



ESRC Follow-On-Fund (FoF) Scheme: External Evaluation

Final Report – October 2012

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Executive Summary

In March 2012 a three-strong team led by Professor Irene Hardill was commissioned by the ESRC to deliver an independent evaluation of the outcomes and impacts of the Follow-On-Fund (FoF) scheme (2008-2012). The Scheme was established with the aim of encouraging the pursuit of knowledge exchange and impact generating activities supplementary to those constituting an earlier piece of *substantial* research. Applications were expected to demonstrate a capacity to effect significant economic, social, policy and/or practice benefit(s).

Of concern to the evaluation were the following: the design and operation of the FoF mechanism; the role of Project Partners within the Scheme; the quality and achievements of funded projects; the scheme's management; the composition and orientation of similar schemes operating in the UK and overseas (where relevant); and the scheme's delivery of value for money.

Interest in the scheme was both *considerable* - with the three Calls to which our analysis is devoted attracting more than 350 applications - and *wide-ranging* - with awards, alone, forthcoming from 17 separate disciplinary areas.

The total value of the successful projects was £6,448,645, with an average individual request of £94,833. Combined, the projects formally enrolled 140 Directly Allocated staff members, 56 research assistants/associates and 97 (non-academic) Project Partners.

Summary of the Evaluation Methodology: A mixed methods evaluation comprising the following five elements was undertaken: documentary analysis; stakeholder interviews; an electronic survey of all 68 successful and 256 unsuccessful applicants (response rates: 63% and 39%); telephone interviews with 22 award holders and a further 15 non-academic 'users' (or other beneficiaries); and telephone interviews with members of the 'Reviewer College' (hereafter: Reviewers). Three case studies were also compiled in partnership with award holders (and relevant Project Partners and/or users) for illustration purposes.

Key Points:

- The scheme's stated objective of strengthening relations between academic and non-academic organisations (and therefore knowledge bases) was achieved, albeit with the vast majority of award holders stating as their primary motivation a desire to expand knowledge exchange activities already underway with user organisations. More than half of surveyed award holders reported that FoF projects built on initiatives finishing, relatedly we suggest, in the preceding two years. A number of projects were even 'live' at the time of application.
- As stated, applications were typically submitted in a climate of strong 'pull' from policy makers or practitioners; but as the report makes clear, there were mixed views on whether the FoF scheme had catered too greatly to immediate policy and/or practice need at the possible expense of engagement with deeper and underlying societal issues. This, despite the fact that the vast majority of FoF *awards* (88%) cited ESRC funding - principally from Responsive Mode (Standard Grants) or 'Programme' mode (to include cross-Council Programmes) - as providing an at least a partial basis for their application.
- The 3 case studies provided are illuminating of the variety of settings and contexts in which FoF projects were conceived. Represented in detail are examples of an ESRC programme grant holder seeking out funds with which to work more extensively with policy makers and academic managers in sub-Saharan Africa; an individual responsible for highly regarded and influential Government-funded contract research pursuing funds with which to establish new tools and resources; and a further individual in receipt of 'portfolio' funding (from the ESRC, central government and the charitable sector) developing a Community of Practice which he would later orientate towards the task of taking new products to market. As mentioned, while most awards built on previous ESRC (or other RCUK) investments, the assessment process was clearly open to

supporting excellent applications of alternative provenance; and mindful, too, of the benefits of sponsoring projects triangulating *across* a portfolio of previously-held funding.

- If, as one Reviewer suggested it did, the FoF scheme represented an opportunity to retrospectively ‘bolt-on’ impact-generating activities to projects conceived in a different climate (i.e. in which Pathways to Impact Statements were possibly not the norm), the Office’s approach to negotiating the above-cited tension (i.e. the pursuit of ‘quick wins’ versus longer term strategic aims) will depend in part on its view of whether the new impact imperative - manifesting itself in a wide-ranging requirement for ‘Pathways to Impact’ statements - will render the FoF scheme void.
- At a minimum, though, there appears to be merit in retaining a FoF scheme dedicated to enabling new and innovative forms of knowledge exchange; a scheme also capable of allocating funding to at least the current threshold (£125K (fEC)). This latter facility, a number of award holders reported, was crucial to enabling the day-to-day engagement upon which so many FoF projects turned. Applicants and Reviewers, more generally, were opposed to any *possible* mandatory requirement for ‘cash’ co-funding (from non-academic partners), and in a number of cases were uncertain as to how to calculate/configure ‘in-kind’ contributions.
- Although one Reviewer queried the possible ‘REF impact on Impact’ – noting the danger that most universities’ and departments’ conceptions of impact might, in future, become reducible to what is ‘four star’ (and therefore ‘international’ or more ‘fundamental’ in reach) - there appeared, anecdotally (for a *detailed* geographic analysis is beyond the scope of this project), to be no lack of enthusiasm for engaging with issues and constituencies prominent at the *local* and *regional* levels. Indeed, our analysis of all 68 applications revealed that a majority (58%) (n=33) were classified as ‘non-international’ (and therefore, arguably, local, regional and/or national) in their orientation. The remainder were oriented in relation to debates and issues operating (at least primarily) *beyond* domestic shores¹.
- A number of respondents cited the difficulties associated with sinking time and resources into a developmental process still unlikely (on the balance of probability; current success rates range from ~15% to 20%) to yield financial reward. Such concerns are no less salient to other of the ESRC’s schemes and initiatives, of course, and need to be seen in the wider light of ‘over-subscription’ – a reality with which all applicants (and their Project Partners) should be familiar. Yet many interviewees described their relationships with non-academic Project Partners as brittle and liable to fracture. Hence, in this context, it may be that issues of demand management are thought through in particular relation to schemes giving strong emphasis to collaboration beyond the academy.
- Although there was a broad consensus that the advice and guidance emanating from the ESRC was of a good quality, more negative comment centred on the quality and efficiency of the peer review process. Given the relative nascence of the scheme such comments are not, perhaps, surprising; nor are they necessarily at variance with the Office view. Indeed, many of the procedural shortcomings pointed to have already been demonstrably rectified. In a context of continuing peer-review fatigue, however, there likely remains a tension between allocating additional resources straightforwardly to projects demonstrating obvious impact potential (via an ‘impact contingency’ or *office*-ratified cash-based extension, for example), and doing so in a way that is consistent with standard ESRC protocols (regarding quality assurance, transparency and accountability). Interesting in this regard is the plan by another Research Council (EPSRC) to support impact-generating/maximising work via an algorithm-based system weighted in favour of those institutions demonstrating a ‘critical mass’ of research excellence.

