowledge exchange made this point after deep involvement with one of the seminar series:

> "This kind of work is essential. If we're trying to innovate our way out of the mess we're in into a fabulous future, this is a really good way of encouraging, nurturing, sparking off innovation. You think new thoughts, new ideas, new alliances and it doesn't cost very much. It's cheap but it is so, so important. Formalise it a bit and encourage it and fund people to do it. We have an incredible pool of talent and knowledge and the innovation urge is huge in this country. We just don't know how to nurture it…this is one way."

- *Enhancement of impacts on the economy and society*

The Scheme enables building of interactive relationships between academics and policymakers, practitioners and other stakeholders, a critical step in impact generation. Some of these relationships and networks show an enduring connectivity and in many cases Seminars have led to conceptual or even instrumental impacts among stakeholders, along with capacity-building and fostering collaborative attitudes among junior researchers.

- *Diversification of the research portfolio*

From an innovative researcher's point of view, the Scheme enables exploratory activities that may well not be funded through any other channels. The Scheme thus enables diversification of the UK's research and impact portfolio, for example through the evolution of new ideas, approaches or even areas. As another example, there is the question of scale: one interviewee said with genuine feeling that

> "the Research Seminars Scheme can do something that big research grants can't…. It is helpful for people like me that can't get mega-funds yet are beyond postdoc/early career grants… the Research Seminars Scheme is on a 'mesa' level… you can think big, with input of all these different people, yet you do not necessarily have to be asking for millions of pounds".

- *Extending the reach of the ESRC*

The number of academics at various career stages and non-academics from various sectors who are drawn into any one series, and into all the series cumulatively, is significant, with numerous possibilities for impacts or "ripple effects". Distribution of Seminar grants across research organisations indicates both alignment with institutions doing extremely well in more conventional competitions, and also a spread across other institutions, thus with modest funds opening up the reach of the ESRC.

- *Enabling intellectual growth*

Through thoughtful free-text responses and interview reflections, a picture has emerged of a passionate, deep gratitude for the opportunity the Scheme provides academics even in these times to return to the heart of what motivates them -- sustained and multi-layered exploration of compelling ideas and problems. "Above all, in a culture in which time poverty is what most people feel, it (the series) forces you to have this concentrated focused time

that you have to honour and you want to honour." Whether the stated objective has to do with interdisciplinarity, engagement with stakeholders, international exchange or development of a new idea, approach or area --- individuals value the rare opportunity to wrestle with intellectual challenges in a format that sparks ideas from one person to another.

Encourage innovation and risk-taking

The Scheme plays a distinctive role, quite possibly world-wide, in its facilitation of innovation through sustained dialogue and exploration. With any dynamic promoting innovation comes risk. Echoing what so many Scheme participants have said, a key recommendation here is to let people take risks, (within reason) allowing them to explore. As a small but important component of the ESRC research portfolio, this Scheme can then act as a low-cost, low-risk vehicle for testing new possibilities. In any event, even if a particular Seminar does not fully reach all its objectives, constructive processes take place.

Don't complicate the Scheme

The Scheme is seen as "doing what it says on the tin", providing a mechanism for the pursuit of new ideas to which applicants feel committed, allowing dialogue to continue and grow over multiple events which deliberately encourage interactive discussions. Indications are that the review process works fairly and effectively (although exacting a cost in staff and panel time), with sufficient information to work with in the applications as currently composed. The Scheme's relative simplicity is valued by most, although even so a few individuals complain of bureaucracy involved in applications or administration. Particularly given that successful PIs will be doing a great deal of work to bring their Series to life, they should not be burdened unnecessarily by such demands. While ideally host research organisations would provide administrative support for implementation of seminars, in these days of full economic costing it may not be realistic to expect much more institutional help "for free". ESRC might arm new PIs with: a) guidance as to types of institutional help they might be able to secure, even informally and/or b) a summary of the valuable sorts of outcomes to which such seminars can lead, helping institutions to visualise their own "self-interest" in making seminar awards successful. ESRC might consider providing slightly increased awards to allow PIs to more formally "buy" administrative help—but if and only if ESRC remained able to give (at least) the same number (or fund at least the same percentage of applications). When all is said and done, despite the hard work, PIs deeply appreciate their awards. Indeed, these awards are often so vibrant that they could add even more value as a learning opportunity for ESRC about dynamics of development of new ideas, fields, networks or other impacts. If *extremely* light touch and constructive, involvement of a case officer during rather than only after a subset of awards might allow for first-hand learning. Ideally, such a person might bring together a group of *willing* PIs to share with each other what works and what doesn't, helping each other as a special community of change agents and at the same time immersing the case officer in issues, dynamics and good practices.

Appreciate the good-will of participants toward the Scheme

Attitudes toward the Scheme are extremely positive and genuine gratitude toward the ESRC is often expressed. While this may be intangible, the good-will of so many members of its community should be valued by the ESRC.

Recognise and communicate the value for money represented by the Scheme

The Scheme represents a highly favourable proportionality of extensive and varied outputs to quite modest input. Internally, the ESRC may want to factor this, and the large number and spread of individuals reached by the Scheme, into its decision-making regarding funding mechanisms.

Externally, the ESRC may want to make more of a public show of this Scheme, explicitly celebrating its roles and accomplishments. In addition to inspiring proposal-writers and their home institutions, a higher visibility of Scheme grants and their achievements could serve ESRC and its community well, illustrating as it would the connectivity between ideas,

research and the development of both academic and non-academic impacts. Ideally, current end-of-award reports could be “mined” by staff for website highlights. One possibility—without significantly adding to the reporting burden—would be to ask each awardholder to include a summary paragraph of highlighted tangible and intangible accomplishments that is explicitly written for public viewing, in such a way that it could be added to easily should the ESRC, still with a very light touch, wish to “check in” with awardholders every 3-5 years to update their paragraph on academic and non-academic impacts and accomplishments.

Conclusion

Taken together, even the goals for the Research Seminar Grants of any one year, let alone several years or indeed the life of the Scheme, convey a sense of the vitality and imagination of the UK’s social and economic research scholars. The ways in which the Seminars have addressed objectives such as networking, stakeholder engagement and capacity-building, as well as challenges such as interdisciplinarity, demonstrate their ability to help realise the potential of ESRC research for impact. Diverse innovative achievements across areas and dimensions represent real return on investment. Finally, at a time when morale may be a real issue in its community, the ESRC’s support of an intellectual grass-roots activity enabling creative exploration and stimulating dialogue may be very powerful indeed.

ANNEX A: FRAMEWORK OF CORE QUESTIONS

I.A. Applications & Distribution
I.A.1Does the Scheme attract good quality social science applications?
I.A.2 Is the ESRC able to process applications effectively, and does the assessment process identify the highest quality groups? Where continued funding is sought is past performance appropriately considered?
I.A.3 How has the ESRC framed the Scheme and articulated criteria, over the years?
I.A.4 Are applications received from across the social science portfolio?
I.A.5 What is the distribution of grants across Research Organisations, and is this appropriate in relation to the spread of expertise?
I.B. Operational Factors
I.B.1 What support from Research Organisations is available for managing seminar grants and is this sufficient? What contributions do Research Organisations make to research seminar grants?
1.B.2 What are the typical formats for seminars employed by grant holders? Are some formats more effective at achieving specific objectives than others?
I.C. Administration & Follow-up
I.C.1 Are the reporting and review arrangements appropriate for the type of grant?
II.A. Changes & Relationships Catalysed
II.A.1 To what extent does the Scheme attract, support and facilitate NEW research groups/networks, as opposed to established groups/networks?
II.A.2 What were the stated objectives for awards (e.g. KE, interdisciplinarity etc)? Did these objectives evolve? Did any surprises occur?
II.A.3 What impact has the Scheme had on fostering interdisciplinary research partnerships?
II.A.4 What impact has the Scheme had on developing collaboration between Research Organisation-based researchers and research users such as policy-makers and practitioners?
II.A.5 Have research seminars produced innovative new research ideas and research areas, and what examples are there of these?
II.A.6 What impact has the Scheme had on developing international research networks?
II.A.7 How has the Scheme encouraged participation of junior researchers?
II.B. Outputs
II.B.1 What publications and output types stem from research seminar grants? Are these recorded and promoted effectively?
II.B.2 How accessible are the outputs from the research seminar grants?
III.A. Lessons
III.A.1 What are the identifiable strengths and weaknesses of the Scheme?
III.A.2 What lessons can be learnt from similar schemes operated by other research funders (both in the UK and overseas)?
III.B. Summary & Recommendations
III.B.1 Does the Scheme offer value for money?
III.B.2 Should the Scheme be continued, how might it be developed and improved?

ANNEX B: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TEMPLATES

Overview Interviews

Question
Applications & Distribution
Does the Scheme attract good quality social science applications?
Is the ESRC able to process applications effectively? Does the assessment process identify the highest quality groups? (Where continued funding is sought is past performance appropriately considered?)
How has the ESRC framed the Scheme and articulated criteria, over the years? Do they evolve?
What is the range of applications like? Are applications received from across the social science portfolio? From across Research Organisations? Any surprises?
Operational Factors
What are the typical formats for seminars employed by grant holders?
Administration & Follow-up
Are the reporting and review arrangements appropriate for the type of grant?
Changes & Relationships Catalysed
To what extent does the Scheme attract, support and facilitate new research groups/networks, as opposed to established groups/networks?
How has the Scheme encouraged participation of junior researchers?
Lessons
What are the identifiable strengths and weaknesses of the Scheme?
What lessons can be learnt from similar schemes operated by other research funders (both in the UK and overseas)?
Summary & Recommendations
Does the Scheme offer value for money?
Should the Scheme be continued, how might it be developed and improved?

PI Interviews

Question
I.A.Applications & Distribution
I.B. Operational Factors
I.B.1 What support from Research Organisations is available for managing seminar grants and is this sufficient? What contributions do Research Organisations make to research seminar grants?
1.B.2 What are the typical formats for seminars employed by grant holders? Are some formats more effective at achieving specific objectives than others?
I.C. Administration & Follow-up
I.C.1 Are the reporting and review arrangements appropriate for the type of grant?
II.A. Changes & Relationships Catalysed
II.A.1 To what extent does the Scheme attract, support and facilitate NEW research groups/networks, as opposed to established groups/networks?
II.A.2 What were the stated objectives for awards (e.g. KE, interdisciplinarity etc)? Did these objectives evolve? Did any surprises occur?
II.A.3 What impact has the Scheme had on fostering interdisciplinary research partnerships?
II.A.4 What impact has the Scheme had on developing collaboration between Research Organisation-based researchers and research users such as policy-

makers and practitioners?
II.A.5 Have research seminars produced innovative new research ideas and research areas, and what examples are there of these?
II.A.6 What impact has the Scheme had on developing international research networks?
II.A.7 How has the Scheme encouraged participation of junior researchers?
II.B. Outputs
II.B.1 What publications and output types stem from research seminar grants? Are these recorded and promoted effectively?
II.B.2 How accessible are the outputs from the research seminar grants?
III.A. Lessons
III.A.1 What are the identifiable strengths and weaknesses of the Scheme?
III.A.2 What lessons can be learnt from similar schemes operated by other research funders (both in the UK and overseas)?
III.B. Summary & Recommendations
III.B.1 Does the Scheme offer value for money?
III.B.2 Should the Scheme be continued, how might it be developed and improved?

Case Study Interviews

Project:
Principal investigator:
Research summary:
Users & stakeholders:
Key types of impact:
Highlighted non-academic impact:
Other non-academic impacts:
Routes toward Impacts
Key knowledge exchange lessons:

1. Role/nature of involvement in the Seminar Series?

2. Participants/Users/Stakeholders?

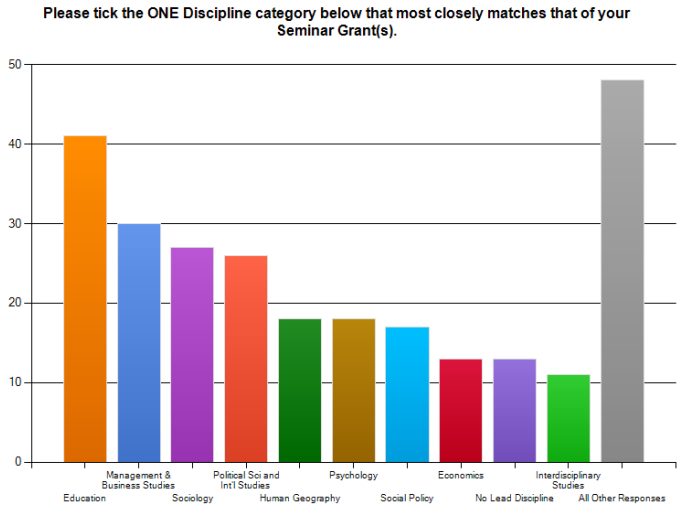
3. Highlighted outcomes/impacts? (Academic, non-academic?) (Stage achieved?) *(Interdisciplinarity, KE/Stakeholders, New ideas/area, Junior Researchers, (international) Network, Other?)*

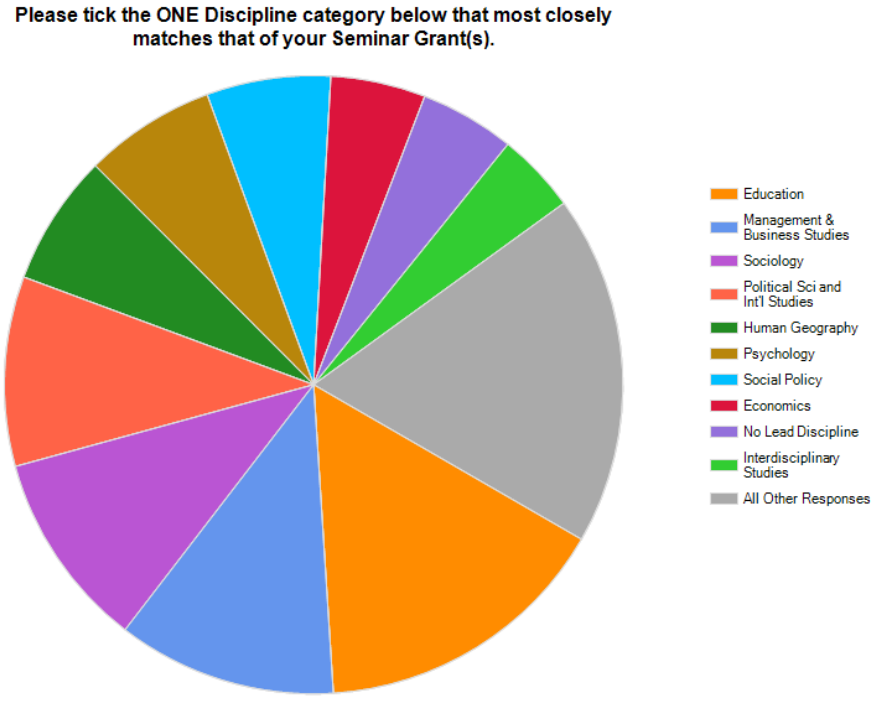
4. (Type of impact?)*(Instrumental, Conceptual, Capacity-building, Enduring Connectivity, Attitude/Culture Change)*

5. Routes toward Impacts? Key mechanisms/processes? Key roles? Format?

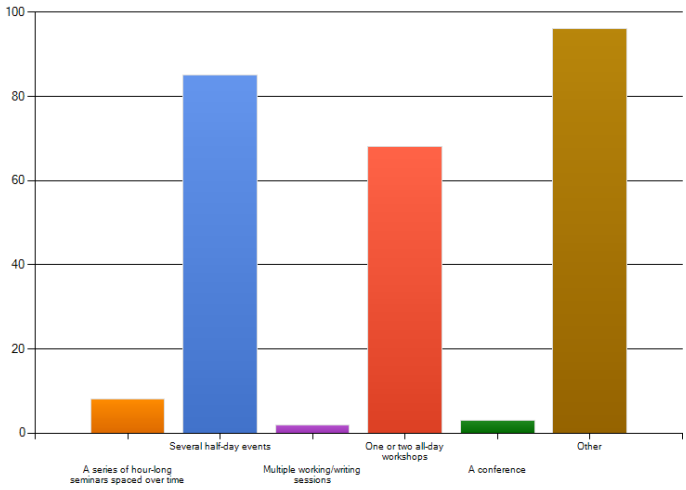
6. Lessons learned…. For Others leading/participating in Seminar Series?
7. Value for Money/Messages to ESRC?

ANNEX C: PI SURVEY, RESPONSE FIGURES

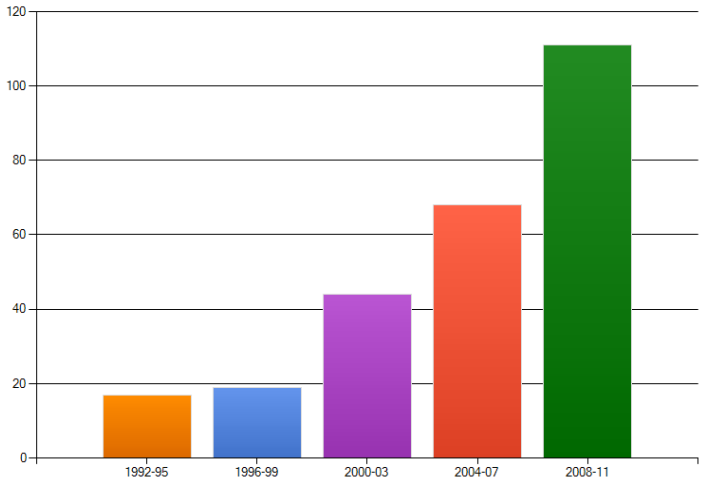




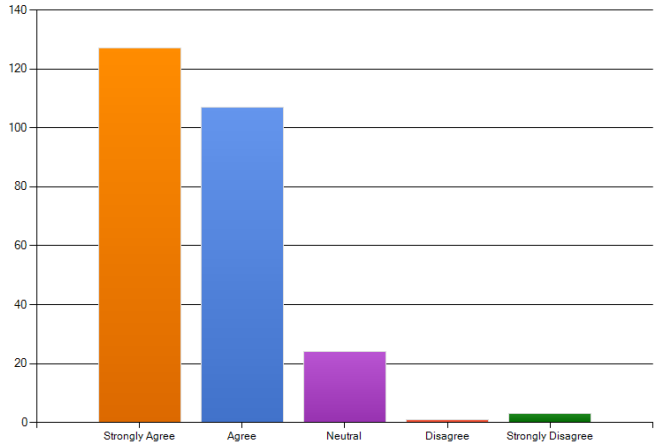
Which ONE of the following is closest to the format of your Research Seminar grant?



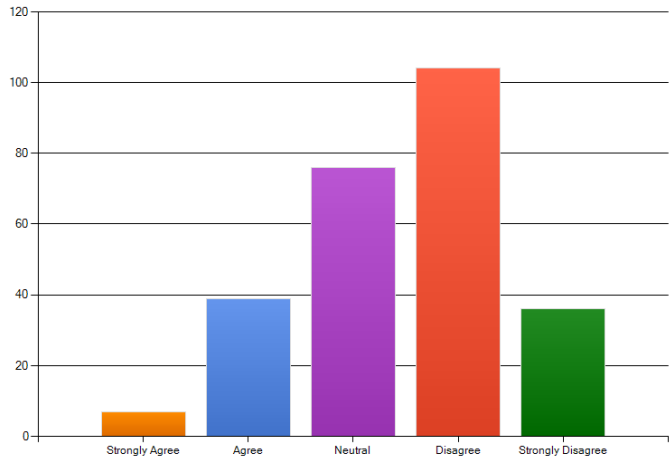
Please tick the range of years in which your grant started. (If you held more than one grant, please indicate the Start Date of the most recent one.)



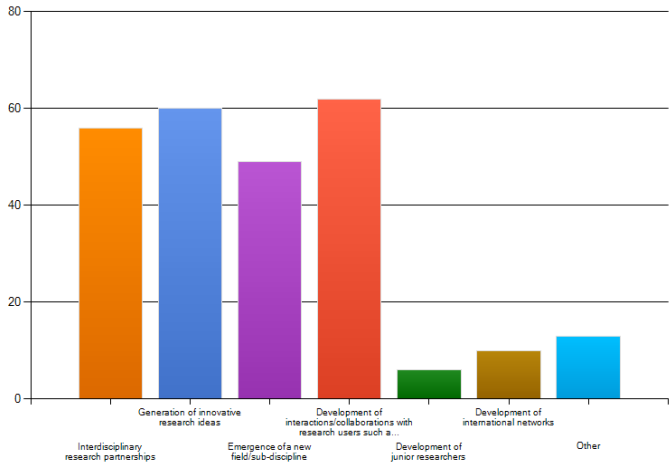
The host university/research organisation(s) provided sufficient support for the management of the Seminar Grant.



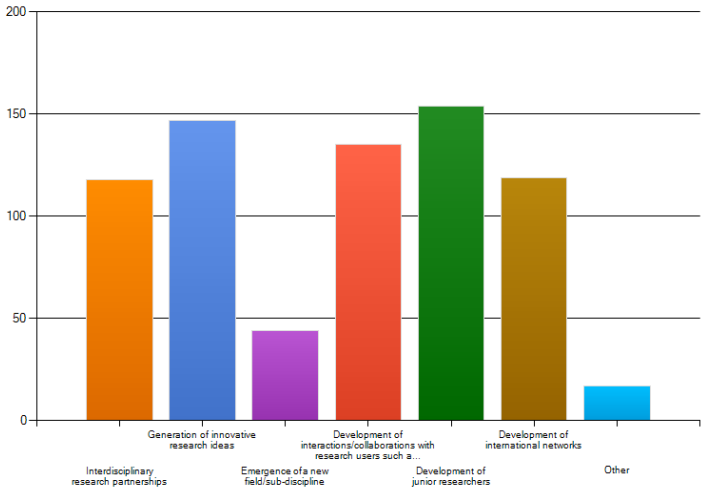
ESRC should require more extensive reporting from Research Seminar grant-holders and develop more extensive end-of-grant reviewing to gather insights and impacts.