Conclusions and Recommendations: The report closes with a number of conclusions and recommendations concerning the FoF scheme’s future. Overall, they echo the views of the vast majority of award holders engaged with: that the FoF scheme delivers a vital and distinctive service; that notwithstanding concerns raised in regard to its possible ‘displacement’ by Pathways to Impact statements, there was still considerable merit in a FoF scheme catering, at a minimum, for innovative and experimental forms of knowledge exchange; and, finally, that consideration be given to alternative (and less resource intensive) vehicles for ‘follow-on’ funding.

¹ In 11 cases this was not stated.

1. Introduction to the Evaluation

In March 2012 a team from the Centre for Civil Society and Citizenship and Centre for Public Policy, Northumbria University, was selected by the ESRC to conduct an evaluation of its Follow-On-Fund (FoF) scheme. The evaluation was intended to provide:

- “accountability to the ESRC and other funders (where applicable) for their investment in Follow-on-Fund activities;
- feedback for those supported under the Follow-on-Fund mechanism;
- through publication of the executive summary, information and guidance for those in academic, policy and practitioner communities;
- guidance on further developments and improvements for ESRC (where appropriate)”.

Source: ESRC Follow-on-Fund Evaluation Brief

This report focuses on the management and outcomes of the FoF between 2008 and 2012, a period in which 68 FoF projects were successfully commissioned.

2. Methodology

Stakeholder Interviews/Interactions

In order to probe the FoF scheme’s beginnings, key aims and objectives and commissioning processes a series of interviews were carried out with members of the ESRC Office, including those immediately responsible for the FoF scheme. These set the scene for a further 5 (telephone) interviews carried out with members of the Knowledge Exchange ‘Reviewer College’ (hereafter: Reviewers). Themes surfacing during these latter interviews were related to a further 29 ‘volunteer’ Reviewers by means of a briefing paper, and feedback invited on their substance.

In parallel, the Office also facilitated access to individuals responsible for ‘follow-on-fund’ and/or relevant ‘proof-of-concept/commercialisation’ schemes at EPSRC, NERC, BBSRC, AHRC and STFC. Given the scheme’s alertness to opportunities of non-ESRC (or other RCUK) provenance, a further (telephone) interview was held with the Director of Policy and Research at a major charitable funder of social science research.

Finally, efforts to situate more ‘international’ perspectives were largely hamstrung, as the ESRC’s own programme documentation confirms, by a dearth of notable exemplars. However, discussions were held with associates of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), Canada.

Documentary Analysis

The Evaluation began in April 2012 and was carried out over a period of 7 months. It began with an analysis of Management Information (MI) data and scheme documentation. The aims, here, were two-fold: to inform the interview and survey schedule; and to inform our understanding of the largely self-selecting sample of award holders we would subsequently engage through interview.

Survey of Award Holders/Unsuccessful Applicants

In early-July all 68 award holders were contacted by email and invited to complete a 44-question online survey. The survey delivered a response rate of 63% (n=43), and the descriptive statistics generated, while displaying certain limitations, are provided for illustrative purposes throughout.

In early August, a further 30-question survey was administered to 256 *unsuccessful* applicants. On this occasion the response rate was 39% (n=100).

Award Holder Interviews

Telephone interviews were carried out with a largely self-selecting sample of 22 award holders. Interviews focused on the project life cycle, the reach and significance of impact(s) flowing from funded activities, and the distinctive features of the FoF scheme to which these, as far as possible, could be attributed. With the support of the Office, three projects were selected for development into case studies (see Section 7).

Non-academic User Consultation

Non-academic users (or other beneficiaries) were identified by the 22 award holders and contacted by email prior to a short telephone interview. The intention was to obtain an at least partial non-academic perspective on the achievements of projects, as well as general comments on the accessibility of the FoF scheme to a non-academic constituency. A total of 15 interviews were undertaken in August and September with users drawn from the public, private and voluntary sectors.

3. FoF Scheme: Design and Operation

The ESRC FoF scheme was launched by the ESRC in August 2008 following earlier ratification of its scope and make-up by the Communications and Information Committee (CIC). The scheme's *opening* budget was set at £0.5 million for the first year, £1.5 million for the second year, and £3 million for the third year, with the prospect of further financial contributions to be determined by an Office led assessment. At the time of its launch, the FoF scheme replaced various Impact Grant schemes, and shadowed the introduction of 'Pathways to Impact' statements in 2009. Indeed, FoF applicants were encouraged to regard the FoF scheme as an *'extension and complement to the Pathways to Impact section of a research grant'* (ESRC, 2011). The scheme was also a response to, *inter alia*, the recommendations of the Warry Report (2006), which concluded that the Research Councils should intensify their commitment to knowledge transfer and the maximisation and demonstration of social and economic impact; and the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee Review of Research Council Support for Knowledge Transfer (HMSO, 2006), which questioned the desirability of the (then) extant suite of knowledge transfer schemes, and encouraged their streamlining under the auspices of the Knowledge Transfer Categorisation and Harmonisation Project (DTZ, 2007).

Managed by the (then titled) Knowledge Transfer team, the FoF scheme was formulated in the light of wide consultation between the Office and the community, as well as scrutiny of similar schemes operating internationally (limited though these were). The scheme required projects - via any activity or combination of activities - to effect significant and demonstrable economic, social, policy and/or practice benefits over and above those associated with projects terminating (for the large part) in the preceding *five* years. Individuals holding an ESRC grant were free to submit an application to the FoF scheme in the six months prior to project termination, while ESRC-funded Research Centres and holders of Large Grants were also given encouragement to apply. Applications of up to £125K (fEC) could be made via the Joint Electronic Submission (Je-S) system.

Later in the report we outline applicants' perceptions of the application and assessment process. For now, then, we provide just a brief overview of the scheme's operation and procedures. Following the usual array of checks by the Knowledge Transfer Team (e.g. in respect of eligibility and applicability), each application was submitted for peer review. In the case of applications of <£30K, a 'light touch' approach was adopted consisting of assessment by just one academic and one user reviewer. In such cases the Head of the Knowledge Transfer Team would formulate a rank-ordered list of proposals and allocate funding on the basis of an agreed budget. Applications of between £30 and £100K were peer reviewed by 2 users and 2 academics (of whom one from either category was nominated). Candidate applications were subsequently made available to an Assessors Panel responsible for the prioritisation of proposals in concert, once again, with the designated budget holder (the Head of the Knowledge Transfer Team). A 12-week window for processing was initially envisaged, although this was later revised to 16 weeks on the basis of delays in the submission of peer review responses. In the aftermath of funding it was intended that the Office would engage in 'light touch' liaison with award holders, partly in an attempt to identify 'early opportunities for impact case studies, publicity, and good practice dissemination' (CIC, 2007).