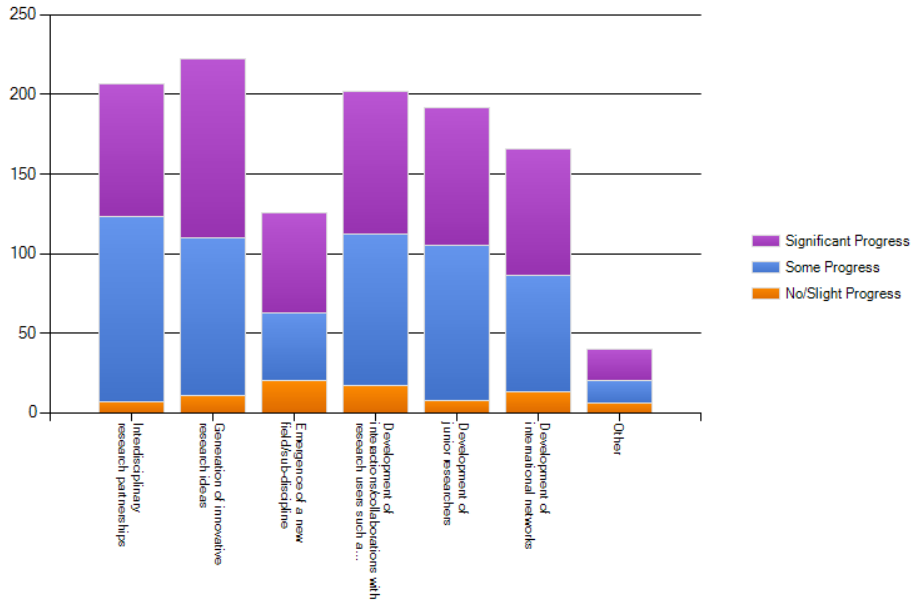
Which ONE of the following best describes the most important Objective of your grant?



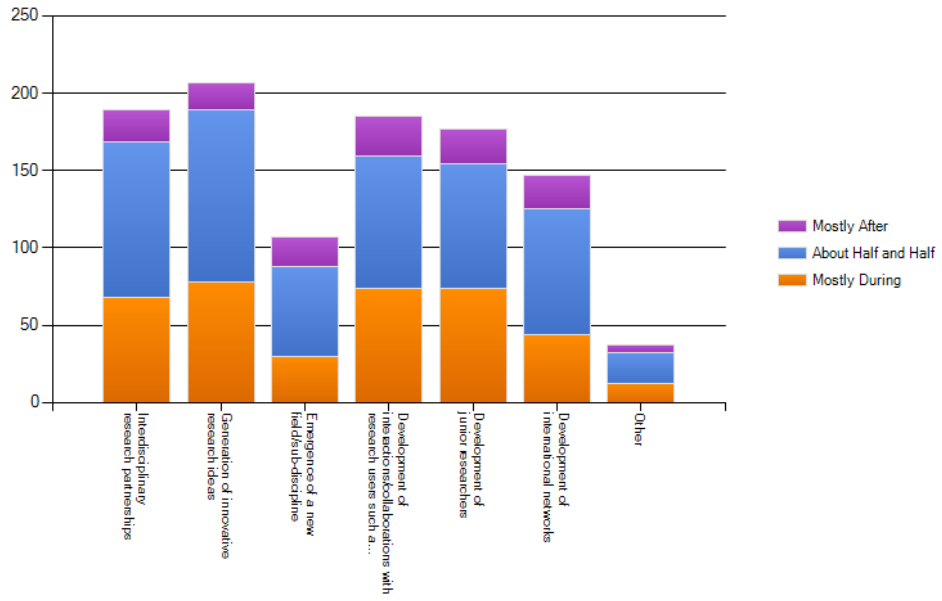
If any other Objectives were also important to your grant, please tick as many as apply.



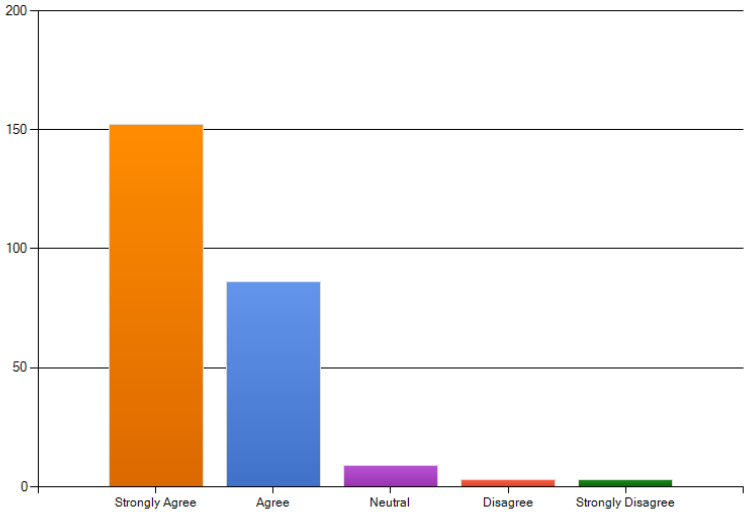
For all the Objectives that your Research Seminar Grant had, please tick the appropriate column to indicate the degree to which progress toward each Objectives has occurred since the beginning of the grant



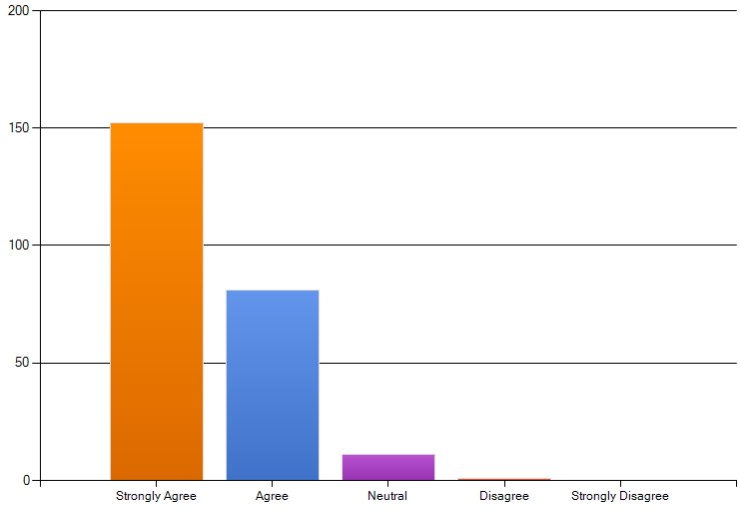
For all the Objectives that your Research Seminar Grant had, please consider the relative extent to which the progress indicated in the previous question was made during or after the grant, and indicate the closest proportionality.



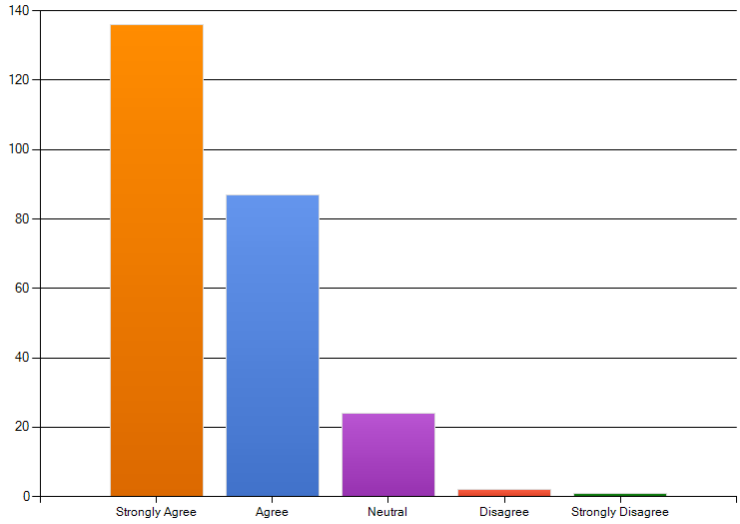
The individuals brought together by the Research Seminar Grant would not have come together without the Research Seminar activity—the grant enabled a new group or network.



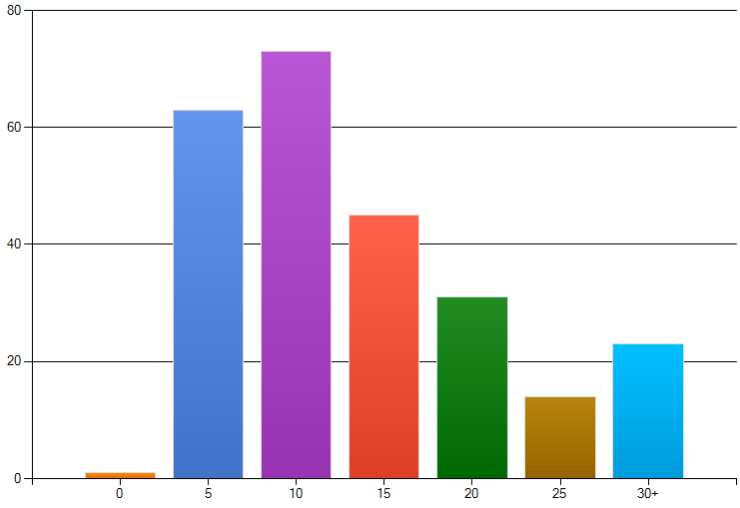
Some of the individuals brought together by the Research Seminar Grant stayed in contact beyond the duration of the Grant.



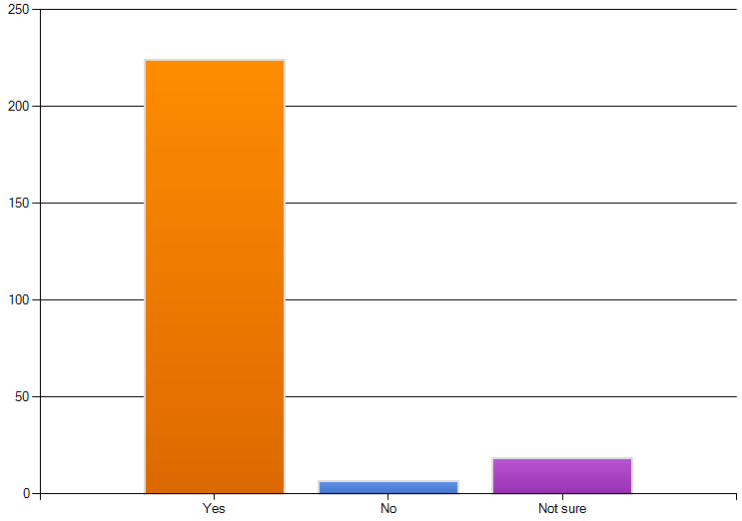
I found the Research Seminar Grant valuable in my own career.



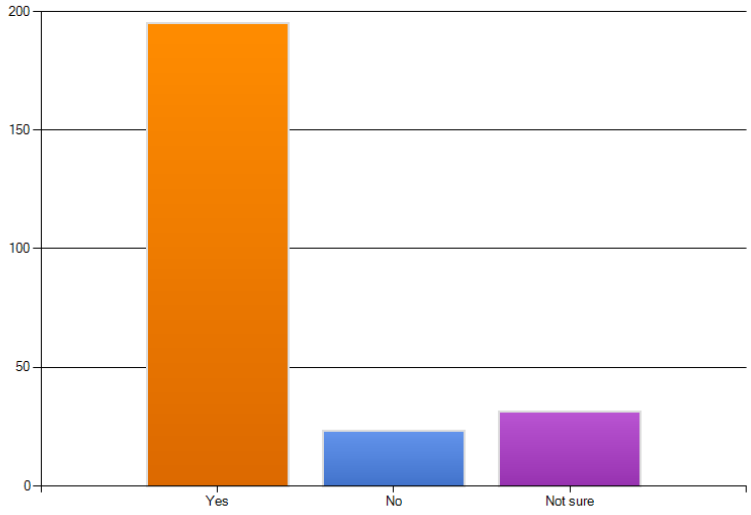
As a very rough estimate, approximately how many junior researchers (5 years or less after PhD) participated in the Research Seminar activity?



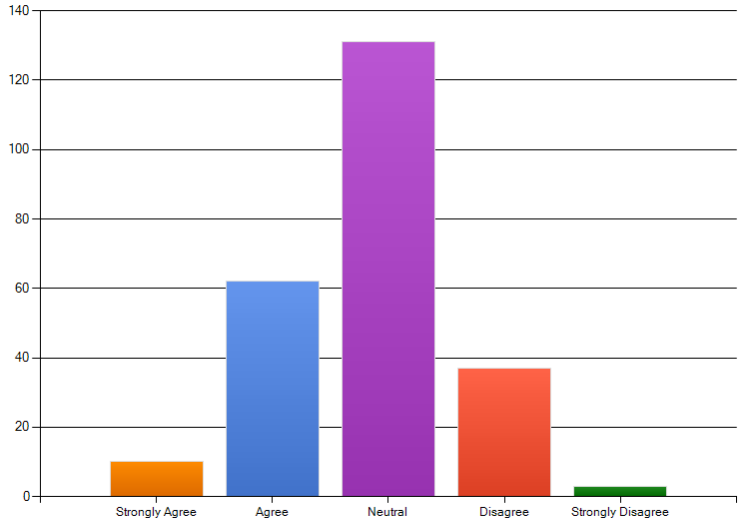
Did the Research Seminar contribute to academic publications or conferences?



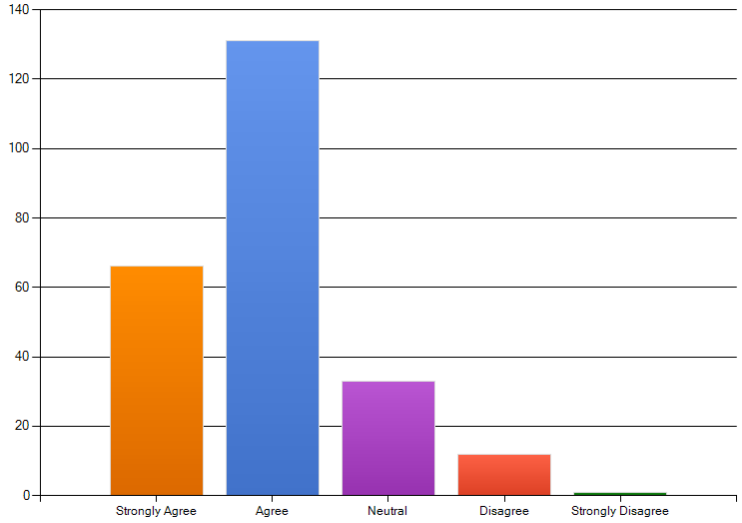
Did the Research Seminar contribute to accessible non-academic outputs (e.g. website, briefing notes, articles in research user journals, presentations in research user conferences)?



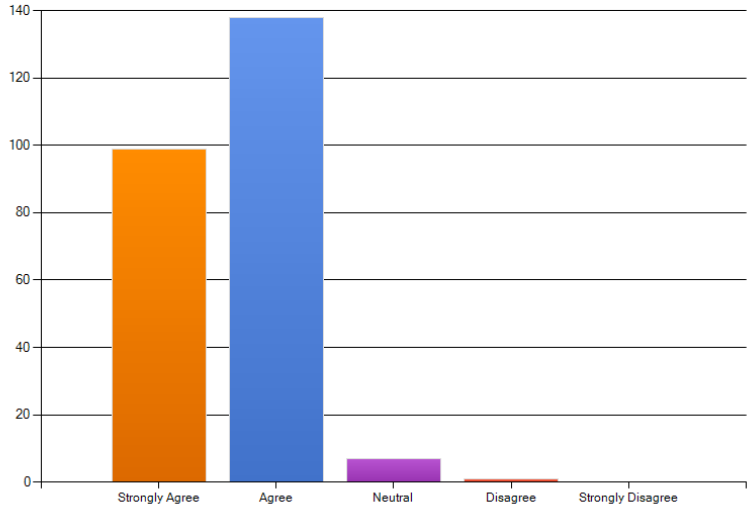
The Seminar led to instrumental impacts (e.g. actual changes in policy or practice).



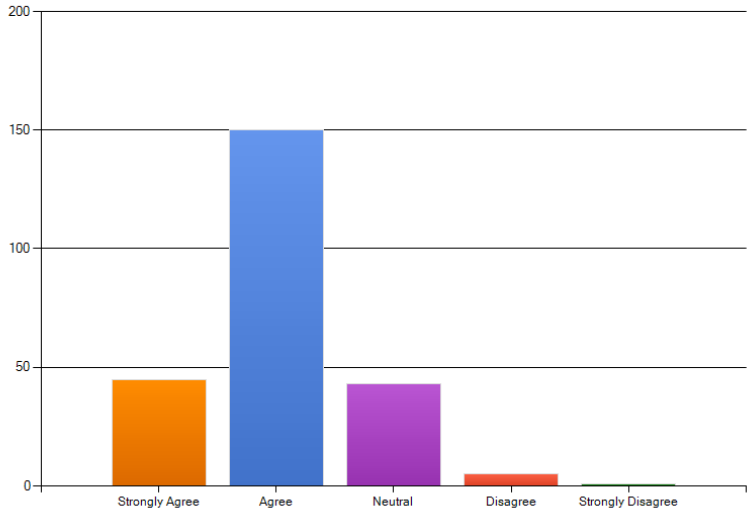
The Seminar led to capacity building impacts (e.g. training of students or professionals).



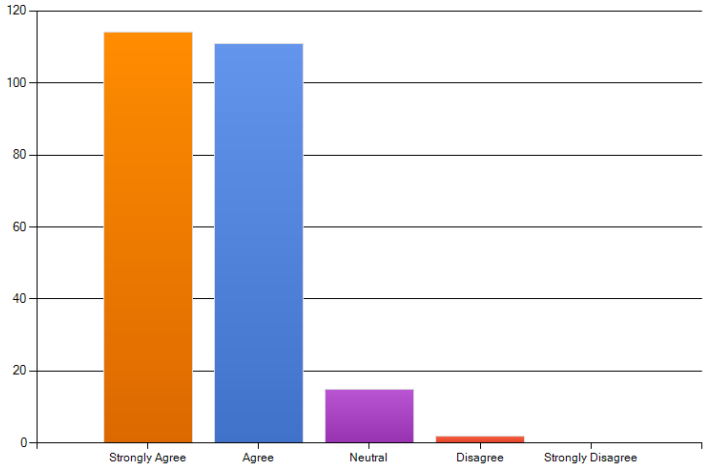
The Seminar led to conceptual impacts (e.g. broad new understanding/awareness raising).



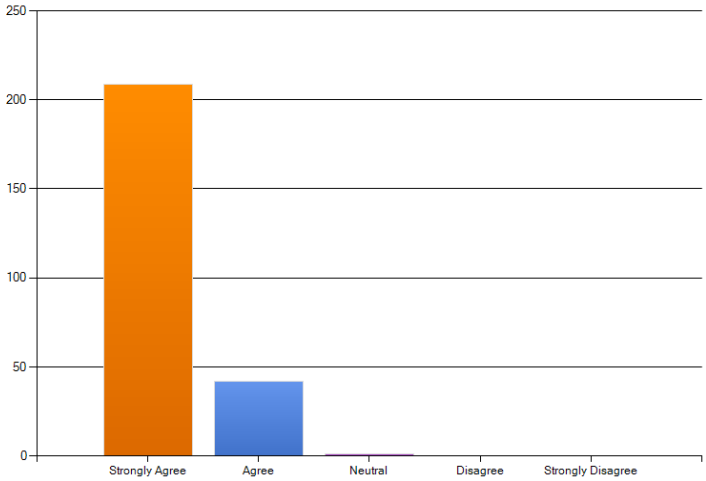
The Seminar led to attitudinal or cultural impacts (e.g. increased willingness in general to engage in new collaborations).



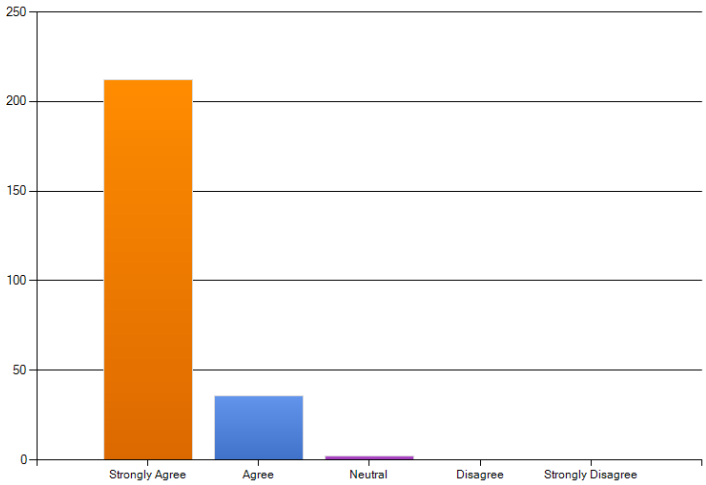
The Seminar led to enduring connectivity impacts (e.g. longer-term collaboration by involved individuals in follow-on interactions such as joint proposals, reciprocal visits, shared workshops).



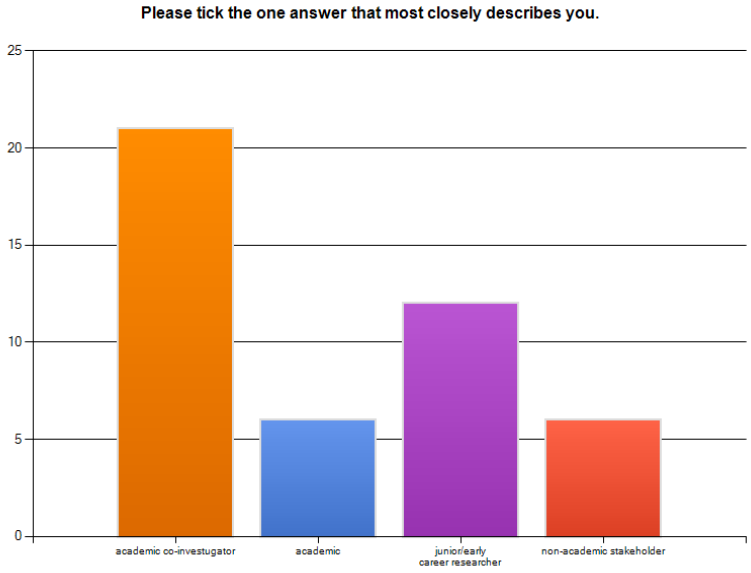
The Research Seminar funding Scheme is an important component of the social and economic research portfolio of the UK.