The extent to which aims were met

Interest in the scheme was both *considerable* - with the three Calls to which our analysis is devoted attracting more than 350 applications - and *wide-ranging* – with awards, alone, forthcoming from 17 separate disciplinary areas; albeit with four *lead* disciplines (Psychology, Management and Business Studies, Education and Social Policy) accounting for more than half (52%) (n=36) of the 68 awards made (see Table 1).

Lead Discipline	Number of Projects by relevant lead discipline	% of Projects by relevant lead discipline
Education	10	14.7
Psychology	10	14.7
Management and Business Studies	8	11.7
Social Policy	8	11.7
No Lead Discipline	6	8.8
Sociology	4	5.8
Economics	3	4.4
Human Geography	3	4.4
Linguistics	3	4.4
Socio-Legal Studies	3	4.4
Political Science	2	3
Statistics, Methods and Computing	2	3
Area and Development Studies	1	1.5
Economic and Social History	1	1.5
Environmental Planning	1	1.5
Science and Technology Studies	1	1.5
Social Anthropology	1	1.5
Social Work	1	1.5

Table 1: Source: ESRC Dataset

Our analysis of all 68 awards revealed that of the 121 projects identified, in different ways, as providing a ‘foundation’ to FoF applications, 88% (n=60) had received at least some support from the ESRC. Of these, 60% (n=36) were projects funded either through Responsive Mode (Standard Grants only) or ‘Programme’ mode (to include cross-Council Programmes) (see Table 2).

Funding Scheme	Number of Follow-on-Fund projects citing preliminary ESRC funding	% of Follow-on-Fund projects citing preliminary ESRC funding
ESRC Programme	22	36.7
Responsive Mode (Standard Grant)	14	23.3
Other ²	13	21.7
ESRC Fellowship	5	8.3
Responsive Mode (Small Grant)	4	6.6
ESRC Large Grants	1	1.7
ESRC Centre Grant	1	1.7

Table 2: Source: Successful Applications (68)

In 9 other cases, projects funded by the FoF scheme built on earlier ESRC funding, but not exclusively so. Instead, they were additionally underpinned by projects funded by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council, the Nuffield Foundation, the Leverhulme Trust, the National Science Foundation (US), the

² Including: three ESRC Research Methods Programme awards; one ESRC First Grant award; one ESRC/MRC Postdoctoral Fellowship award; one ESRC/MRC Studentship award; one standard ESRC studentship; one Capacity Building Cluster award; one Researcher Development Initiative award; one Business Placement Fellowship award; one ESRC ‘Knowledge Exchange’ award; and one Research Seminar Series award.

British Academy and the European Science Foundation – to name simply major grant awarding bodies. A full picture of the origins of preliminary projects is provided in Table 3.

Funding Source	Number of Follow-on-Fund projects citing as preliminary funding	% of Follow-on-Fund projects citing as preliminary funding
ESRC	60	88.2
Charitable Sources	24	35.2
Other government bodies in the UK	23	33.8
Other	8	11.7
Other research councils	5	7.3
EU Other	2	2.9
Government bodies in the EU	1	1.4

Table 3: Source: Successful Applications (68)

In the view of at least one Reviewer, there was considerable benefit to be derived from investment in projects not only extending earlier ESRC-funded work but also triangulating across other awards of possible non-ESRC (or other RCUK) provenance; awards possibly stressing different and complementary modes of investigation. Yet there were also potential pitfalls with this approach, with one Reviewer – mindful of what he believed was a tacit requirement for projects to *retrospectively* ‘bolt-on’ impact-generating activities to earlier *projects* – highlighting the risk of FoF applications being oriented too much around a ‘set of information’ held, or even more ‘general academic work’. Clearly, this is a tension the Office must negotiate as it seeks to refine the FoF scheme’s terms and conditions.

While one Reviewer queried the possible ‘REF impact on Impact’ – noting the danger that most universities’ conceptions of impact might, in future, become reducible to what is ‘four star’ (and therefore ‘international’ or more ‘fundamental’ in reach) - there appeared to be no lack of enthusiasm for engaging with issues and constituencies prominent at the *local* and *regional* levels. Indeed, while the question is itself open to competing interpretation, our analysis of all 68 applicants’ (Je-S required) self-assessments in regard to international orientation revealed that 42% (n=24) of projects drew on earlier-gathered research and evidence to influence policy debates and outcomes beyond domestic shores. A majority (58%) (n=33), meanwhile, were classified as ‘non-international’ (and therefore, arguably, local, regional and/or national) in their orientation.

4. FoF Scheme: Role of Project Partners

Of the 41 award holders responding to the survey question concerning the drivers and motivations for submitting a FoF application, 27% (n=11) identified a desire to initiate *new* partnerships and/or working relationships; while 54% (n=22) were anxious to ‘expand knowledge exchange activities already underway with user organisations’. 39% (n=16) and 49% (n=20) of respondents³ had worked with ‘all’ or ‘some of’ their partners previously. A number of award holders spoke, during interview, of the importance of ‘taking work to the next stage’, of ‘maintaining momentum’, and of seeking out additional funding at times of strong ‘pull’ from policy-makers. In this context, it is not surprising that over half of the FoF projects registering in our survey had finished less than two years previously. Several projects were even ‘live’ at the time of application. On the one hand, of course, these are moments when ‘impact’ might be readily achieved. But in the view of at least one Reviewer, the scenario of existing award holders requesting ‘add-on’ funding in respect of ‘add-on’ impact plans was a troubling one; if not for any inherent lack of merit in the activities proposed, then for the prospect of long-established partnerships merely being ‘rehashed’. *‘Is there not the opportunity here’, this Assessor asked, ‘for working in a different way that may be beyond our comfort zone but achieves more sustained and qualitative outcomes?’*. Other Reviewers shared similar concerns. One, for example, while noting the scheme’s emphasis on promoting the exploitation of recent or even ‘live’ research in its later stages, was concerned that projects conceived with only a particular short term outcome in mind would be inaudible above the immediate ‘policy noise’.