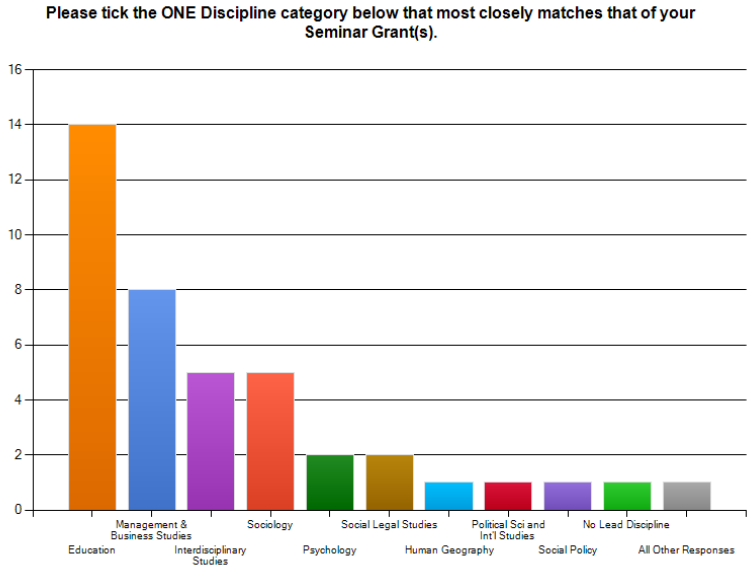


By providing numerous modest grants directed toward new efforts, the Research Seminar funding Scheme offers value for money.

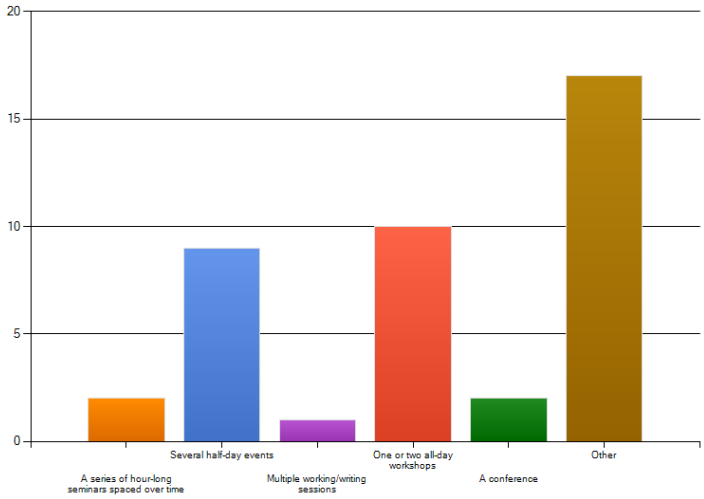


ANNEX D: SUPPLEMENTAL SURVEY, RESPONSE FIGURES





Which ONE of the following is closest to the format of your Research Seminar grant?



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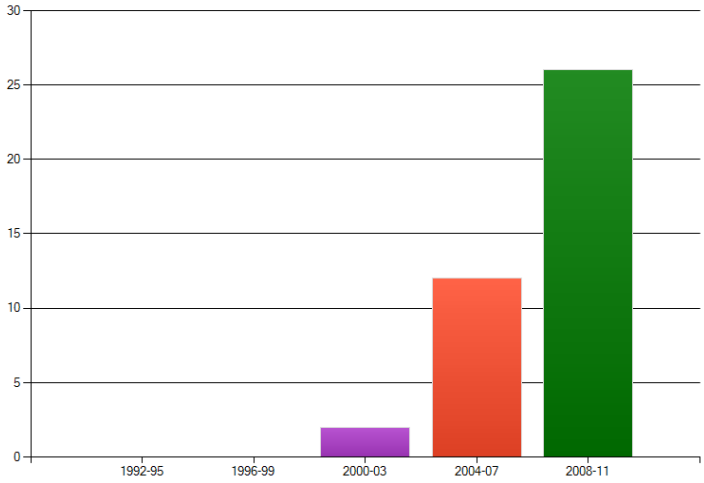

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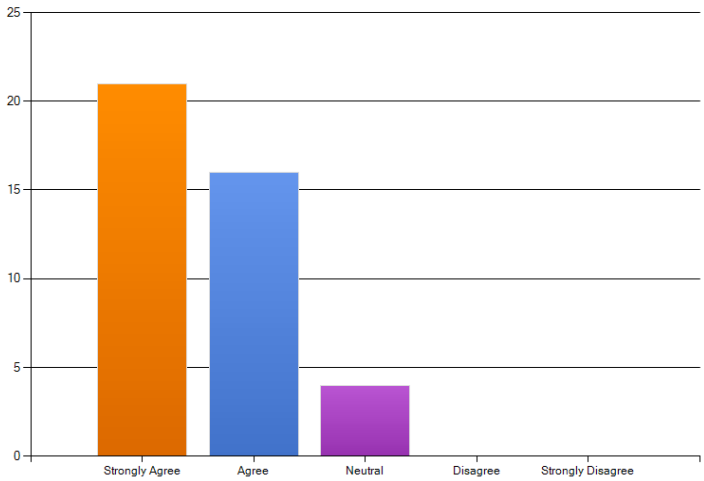

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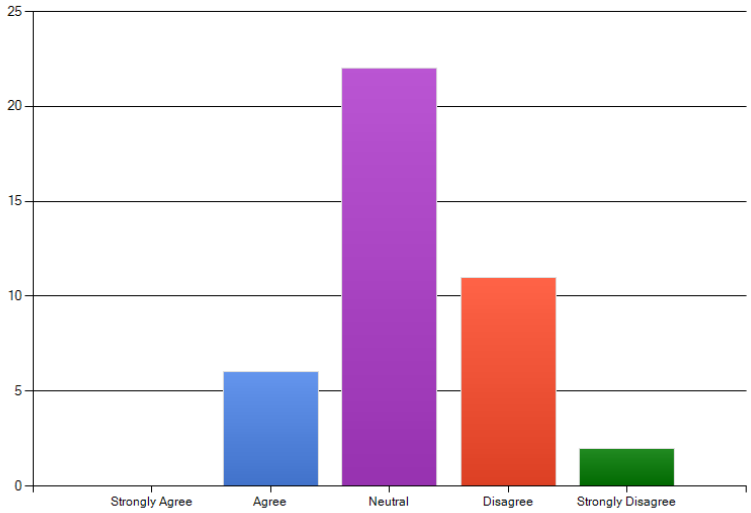
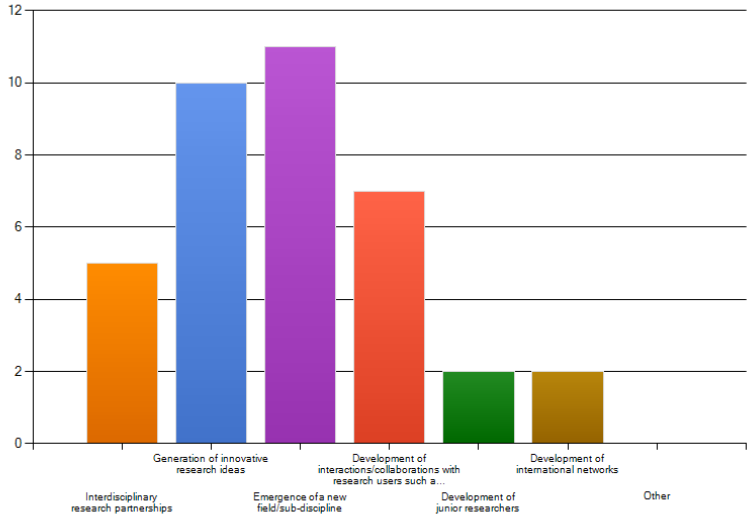


Which ONE of the following best describes the most important Objective of your grant?



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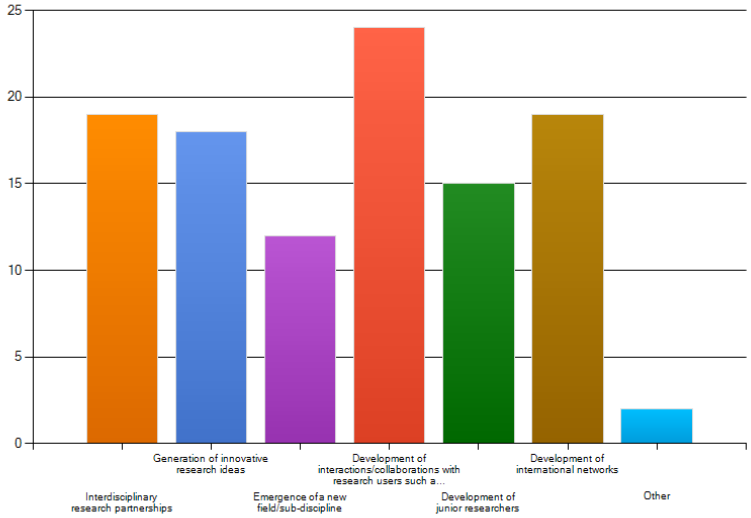

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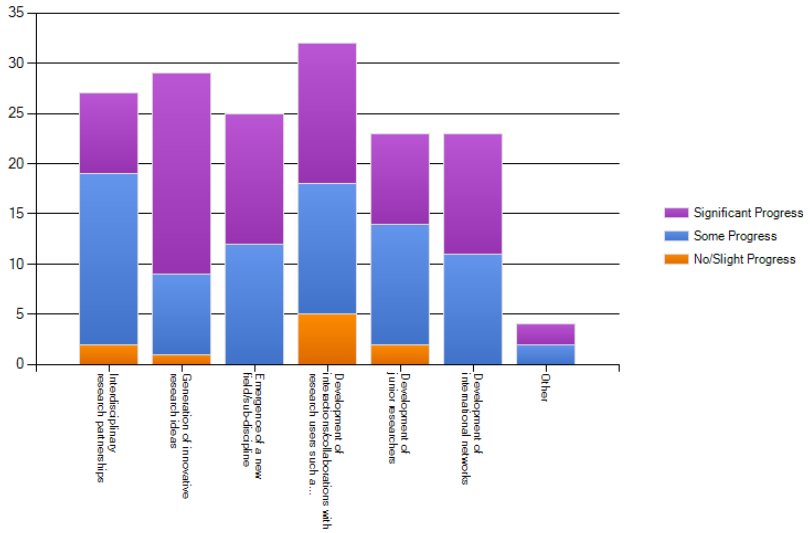

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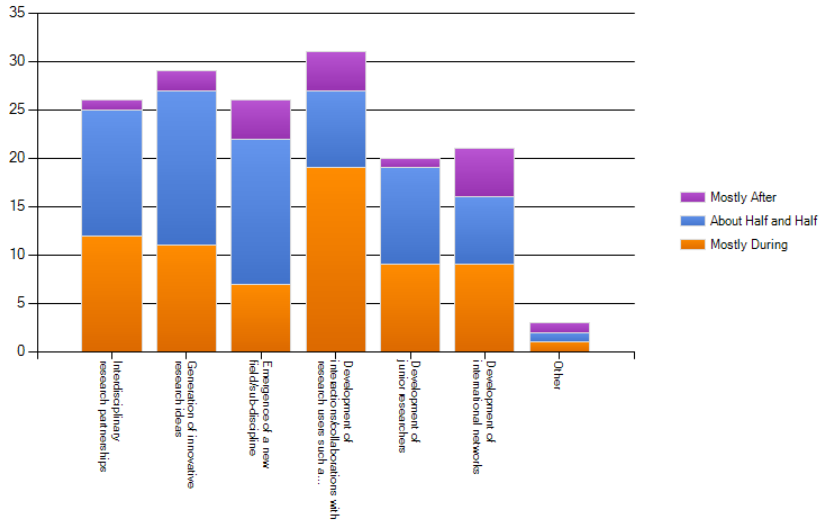
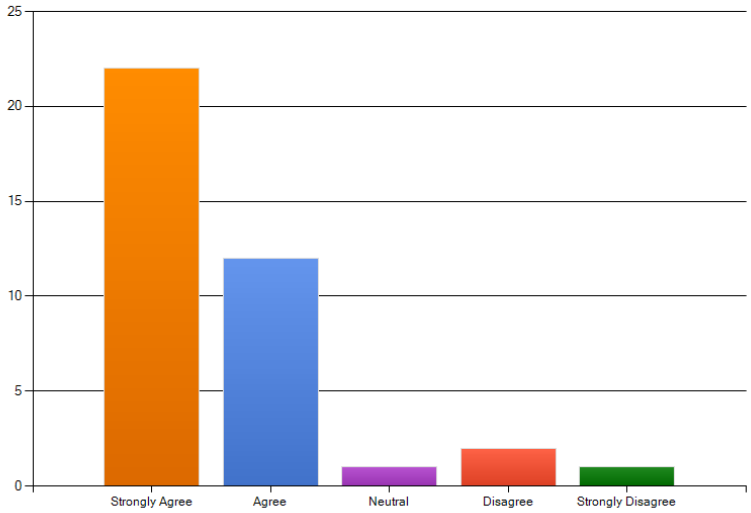


The individuals brought together by the Research Seminar Grant would not have come together without the Research Seminar activity—the grant enabled a new group or network.