³ Note that the number of respondents to individual questions varied across the survey

While such comment affirms the importance of engagement with deeper and more underlying societal issues, Reviewers were nevertheless of the view that highly stressed organisations living, out of necessity, ‘in the moment’, such as those operating in the social work and social care sectors, were unlikely to see merit in any departure from it. *‘Why’, this same individual queried, ‘would they wish to look at 10 years’ worth of policy when they can’t find the funding to deliver next week?’* There looks to be a tension, then, between heightening the emphasis on knowledge transfer and the maximisation and demonstration of social and economic impact, on the one hand; and engagement with more fundamental and long-run questions of society and economy, on the other - perhaps as part of a more rigid long-term research plan of the sort prevalent in the physical sciences. As one Reviewer commented: *‘the high emphasis given on impact success at all costs in current ESRC advice to applicants reduces this option [of long-term planning and decision-making] and also the whole point about research, if we could predict the results and the impacts there would be no point in the research, as we would already know what we were looking for’*.

With regard to the specific role of Project Partners in the life cycle of FoF projects, the 41 responses to the survey question – ‘How were your nominated (non-academic) Project Partner(s) involved in the development of your ESRC Follow-on-Fund application?’ – suggest that over 70% (n=29) were involved in the ‘execution’ of FoF activities; almost two-thirds (66%) (n=27) were involved in ‘dissemination’ activities; and that 22% (n=9) were involved in some form of integrated ‘training’. In a great many cases it was the FoF scheme’s capacity to channel financial support to non-academic partners that made this possible; a much valued feature of the FoF scheme alluded to elsewhere. The survey also revealed that nominated Project Partners were involved in the *design* of 78% (n=31) of projects; an encouraging statistic in the light of the stated importance of involving potential users and stakeholders in the development of projects.

Rhetoric aside, however, interviews with a number of award holders and Project Partners gave the impression that the discursive terrain was invariably staked out in advance. In other words, processes of co-production unfolded within an already carefully defined context. One highly typical account in this regard read as follows: *‘I drafted an outline of what it was I wanted to apply for and then I circulated it to various organisations to ask them for comments and to ask them if they’d be interested in being involved. I think all four of them I sent it to got back to me. All of them had suggestions for things that they would find useful in a website that we were proposing to make. So I incorporated their suggestions into that and then I asked them if they’d write me the letters of support and all four of them did’*.

Not only, then, should we treat the above-cited figures with caution, we should also consider the potential consequences of this more limited conception of co-production, and to the possible contributing factors to this dynamic. One Reviewer, for example, pointed to a tendency on the part of many researchers to forego the often-painstaking work of connecting with partners at the most basic level; often because the most purposeful engagement activity is time-intensive and often unrecognised and/or given due regard in university workload allocations.

Whether co-funding should be a requirement

The vast majority (74%) (n=50) of formalised links around which applications were oriented failed, our documentary analysis suggests, to leverage even a modest ‘direct’ contribution. What contributions there were (in 20 of the 28 cases) often amounted to, or were deliberately flagged as, staff ‘buy-out’; which in a number of other cases was identified as an ‘indirect’ contribution. The same could be said of other items categorised differently across the 68 proposals. Indeed, so inconsistent did the figures appear, that we urge caution in the reading of the analysis that follows, and flag for the Office’s attention the inconsistency with which ‘direct’ contributions appear to be calculated⁴. With these disclaimers in mind, though, our analysis revealed that of the 36 awards boasting one or more Project Partners, 18 featured single or multiple ‘direct’ contributions equal to £262,728 (min. £2 (two pounds); max: £90,000 (ninety-thousand pounds)) (see Table 4).

Amount (£) (<i>Direct Contribution</i>)	Number of projects generating the relevant amount of cash co-funding	% of projects generating the relevant amount of cash co-funding
None/Not applicable	50	73.5
£0-£999	4	5.8
£1,000-£1,999	1	1.5

⁴ Specific examples available on request

£2,000-£2,999	0	0
£3,000-£3,999	2	3.0
£4,000-£4,999	0	0
£5,000-£5,999	3	4.4
£6,000-£6,999	0	0
£7,000-£7,999	0	0
£8,000-£8,999	1	1.5
£9,000 - £9,999	0	0
>£10,000	7	10.2

Table 4: Source: Successful Applications (68)

33 awards, meanwhile, attracted single or multiple ‘indirect’ contributions equal to £350,887 (min: £4 max: £40,000 (forty thousand pounds) (see Table 4).

The sum total of the combined (‘direct’ and ‘indirect’) contributions was £613,615 (a combined average per award of £9,024), with ‘in kind’ contributions accounting for 57% of the total (see Table 5).

Co-funding Amount (£) (Indirect Contribution)	Number of projects generating the relevant amount of ‘in-kind’ co-funding	% of projects generating the relevant amount of ‘in-kind’ co-funding
None/Not applicable	35	51.4
£0-£999	3	4.4
£1,000-£1,999	2	2.9
£2,000-£2,999	2	2.9
£3,000-£3,999	2	2.9
£4,000-£4,999	2	2.9
£5,000-£5,999	2	2.9
£6,000-£6,999	3	4.5
£7,000-£7,999	1	1.5
£8,000-£8,999	3	4.5
£9,000 - £9,999	0	0
>£10,000	13	19.2

Table 5: Source: Successful Applications (68)

Despite, subjectively speaking, the impressive total, and the preponderance of public and voluntary sector bodies in our list of cited partners, 64% (n=27) of successful applicants surveyed believed their FoF application would have been jeopardised had a compulsory requirement for co-funding been in place. This is contentious terrain, of course. On the one hand, a pledge of financial support was felt by Reviewers to provide specific proof of a Project Partner’s commitment to the knowledge exchange relationship; while on the other, there was no denying the straitened circumstances of the public and voluntary sectors (including those of the many umbrella organisations arguably most likely to locate themselves in an academic collaboration) and thus the difficulties any mandatory requirement for ‘cash’ co-funding would pose. In fact, when asked to reflect on the possibility of more stringent or even compulsory requirements in respect of ‘cash’ co-funding - such as those embedded in a recent ESRC Knowledge Exchange Opportunities call (since moderated such that ‘partner contributions can now consist of any combination of cash or in-kind resources’) - one highly typical interviewee explained: *‘you’re asking the public sector to stump up the money for things that they may or may not see the real need for....and when they’re literally fighting for jobs and services, I think it’s just totally unrealistic. There’s no way this project would have gone on’.*

As a viewpoint it was one to which Reviewers were largely sympathetic; with one even relating in detail his own experiences of the challenges and realities of collaborative working in the voluntary sector: *‘over the years attempts to work with the voluntary sector has [sic] in some instances resulted in being asked to pay for rooms, transport, time and other resources to enable them to take part in the research – even research commissioned by the sector itself. We try to build this into any bid, but if for example, the work is being funded by another voluntary sector organisation they are often unwilling to pay for such*

additions, even though they understand the need. This situation demonstrates the complexity of relations in 'the market' and the strain on all sides'.