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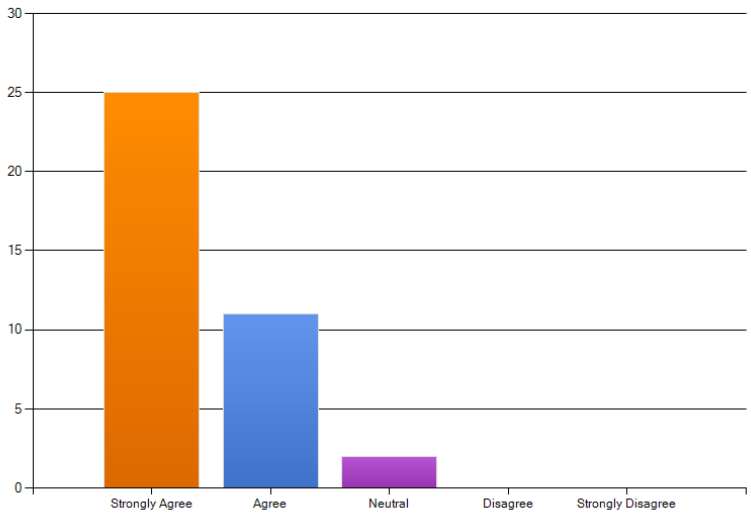
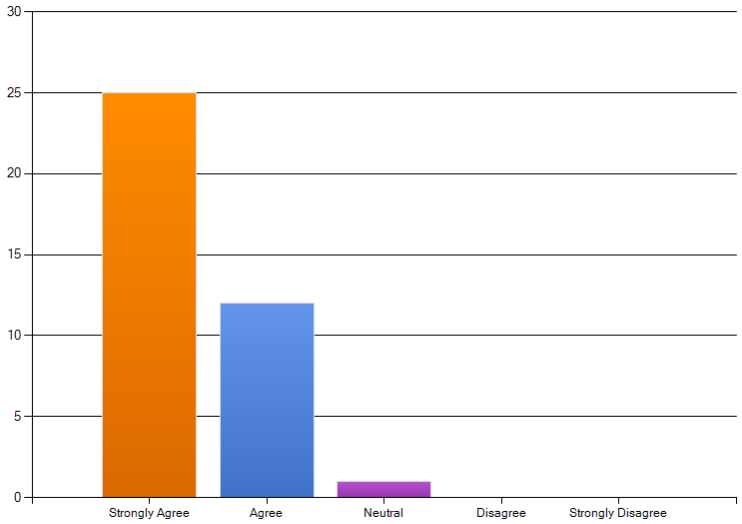
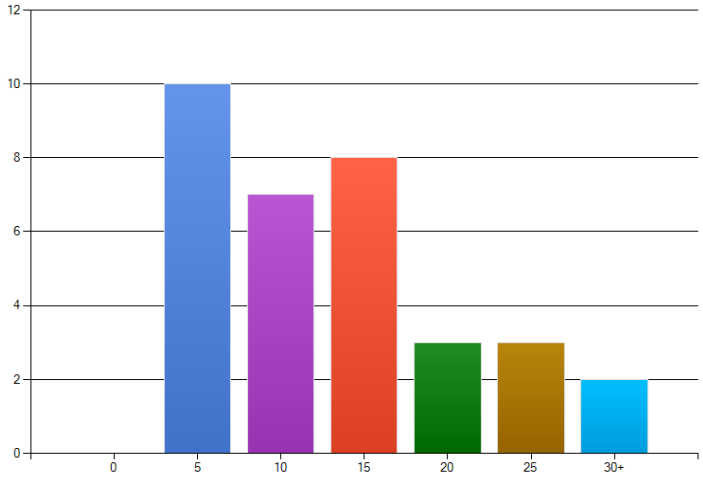


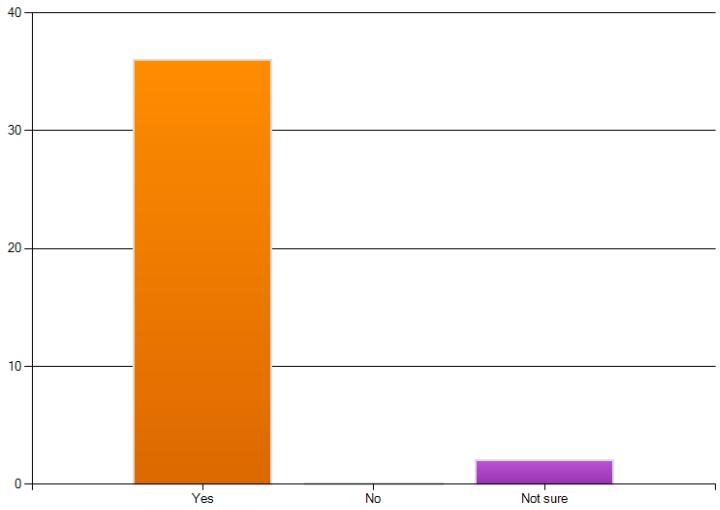
I found the Research Seminar Grant valuable in my own career.



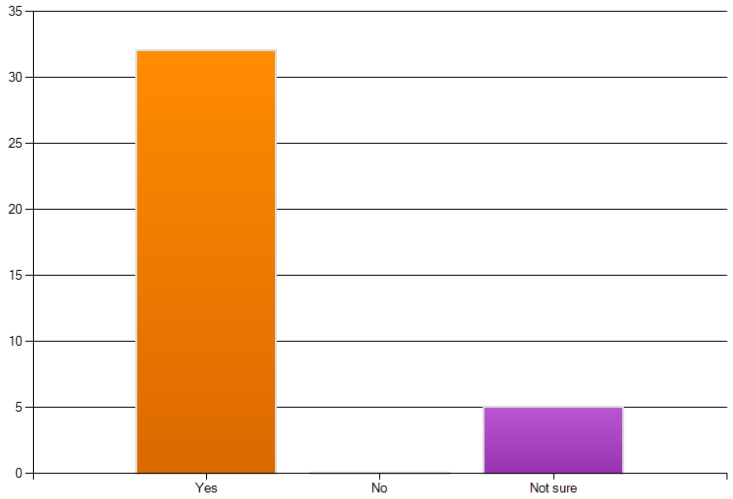
As a very rough estimate, approximately how many junior researchers (5 years or less after PhD) participated in the Research Seminar activity?



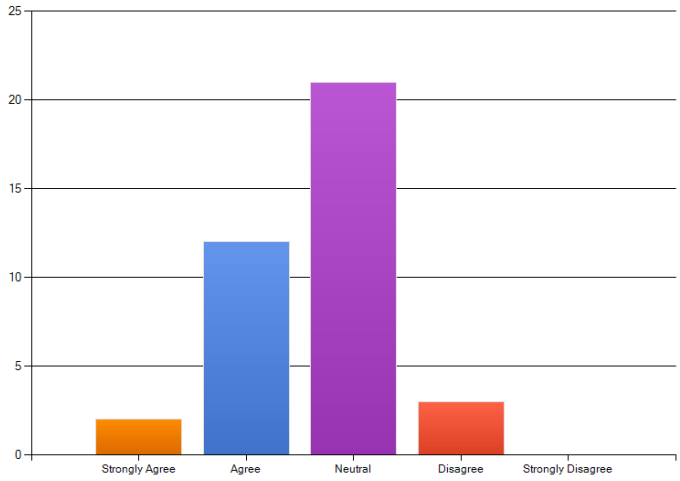
Did the Research Seminar contribute to academic publications or conferences?



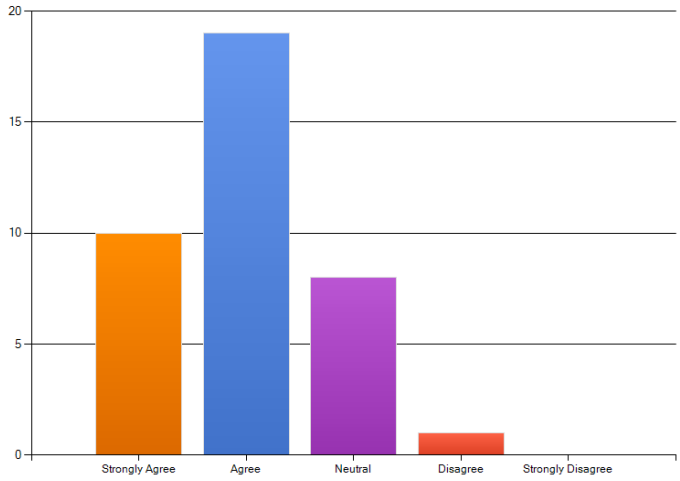
Did the Research Seminar contribute to accessible non-academic outputs (e.g. website, briefing notes, articles in research user journals, presentations in research user conferences)?



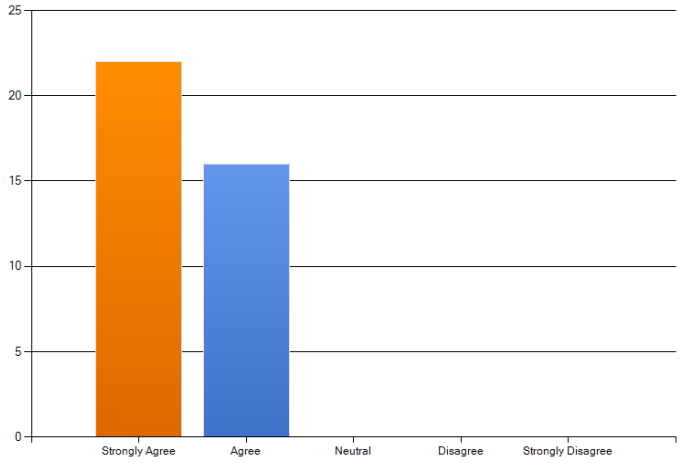
The Seminar led to instrumental impacts (e.g. actual changes in policy or practice).