One further possible consequence, it was suggested, of more stringent or even compulsory requirements in respect of 'cash' co-funding was a 'skewing' of research funding towards projects better placed to lever in the necessary amounts; namely those involving either the private sector or large public sector organisations. Even those interviewees reporting previous experience of working with the private sector were at best ambivalent, and at worst hostile to the prospect of a forced requirement for 'cash' funding. Indeed, on previous occasions the very presence of a financial 'stake' was felt to have gifted partner organisations, as one award holder with a particularly distinguished track record of collaboration with the private sector put it, *'a disproportionately important hand over how [and, presumably, on what] that's spent and they will have eliminated any moral obligation to do things in a way that's better for the project overall than from their perspective'.*

Although, in some ways, the presence of competing interests might be considered a healthy and generative context in which to pursue knowledge exchange, this same interviewee was of the view that any noticeable 'raising of the bar' in terms of co-funding - but particularly in terms of 'cash' co-funding - would have the effect of stifling innovation and risk taking; by, for example – and as another Reviewer pointed out – hampering the involvement of micro and small to medium enterprises, both of which were cited as important engines of economic growth and technological progress. On the more general matter of possible private sector involvement in the FoF scheme this same Reviewer regarded it as unlikely that any business would declare a financial interest in a project where the outputs were 'distant from market', or otherwise ambiguous in regard to their potential appropriation. That is unless the collaboration offered the potential for major alteration of the policy and/or practice equilibrium.

Deliberations around the nature of 'in-kind' contributions were reported by award holders to be only slightly less fraught, despite the highly differentiated ways in which these were registered. Interviewees hinted at the prevalence of 'creative accounting' and at feeling unsure about how best to calculate/configure 'in-kind' contributions. As one award holder explained: *'It's a very awkward model. I mean we access money from the [European partnership instrument] and they need matching funding and it's complete murder....I mean I understand and I think it's good to look for co-funding but I think pushing people to do some sort of creative accounting over whose time can be costed in to bring the figure of the match funding up is not a healthy way to go'.* In this context, it may be appropriate for the Office to consider the guidance it affords to applicants in respect of prospective 'in kind' contributions, and to possibly develop a series of exemplars or illustrations of best practice. Serving as a possible useful reference point, here, are the more exhaustive guidelines developed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada⁵.

Taken collectively, the above charges give illustration of the fragile and often transitory nature of academics' relationships with users. A number of respondents cited the difficulties associated with sinking time and resources into a developmental process unlikely (current success rates ensure) to yield financial reward. Such concerns are no less salient, of course, to other of the ESRC's schemes and initiatives, and need to be seen in the wider light of 'over-subscription'; a reality with which all *academic* applicants and their partners should be, and generally are, familiar. But as one highly typical respondent to the 'unsuccessful' survey explained *'there are a lot of costs in building networks with partners and then not being funded....[there's a]....danger that it actually damages relations with external partners'.*

Once again, such sentiments need to be viewed with a sceptical eye, but they appear largely illustrative of the alienation schemes, so strongly emphasising collaboration beyond the academy can engender. They particularly emphasise the necessity of both clear guidance and clarity regarding the stated intentions of the scheme (against a reality in which applications boasting some form of previous ESRC (or other RCUK) funding perform particularly well), and the importance of thinking demand management issues through in relation to schemes giving strong emphasis to collaboration beyond the academy.

Whether partnerships formed have continued beyond award durations

⁵ http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/policies-politiques/cash_inkind-especes_en_nature-eng.aspx

On a more positive note, over 95% (n=41) of award holders were either in agreement or strong agreement that the ties between academic and non-academic contributors had been strengthened during the project period; while over 93% (n=38) of respondents were either in agreement or strong agreement that the ties formed have remained active and productive in the post-award period - often in ways at variance with earlier projects' terms of reference. In other words, projects appear to have provided a vital springboard to collaborative activity of more substantial scope and duration.

The durability of partnerships is scrutinised in a different way in Section 10. Here, however, we discuss the number of unsuccessful applicants seeking out alternative funding (and thereby seeking to preserve that initial 'coming together' of agendas), any reasons for not seeking out alternative funding, and the outcome of those applications that did emerge.

5. FoF Scheme: Activities Funded

The information conveyed in this section is intended to provide context to the vignettes and case studies that follow in Sections 6 and 7.

Activity	% of respondents undertaking activity	No. of respondents undertaking activity
Development of Dissemination Materials	81.4	35
Workshop	69.8	30
Conference	65.1	28
Development of Training Materials	58.1	25
Seminar	48.8	21
Network	44.2	19
Multimedia	34.9	15
Placements	14	6

Table 6: Source: Question 21, Online Survey of Award Holders

Over 80% of survey respondents reported developing dissemination materials as part of their supported activities. These, as case study 1 illustrates, tended to take the form of case studies and impact statements, many of them suffused with testimonials and fragments of interview data. In a number of cases these provided the focal point for discussions at a subsequent workshop or seminar. Indeed, almost 70% of survey respondents reported as having integrated at least one workshop into their FoF programme. In a number of cases these appear to have been figured (as in Case Study 1) as *international* 'knowledge sharing' events.

More interesting, perhaps, is the fact that more than half (58.1%) of respondents identified as having developed education or training materials - often as part of a wider strategy to embed practice and develop capability for the long term. In fact, tropes of legacy and sustainability are no less evident in the 44.2% of respondents committing, more widely, to the development of networks. A detailed analysis of the purposes to which these were put is not possible under the circumstances; however, the motivations of those seeking their establishment appear roughly two-fold. On the one hand, they appear to have served largely instrumental purposes; for example, the 'community of practice' (CoP) located at the heart of Case Study 3 was established with the express intention of co-creating innovative responses to the dilemma of climate change. On the other, networks were established with more long-term needs and aspirations in mind.

While, on occasions, the development of new online technologies and media platforms (such as those detailed in Case Study 3) were oriented to fulfilling a similar function, it appeared more common for applicants to solicit professional support in the development and/or advancement of more prosaic web-based materials. One award holder, for example, explained: *'we had been disseminating this kind of research via our own lab website, but it was the wrong vehicle....[to]....be attractive to health professionals'*. Reflecting on the new platform that was to take its place, one such health professional commented: *'I've been able to direct parents to [the website] and it has been very helpful....I have a place where I can direct them to...sometimes they'll look at the website and then come and talk to me'*.

Finally, given the oft-cited benefits of 'knowledge transfer on legs' (Fisher et al, 2012; Hardill and Baines, 2011), it is in some ways surprising that just 14% of award holders built Placement Fellowships into their FoF

programme. Those that did, appeared to have reaped the benefits of an arrangement facilitative of both direct (e.g. through particular programmed activities) and indirect/incidental (e.g. through the incremental transmission of embodied competencies/knowledges) knowledge transfer/exchange; yet their use, throughout, appears to have been hamstrung by the effects of instability and upheaval in the public and voluntary sector workplaces (in particular) of the ‘outgoing’ Fellows.

6. FoF Scheme: Non-academic Impact

As noted in Section 3, the FoF scheme was established with the aim of encouraging the pursuit of knowledge exchange and impact generating activities supplementary to those constituting an earlier piece of *substantial* research; activities that could also demonstrate the potential for significant economic, social, policy and/or practice benefits. Here, in the limited space available to us, we signpost just some of the more ‘typical’ examples of impact (economic, social and policy and/or practice) spilling from FoF supported activities. These brief vignettes differ from the case studies in Section 7, by virtue of their greater concern for the types of impact evidenced, as opposed to the case studies’ emphasis on the settings and contexts in which FoF projects were conceived.

First, we wish to spotlight the *development and commercialisation* of a new form of Resilience Therapy by a team of academics and non-academic experts. Promising to boost levels of child and family health in ways only tentatively explored in an earlier project, the FoF scheme allowed the team to bundle together a series of work packages otherwise likely to be pursued independently. Providing for the ‘buy out’ of the Principal Applicant, the appointment of a full time Research Associate *and* the involvement of user partners (via Placement Fellows), the FoF scheme was able to mobilise all relevant communities of interest in the pursuit of a fully validated training programme. Subsequent outputs included a Resilience Therapy training programme and the establishment of a means of long-term delivery - a social enterprise (Community Interest Company).

Second, we draw attention to a project seeking to embed the insights from previous, non-RCUK funded research on memory recall in *professional practice*. Building on an initial translation of these insights into a written form better suited to policy-makers and practitioners, the FoF project’s second phase – only partly specified at the point of application – saw the applicant establish links with a local constabulary in order to embed the project’s empirical contributions in the development of a new Witness Statement Collection Tool. In something of a break with practice, the tool - which is now being used in 27 police forces in the UK and abroad - allows for the *self-completion* of witness statements and thereby the collection of multiple statements at any one time. Not only has the product increased the speed with which statements are collected (freeing up police time in the process), it has also reduced anxiety levels among members of the public. One user reported that, ‘*where it’s had its biggest impact is in the road traffic collision industry. If there was a fatal road traffic crash, for example, then two officers would attend that...those two officers would have around 10-20 witnesses to trace...so what they will do now is they will try and pursue these at the scene...so it’s cut down on the Police hours, travel, stress of witnesses...it’s built into all our major disaster plans?*’

Our third and final vignette brings to light a FoF project blending *social, policy and economic impact*. Built on ground-breaking ESRC-funded research into the erotic dancing industry - a sector of the economy traditionally hard to regulate – this project set out to develop good practice procedures and specific initiatives relating to licensing, safety and working conditions in association with stakeholders from a range of regulatory and support services. These, as the award holder explained, have been adopted by a number of Local Authorities: ‘*it has directly influenced policy, trained local authority licensing committees in evidence based research which has informed policy directly, and set about creating gold standards in the erotic dancing/ adult entertainment industry?*’

7. FoF Scheme: Case Studies

Case Study 1: Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania: Developing an Equity Scorecard

The FoF work built upon an ESRC-DFID funded project, which generated a new evidence base identifying ways of making higher education more socially inclusive in sub-Saharan Africa. One innovative feature of the project was the construction of Equity Scorecards (ESCs), which have the potential to have an impact on universities as they engage faculty, staff, administrators and students in a process of change that is customised to the institutional context.

The FoF project enabled Professor Morley and her team to promote impact through holding three Knowledge Exchange and Impact Enhancement Seminars in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Accra, Ghana and at the University of Sussex, UK. Knowledge developed through the project was presented, verified and exchanged with the case study universities, policymakers, and community and student organisations. Each seminar was interactive and participative, with position papers presented by policy analysts (Paul Effah, Ghana, Daniel Mkude, Tanzania and Miriam David, UK). Participants discussed case studies from the interview data and ESCs and identified future impacts and implementation plans in relation to the findings e.g. zero tolerance of sexual harassment. A project website was developed (www.sussex.ac.uk/education/cheer/wphegt), and contains a range of resources, such as videos, ESCs, publications, working papers, case studies, PowerPoint presentations, project report and executive summary, and resources for widening participation (e.g. reports and bibliographies). The website resources are being widely accessed and used by a global audience, and this has led to invitations to speak across five continents.

The original project built research capacity by providing research training and by combining newer and experienced researchers in international teams. The involvement of policymakers and academic managers from the outset of FoF in the interviews and in-country advisory groups facilitated ownership and impact of the final research findings. There have also been a number of country-specific impacts. For example, in Tanzania: impacts have included the development of an MA in Gender Studies at UDSM; support for disabled students; mentoring of new academics; the review of the academic adviser scheme and creation of new retention strategies.

We now focus in detail on the impact of the project on higher education in Ghana from the perspective of the user interviewees. Linda Dzama Forde (University of Cape Coast) commented that, *'as a result of engagement with Professor Morley's work the University has changed its working practices'*; a view echoed by Isaac Ohene, former Registrar, *'The University of Cape Coast community, staff and students are now more aware of gender issues, especially sexual harassment'*. Linda Dzama Forde indicated that, *'To increase student retention, our Vice Chancellor has mandated the University Counselling Centre to access the names of all students who are at risk of dropping out so that such students can benefit from preventive counselling services'*. When Peace akua Oddoye was warden of the only all-female hall on UCC campus she worked with others, *'to organize a sexual harassment awareness programme for the University community, especially female students'*. Former doctoral student and University of Cape Coast Lecturer Christine Adu Yeboah mentioned that, *'even though it is difficult to isolate the extent of the impact attributable to the project, the Head of Department of Educational Foundations, UCC is discussing the start of a B Ed degree in Special Education to help address the needs of students with special challenges at the pre-tertiary level. The Head was one of the participants at the Accra dissemination seminar'*. One final impact mentioned by both Linda and Christine is that the University has shared the project findings with an educational NGO, which has initiated a project to assist able students with limited financial resources to gain access into tertiary education.