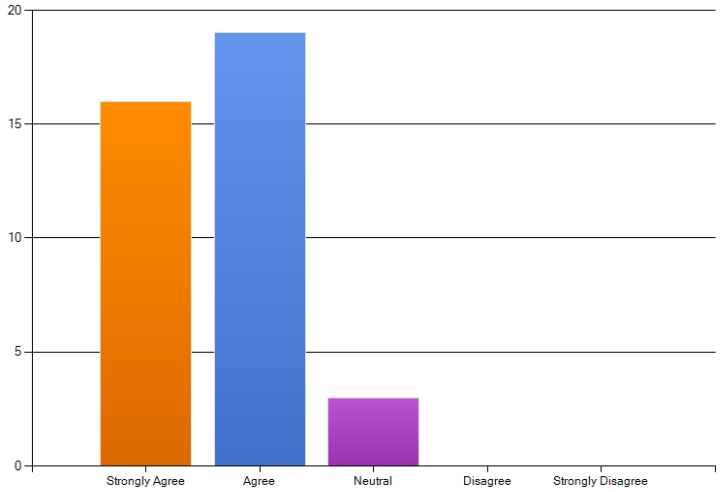
The Seminar led to capacity building impacts (e.g. training of students or professionals).



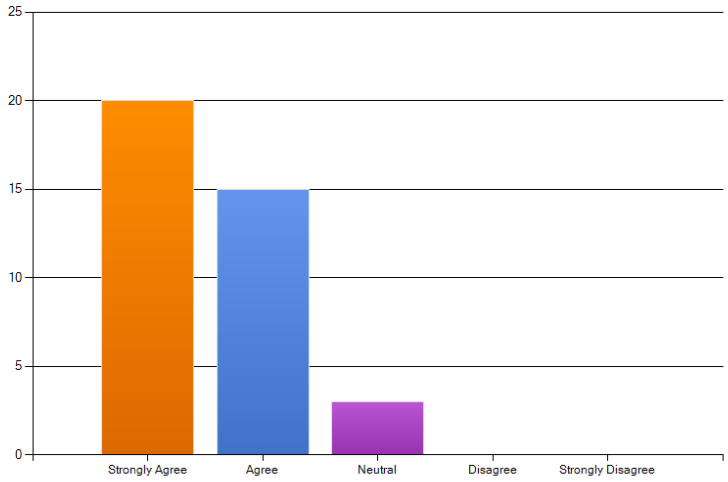
The Seminar led to conceptual impacts (e.g. broad new understanding/awareness raising).



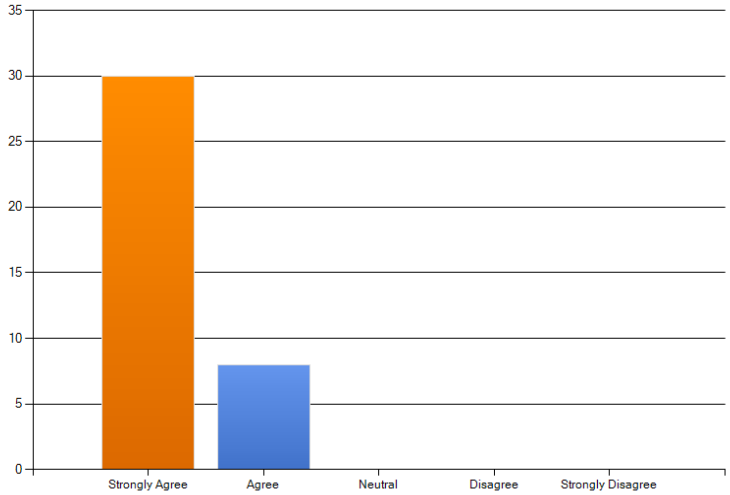
The Seminar led to attitudinal or cultural impacts (e.g. increased willingness in general to engage in new collaborations).

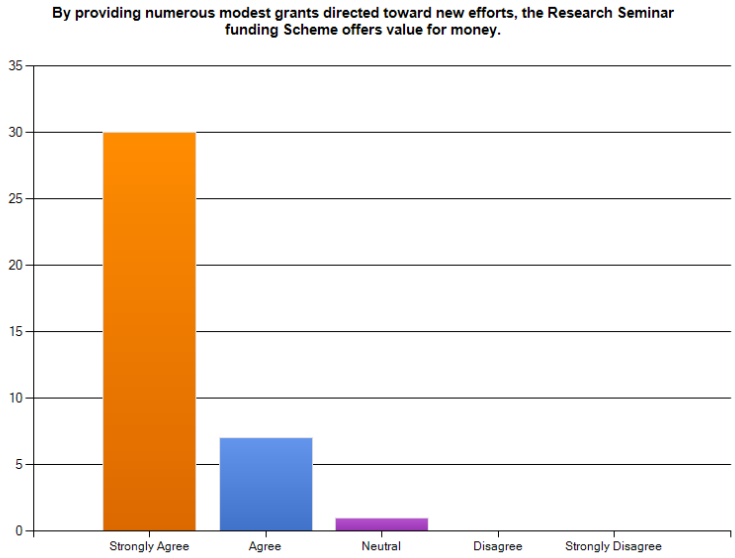


The Seminar led to enduring connectivity impacts (e.g. longer-term collaboration by involved individuals in follow-on interactions such as joint proposals, reciprocal visits, shared workshops).



The Research Seminar funding Scheme is an important component of the social and economic research portfolio of the UK.




By providing numerous modest grants directed toward new efforts, the Research Seminar funding Scheme offers value for money.
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree
Strongly Disagree

ANNEX E: FORMAT TACTICS, EXAMPLES

Respondents provided examples of tactics with which they matched format of Seminars with objectives.

- Convening dinner the preceding night (The really boring thing that made a difference was that it was much better if people stayed overnight – that radically transformed the nature of the event.")
- Offering space for intensive consideration of a topic –"in a way you don't usually get at a conference"
- Generating chat – as by circulating extended speakers' abstracts beforehand
- Including (genuine) discussion sessions
- Keeping the groups small and generating an informal atmosphere – encouraging junior researchers to participate, for example
- Experimenting with structure – for instance following morning keynote speakers with plenty of discussion time, then afternoon "interventions" of panellists speaking to circulated provocative statements
- Varying formats over time if needed to match purposes, such as finishing with a larger, perhaps stakeholder-oriented conference
- Hosting seminars at different geographical locations
- Holding some events for policymakers in London
- Selecting particular individuals –for example for an evolving discipline, one series encouraged individuals already "exploring at the edges"
- Putting in real effort to ensure involvement of key participants such as non-academics -- this takes "a lot of hard work and knocking on doors –start planning as early as possible, don't wait till the money (arrives) to have your wish-list sorted out."
- Encouraging genuine participation of certain categories of participants, such as stakeholders or junior researchers, perhaps including presentations by them
- Using travel bursaries to facilitate/encourage attendance
- Holding evening events open to the public, to complement smaller deliberations
- Maintaining a "core" of individuals attending all/most of the seminars, to achieve "a sense of development over time"
- Building with the core team "a strong enough hook to hang that complexity of different concerns and interests together on"

ANNEX F: PERCEIVED STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE SCHEME

Perceived strengths and weaknesses (or issues faced) were elicited from participants and responses clustered. To flesh out perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, a short "narrative" about each cluster, drawing upon representative quoted comments from free text survey responses, is provided here.

Strengths

Survey respondents articulated a wide variety of strengths, often associated with the roles played by the Scheme.

- Stimulus for Innovation/New Thinking
- Convening Role
- Networking/Collaboration-Building
- Linkage with Stakeholders
- Flexibility/Openness
- Value for Money
- Capacity-building

Stimulus for Innovation/New Thinking

Very often, the Scheme strength underscored was its catalytic role: "funding the initial stages of innovative and cutting-edge collaborations and fostering debates that stimulate new thinking and new research questions". Having received "seed corn money for new developments", the Seminars are "conductive to testing water around new research initiatives and making preliminary advances". Since the Seminars can "bring together people who in different ways are exploring new territory", the Scheme "allows for the construction of more innovative engagements across domains normally sequestered from each other". They foster "imaginative interconnectedness", thus "facilitating creative synergies; allowing development of research ideas", even "pump priming glimpses of the horizon, helping these to become a focus of new research activity". The award supports "a focussed time for idea generation that lives well beyond the series". In short, the Scheme "allows a very wide range of individuals to access blue skies research funding to work and think together, which is critical to the development of new fields and new ideas".

Convening Role

Basically, but non-trivially, the Seminars physically brings people together, often in multiple meetings over time, within a distinctive context: "bringing a core set of experts together to deliberate about key social science issues over a sustained period of time in ways not afforded by most conferences". The Scheme provided "the opportunity for a diverse range of interactions on focused topics that can be distinctive from other meetings" and made possible a "sharing of ideas and expertise", the "capacity to meet and think". "Under a prestigious title", the Scheme "provid(es) space for dialogues across disciplinary, sectoral and other boundaries". The Scheme is highly praised for providing otherwise unavailable "*space and time*" (an oft-repeated phrase) for creativity, intensive interaction, discussion of important issues. The Scheme "allows people to come together for a prolonged conversation where they may otherwise not have the resources to do so" --- "enabling researchers to meet and discuss research – probably more important now, when universities are strapped for cash and cannot support such meetings from departmental funds". The Scheme

provides an "opportunity to share emerging theory, research and practice and explore connections, future development in an informed, safe and authoritative environment".

Networking/Collaboration-Building

The Scheme "provid(es) opportunities for social science researchers to obtain pump-priming funds and build networks". Over and over again, the Scheme is praised for its pro-active role in the development of productive relationships, for example: "building research networks"; "promoting research collaboration" and "initiating larger projects and collaborations". Words like "enabling", "creating", "building" and "facilitating" recur. Sometimes the lasting nature of relationships is emphasised: "creating research networks which endure", "researcher network building and maintaining"; "enabling sustained collaboration"; or, more specifically, "the strength of the network that formed and has remained connected and went on to be involved in further work including a large European funded project". The role of the Scheme is seen as distinctive: "access to funding for collaborations that otherwise would not happen". Networking through the Scheme is seen as contributing to *next generation researchers*: "provid(ing) an ideal environment for PhD students and Post docs to meet each other and make contacts", "enabling junior researchers to build networks and to pump-prime new ideas", "training junior academics" and in some cases giving them experience in managing aspects of the Seminars.

For many respondents, the special strength of the Scheme lies in the creativity arising from its provision of "increased opportunities for innovative *interdisciplinary* collaborations". "It allows networks to be established which cross disciplinary boundaries, and this can form the basis for innovative ideas for research projects." Productivity arises from the Scheme's "facilitating the bringing together of what is already there in terms of disciplinary research and understandings and, through that, interdisciplinary innovations and subsequent publications that would not otherwise happen".

Several respondents underscored the importance of "helping UK researchers to network with the *international* academic community", in order to "develop research links, especially international" and "knowledge sharing in specialised fields involving international collaboration". Thus the Scheme can enable "interdisciplinary/ international/comparative research and publications". Seminar Series funding made possible "the bringing together of researchers and practitioners from the UK and abroad to brainstorm on a theme of mutual interest and develop new research ideas".