Academic Lead(s):

Professor Louise Morley, Director, Centre for Higher Education and Equity Research (CHEER), University of Sussex, UK; Professor Amandina Lihamba, University of Dar es Salaam and Dr Linda Dzama Forde, University of Cape Coast.

Case Study 2: Preventing Improper Juror Conduct and Ensuring Effective Jury Deliberations

This research builds on the recent landmark study of the jury system in England and Wales, 'Are Juries Fair?', which was funded by the Ministry of Justice. That study found that almost half of surveyed jurors in England and Wales were uncertain or did not know what to do about improper juror conduct, as many as a quarter had seen information about their case on the internet during the trial, and a majority wanted more information about how to conduct jury deliberations.

This project set out to explore each of these issues in depth to determine how best to prevent improper jury conduct (including internet use) and improve jury deliberations. The importance of the underlying research was highlighted by the Lord Chief Justice's citing of its findings in a landmark Court of Appeal ruling on juror conduct. The project uses an immediate post-verdict survey to explore juror use of the internet during trial,

understanding of juror impropriety and views on what deliberation guidance is needed. These initial findings provide the basis for the piloting - in close cooperation with the judiciary, Ministry of Justice, Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service and Judicial College - of new tools for the approximately 200,000 members of the public who serve as jurors each year. These tools will range from credit card sized Conduct Cards and interactive decision-making exercises for jurors to information in the jury box and deliberating room. The tools will be piloted for their efficacy in courts around the country, and subjected to a detailed cost-benefit analysis.

At a time when the Government's accelerated review of the Contempt of Court law gives added profile to the human and financial costs of jury mistrials, these materials are uniquely placed to bolster this vital aspect of the judicial process. Therefore, while this is inherently pioneering academic work in the study of juror behaviour, the project's non-academic impacts have been and will continue to be particularly profound. As well as affecting procedure in jury trials, the findings of the research are now likely to affect both the Law Commission's recommendations for reform of the Contempt of Court Act and the Attorney General's future decisions about prosecution of both jurors and the media for contempt.

Finally, such is the scope and pervasiveness of the problem of juror impropriety in the internet age that the project will be of clear relevance to policy-makers and practitioners not just in England and Wales, but also those operating in other jurisdictions such as the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where the problem of juror use of the internet is no less problematic. Commenting on the project, its Principal Investigator, Professor Cheryl Thomas said, *'the ESRC's Follow-on-Fund has ensured that vital solutions are found to answer fundamental questions raised in my original government-funded research about how to prevent improper juror conduct and provide jurors with the best tools to fulfil their crucial role in the criminal justice system'*.

Academic Lead(s):

Cheryl Thomas, who is Professor of Judicial Studies at University College London and Director of the UCL Jury Project, worked in collaboration with Dr Nigel Balmer, a Reader in Law and Social Science Statistics in the same Faculty of Laws.

Case Study 3: Social Marketing for Sustainability: developing a Community of Practice for co-creating behavioural change campaigns

Building on a substantial and cumulative body of work - variously underpinned by funding from the ESRC (First Grant scheme), the British Academy, the Leverhulme Trust and DEFRA - this project aimed to establish a new community of practice comprising academic researchers, social marketing practitioners, design experts and citizens, and to orientate it towards the challenge of using social marketing techniques to promote lasting pro-environmental behaviour change in the travel and tourism sector; a sector both much maligned for its heavy bearing on the environment, and yet curiously 'exempted' from wider initiatives intended to offset carbon-intensive behaviours at the level of the individual.

As a broad aim this was operationalized in the first section of the programme via a series of workshops and interactive symposiums exploring both possible ideas for social marketing campaigns and the platforms (e.g. iPhone, Nintendo DS and Internet-based social media and social networking tools) from which they might be conducted or transacted; and then later, by means of a design and development stage, during which new and innovative products were developed and trialled with members of the public before, ultimately, being brought to market. Underpinned and informed, throughout, by empirical data on pro-environmental behaviour change obtained over a period of more than a decade, the project represents one of the first to explore the potential for co-creating innovative behaviour change tools in a systematic and evidence-based way. Commenting on the project, its Principal Investigator Dr Stewart Barr said: *'The collaborations we have developed in this project have enabled us to create a broad community of practice amongst behaviour change professionals for co-creating knowledge on how to produce innovative approaches for behavioural change in this fast moving sector'*.

As well as being of benefit to government departments concerned with the promotion of pro-environmental behaviours and public policies, the project will also contribute to lively debates within the environmental social science literature - including those questioning the role of marketing-based approaches to behavioural change - and to the profile of the project's non-academic partners, who, whilst already active in the development of social marketing interventions, were keen to move towards a focus on pro-environmental behaviour change. Rosie

Head, a consultant at Uscreates, one of the organisations enrolled in the partnership, said: *'This project has been a great opportunity for us to broaden our business offer and work with new partners in the promotion of sustainable, low carbon lifestyles. Whilst we have had much success in changing behaviours across numerous health and social issues, this project was a great opportunity to use the same techniques on a pro-environmental behaviour. We were hugely encouraged by the flexibility of the scheme, a real departure from more 'conventional' academic funding streams'*.

Academic Lead(s):

Stewart Barr, who is Associate Professor in Geography at the University of Exeter, worked in collaboration with Gareth Shaw, a Professor of Retail and Tourism Management in the adjacent Business School.

8. FoF Scheme: Management

In this section we reflect on the management of the FoF scheme, but particularly on those facets of its administration drawing the most vocal comment – namely, the *application* and *assessment* stages. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to consider the *overall* impressions of both successful and unsuccessful applicants. Perhaps most encouraging in this regard is the fact that more than 90% (n=39) of *successful* applicant survey respondents felt that the advice and guidance emanating from the Office was sufficient for them to develop and submit their FoF application. Just 2% (n=1) of award-holder respondents disagreed that this was the case. Still more compelling is the fact that of the 84 *unsuccessful* applicants responding to the same question, an encouraging 72.6% (n=61) either agreed or strongly agreed that the information, advice and guidance was of a quality fit for purpose.