Linkage with Stakeholders

The Scheme plays a valued role in promoting linkages between academic researchers and non-academic partners; it "provides an opportunity to bring together scholars, policy makers and practitioners to share ideas and insights and …. build new partnership through a series of linked activities." The format of the Seminar Series allows it to "bring(ing) together academics and policy makers/practitioners to discuss 'live' issues in an informal and supportive space", thus generating"the opportunity for researchers and practitioners to develop a dialogue over time". Quite distinctively, the Scheme enables focus on the "breadth and depth of a complex (sometimes contradictory) issue capable of being explored jointly by scholars and practitioners over a useful time frame". On a practical level, "the validation of research funding from ESRC made it much easier to convince policy/practice people of the value of getting involved and was able to subsidise some of the costs involved".

One non-academic stakeholder's response to the supplementary survey reflected a very positive view of being genuinely involved in a seminar series:

> "Having the opportunity to present a major paper on a multi-faceted and sometimes controversial government policy and obtaining new ideas and perspectives, forging new partnerships and networks, and winning the broad support of a highly qualified, passionate and multi-talented group."

Perhaps particularly important in today's context, the Scheme makes a "contribution to links between academics, policymakers and practitioners and the resulting influence in generating

more impact-oriented research especially relating to funded work". A particular dimension is the involvement of junior researchers who arguably may develop user networks and become more likely to interact with stakeholders as their own careers progress: since the Scheme offered "the material means to bring together for conversation and discussion established and early-career scholars, and practitioners/users, and thereby to provide opportunities for further future collaboration in knowledge-related activities".

Flexibility/Openness

Over and over again, respondents singled out "flexibility" as a key strength of the Scheme. "Flexible research funding providing exciting opportunities to be creative rather than bureaucratic". The Scheme is "accessible and stimulates (a) huge range of activities", with "flexible broad customisable support" that can be "flexibly organised to suit the objectives in that particular research area". The Scheme's "openness to innovative ideas", in terms of topic proposals, recipients and formats, means that it is "open to a wide range of researchers, not just the 'big cheeses'. Very open in the way money can be spent to benefit the research network involved." The Scheme also "flexibly bring(s) together different stakeholder groups". With "trust in the organizer to deliver" and "very little micro-management", the Scheme provides "opportunity for blue-sky research dialogue" and an "ability to explore issues without predefined outcome(s)."

Value for Money

Many respondents cited "value for money" as the key strength of the Scheme, with some going into detail on the multiple returns:

> "It is a vital source of funding to develop new areas of research and collaboration. It contributes to networking opportunities and gives early career researchers experience of managing a research project. What the ESRC gets is enormous value for money."

The Scheme provides "a very cheap way of bringing people together and developing new ideas which include established and new researchers"; "an efficient and cost-effective means of promoting new research collaboration that would otherwise not happen"; and "a forum for brainstorming new ideas and methods at modest cost in time and money". Many commented more simply: "the Scheme levers a huge bang for its buck for the ESRC". The modest investment per grant was noted in terms of proportionality: ""Very little outlay for fairly large return"; "high return potential from modest grants"; "high impact/output for the cost"; "high value at low cost", "small grants that can produce significant returns".

One aspect of the Scheme's perceived value is its distinctive role, as "exploratory seedcorn money like this is very hard to find from other sources". The Scheme "provides increasingly rare opportunities for seminar funding" with "the opportunity for a very diverse range of interactions on focused topics that can be distinctive from other meetings". "There are very few other sources of support for something very important for intellectual life (discussing specific ideas over a sustained period of time)." Perhaps especially today, the Scheme plays a special role: "These seminars series create space to think in an ever-crowded world – they are the academic life line for many UK academics".

The following heartfelt expression of gratitude may best capture the value for money perceived by so many:

> "Generating new innovative ideas, promoting interaction and engagement of ideas with academics and policy-makers and excellent opportunity for collaborative research outputs e.g. books, articles, conference papers and new grant funding applications. This has helped to consolidate and build on my field of expertise - really crucial for social and economic research in the UK and beyond. I am so grateful to the ESRC for this opportunity."

Capacity-building

Responses to the supplementary survey from individuals identifying themselves as junior/early career researchers add another dimension to these discussions, which are

otherwise based on input from PIs. It is clear from free text answers that at least those invited junior researchers making the effort to respond to the supplementary survey saw genuine capacity-building advantages to the scheme. Some comments related to "personal" professional growth such as the development of confidence, for example: one responded regarding outcomes of which he/she felt most proud: "Tangible – presenting for an hour! Intangible – feeling worthy of the audience". Others mentioned more strictly professional gains at their formative stage, for instance "Collaborating with a range of internationally experienced researchers and having the opportunities to discuss new research ideas, in detail, in order to strengthen the design, impact and validity of my own research projects". Networking was a boon: "As a PhD student the opportunity to develop networks with researchers, with whom I now feel confident to greet and engage with in conferences and on projects was a fantastic opportunity. The chance to get an overview of the different research perspectives and to appreciate the tensions and opportunities for collaboration was also invaluable." Interaction with more senior academics could be beneficial, in terms of both "products" and relationships; one junior researcher referred to the "ongoing collaboration between junior and senior colleagues, which has not only established a new sub-discipline in sociology, but has led to tangible outcomes such as special journal issues and reciprocal conferences and the less tangible, but no less important outcomes of supportive mentorship". One junior researcher provided a narrative that may reflect usually invisible capacity-building "ripple effects" from other series as well:

> "The seminar series greatly enhanced my own experience of postgraduate work. I met a friend for coffee the other day, she's become a friend since one of the seminars. She said that after 15 years, the seminar inspired her to return to university to complete her MA. She told me that she never would have had the guts to do that had it not been for the seminars. This makes me very proud of the work we did."

Weaknesses/Issues

When asked, respondents also provided weaknesses or issues facing the Scheme, although it must be said that the positive nature of the strengths' comments far outweighed negativity expressed toward the Scheme itself.

- No weaknesses
- Finances (future and per-grant)
- Lack of follow-on support/continuity
- Burden of Work Required, Need for Institutional/Administrative Support
- Impact Issues

<u>No weaknesses</u>
The single most repeated answer to the question asking for weaknesses was "None".

<u>Finances</u>
One critical financial issue lies in the likelihood of Seminar Grant funding remaining available, with a concern that "funding will decrease in the foreseeable future". "Withdrawal of funding is the most significant threat to the scheme"

Some feel that funding is "inadequate". This is exacerbated for several who are not pleased with the application or reporting processes, with one mentioning "a fairly lengthy application form and bureaucracy equivalent to far larger grants" and another observing that "strict deadlines are awkward with partners who operate in different operational and financial cycles from universities". Some of this has to do with the amount of work put in by researchers (see below); and some feel a "need for further funding to maximise impact", also discussed below. Some points raised have to do with practicalities, such as "limited funds to

pay for attendees". For example, one respondent with a current series observes that the "financial contribution (is) unable to cover the travel costs of all who would wish to attend". Concerns are voiced that "costs have gone up" and "the grants need to catch up with increases in inflation". One issue is funding for international participants, for example, "not enough money to be truly international" or "the funding for bringing in overseas scholars is quite limited, which is a constraint for research that is inherently comparative". Some raise the issue of the grant's duration as "too short-term", suggesting that "these seminars work best over a period of 2-3 years", particular if "funding reaches (its) end just as relationships are beginning to 'gel' and exciting ideas (are) emerging". Regarding the amount of money that could be available per grant while still funding a number of Seminars, one balanced view might be "It could do with a little more money (but not too much)".

Lack of Follow-on Support/Continuity

"The greatest challenge is to continue to progress the work after the grant period is ended." "Continuity", "sustainability" and "keeping the momentum after the grant finishes" are frequently voiced concerns. Particularly given the catalytic role that many Seminars hope to play, it is a concern that, with no "dedicated follow-up funding", there is a "lack of an obvious next stage": "no direct route to follow up on ideas" or "opportunities to lead on to a larger project". Some could use resources for follow-on activities, for additional "successful research seminars" or "sustaining the network after the series ends". One suggestion is for more help advising "ways of taking debates and insights to the next stage of application – by definition, the areas addressed (by the Seminars) may not be as yet recognized by funding councils and/or referees. Grant calls should take greater note of funded seminars to attract and fund truly innovative research."

Burden of Work Required, Need for Institutional/Administrative Support

A Seminar Series asks a lot of its PI or leadership team, it requires a "HUGE time investment from organisers, which is not funded". There is a disparity between "the amount of funding allocated in proportion to the work which a series actually involves". "Organising and participating in research seminars is time-consuming for those involved". It is "work for love rather than money!" And of course post-project activities require work, such as "the burden of post-seminar editing of a collective volume".

"No funding for academic staff time" means that running a Seminar "therefore can be seen as a cost to institutions", with sometimes "institutional disinterest due to relatively small size" of the grant, along with what seems sometimes to be an unwillingness to provide help informally. Sometimes an awardholder has to take on administrative burdens that he or she had hoped would be handled by their university, with what is admittedly an extreme illustrated by one "horror story":

> Organisation of seminars - especially involving bringing people from around the world together in one place at the same time whilst providing for aspects such as travel and accommodation - is a demanding task. Some universities are just not up to it. Lacking any institutional support I was left to do it alone which was stressful. I was also undermined by the university refusing to use the grant that I had been awarded to pay for various aspects or making me jump through numerous hoops before it would pay for them. I had to pay for numerous things myself and then seek reimbursement which met with the same response.

Generally, above and beyond, non-costed effort is put into leading the Seminars. "They offer excellent value for money to the ESRC but partly because most of the work that is involved in organizing them and producing outputs is not funded by the ESRC". Yet there are balances to be struck, if the Scheme is to have a broad influence: "It is a large workload for the PI with no FEC allowance for time, although this would limit the number of grants able to be awarded and I think it is important to maintain the spread of the awards so this is a disadvantage that is offset."

Impact Issues

On the one hand, challenges exist (as for all research grants) in the generation of impacts. It can be hard initially to engage stakeholders in the Seminars, "justifying 'blue-sky' type seminar interaction to government agencies", for instance. More lastingly, a challenge is that of "achieving with such modest funds non-academic impacts in professional and policy contexts", "finding ways of involving policymakers/practitioners/commercial stakeholders so as to ensure that the academic value of the seminars is transferred to practice". The lack of follow-on funding may make it particularly difficult to sustain the contacts and networks and interactions that can help lead toward impacts even after the project is over. "Broader outreach" might be valuable; indeed "the success of these series perhaps need (a) higher profile" --- perhaps a role for the ESRC in promotion?

On the other hand, a different but related issue lies in concerns about a "narrow focus on impact", that "ESRC (is) becoming outcomes/impact focused through large grants". At one level, this can result in too much reporting with too much emphasis on impact, too early; "short term impacts could be seen as unrealistic" as "benefits often (come) long after the event –outputs, 'impact', etc." Yet, the wrong sort of emphasis on the wrong sort of impacts could also have deeper repercussions. "The emphasis on policy relevance and impact could risk undermining what is so valuable about the opportunity it (the Scheme) offers, if it becomes too dominant as the rationale." "The need for open-ended debate without clear outputs is important." There might be a threat that the wrong sort of emphasis would "Make applicants describe the impact in advance of the results or generally forget what social sciences research is about –i.e. not doing what the government always wants". Another threat might be "a potential demand from funders for more instrumental outcomes from the seminar series scheme – this would undermine the conceptual value of the scheme (by reducing interest in highly conceptual/riskier work."