The concerns of those responding to our survey were essentially three-fold. First, several respondents commented that the application form was, in some ways, incommensurate with the scheme's distinctive demands and requirements. More specifically, it was suggested that the form catered rather better for applications with a prominent *research* element (as was permitted), than for those applications either more squarely or even entirely focused on dissemination and knowledge transfer activities. As one respondent explained: *'the forms....are based on traditional research bids - an underlying assumption being that applicants must undertake BOTH research and impact activities'*. Such unease is not necessarily surprising or unexpected. On the contrary, similar concerns have dogged countless other schemes, both in the context of established research and wider knowledge exchange commissioning processes. Yet these suggested disbenefits are both a by-product of moves to harmonise (Je-S enabled) application requirements across the Councils, and arguably a pale manifestation of criticisms made several years ago when a multiplicity of application forms and guidance reduced clarity of understanding still further.

Second, concerns over the suitability of the application form were matched by a concern for the clarity with which scheme objectives had been communicated. Concerned that the ESRC's expectations in respect of the FoF scheme were vague and undefined, one respondent stated: *'It was a bit difficult to understand what the ESRC wanted/envisaged initially, especially in terms of the key performance indicators'*. Given the relative nascence of the scheme such comments are not necessarily surprising. Nor, it could be said, might an overly prescriptive regime be conducive to the funding of projects demonstrating new and innovative forms of knowledge exchange.

Third, of seemingly greater concern to applicants was the quality and rigour of the peer review process. Again, while the feedback of *unsuccessful* applicants must be treated with caution, the concerns of those responding to our survey were essentially two-fold. First, applicants questioned the commensurability of the sometimes modest value of candidate projects and the extent of the assessment period. Such concerns reverberated, in some ways, through the aforementioned Audit. This revealed that applications were processed within the target period (eventually levelling at 16 weeks having been earlier set at 12 weeks) in just three of the twenty cases selected for scrutiny. Meanwhile, five of the selected applications were processed over a period of 24 weeks, mainly due to delays in the submission of peer review responses (itself partly a consequence of Calls falling in periods of holiday) and uncertainties over the available budget. Second, and in some ways paradoxically, applicants were concerned at the lack of detail and precision in the peer review comments provided. Just 15% (n=12) of the 80 *unsuccessful* applicants responding to our survey question agreed or strongly agreed that the feedback received was valid and legitimate, with 58% (n=46) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that this was the case. Approximately 65% (n=51) of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the feedback received would help them in the preparation of future funding applications.

Given the anonymous nature of these responses, it is not always possible to establish the stage in the scheme's life-cycle to which they pertain, and thereby their pertinence to the scheme's later rounds or even to the present day. What's more, as recent conversations with the ESRC Office confirm, many of the procedural shortcomings pointed to have already been demonstrably rectified. The explicit selection of academic peer reviewers demonstrating either particular awareness of or regard for knowledge exchange activities - both in their own right and as a component in the broader research process - has been a key first step in this regard, while the enrolment of additional 'user' reviewers has also brought more informed opinion to bear on the likely significance (in terms of potential impact and consequence) of activities proposed. Secondly, as the culture of knowledge exchange begins to embed itself in the consciousness of the wider community, there appears anecdotal evidence that the value of knowledge exchange activities is being comprehended more widely - possibly to the extent that assessment of knowledge exchange activities is seen less as a 'secondary' or 'niche' activity within the wider spectrum of peer review duties. Thirdly, the effects of a recent Office reorganisation - which saw responsibility for knowledge exchange activities dispersed throughout a newly-conceived Research, Partnerships and International (RPI) Directorate - will see the expertise and experience of a cadre of staff more versed in day-to-day commissioning activities enrolled in the future administration of knowledge exchange schemes. In summary, while the interventions just described are likely to bring greater certainty and robustness to the assessment process, the tone and magnitude of the feedback - and, as a result, the residual mistrust of ESRC processes - remains worthy of further reflection.

We wish finally, however, to reflect on a 'post award' management issue related to us by just one award holder, but which presumably had an impact across the cohort of funded projects. This concerns the extent to which award holders, having been advised that a Case Officer would "*identify...further opportunities for impact and good practice dissemination help us with publicity...which sounded great*", actually received the help and support alluded to. Indeed, as this award holder explained, *'the reality of it really wasn't like that all'*. While the Office's limited means were acknowledged, it was noted that the on-going engagement and support of Case Officers (or other designated officials) tended to vary quite considerably across the Research Councils. So much so, in fact, that the Office may wish to consider the mechanisms by which 'best practice' - in regard to the Research Councils' wider efforts to facilitate and add value to supported projects - is pooled and transmitted across Council boundaries.

9. FoF Scheme: Lessons from Similar Schemes

In this section we draw on interviews carried out with officials from wider Research Councils to tease out lessons for the ESRC. A number of Research Councils have run FoF schemes since 2003, initially (at least in the case of the 'big science' councils) as 'proof of concept' funds designed to boost commercialisation efforts, whether through the creation of a business plan, the pursuit of a licensing agreement, or the accessing of seed or venture finance. As with the ESRC FoF scheme, though, applications were free to build, in some cases, on non-RCUK investments, including those overseen by Government departments. Also similarly, funding levels tend(ed) to be between £100-150K for a typical 12 month project.

In all but one case, those interviewed confirmed their Councils' on-going commitment to the spirit and substance of the FoF scheme, despite certain adjustments having been made. At the time of interviewing an AHRC official their own internal FoF review was underway, but on October 15th 2012 a series of tunings were announced, many of them centring on the 'greater focusing' of the Scheme on applications that encourage creativity, accommodate risk, and promote innovative activities. A new scheme titled Follow-on Funding for Innovation, Creativity and Engagement will be launched in January 2013, with applicants required to provide evidence of a well-defined non-academic need and engagement with potential users and stakeholders during initial project development. Additional features include: a provision that allows contributors to earlier projects (other than the Principal Applicant) to submit FoF applications as Principal Applicant; a facility to enroll *international* colleagues as co-investigators in FoF proposals; and, most interesting of all (if not for its applicability to an ESRC context), a new freedom that will see applicants previously funded by another Research Council rendered eligible to seek out relevant 'follow-on' funding from the AHRC.

In 2007 the BBSRC published a review into its FoF scheme (Hill et al, 2007); a review which later prompted a series of interventions designed to provide, in the words of one stakeholder interviewee, *'more focus in the way the scheme runs'*. This greater focus appears, so far, to have centred on modifying the FoF scheme to facilitate the commercialisation process, first through the introduction of a so-called Pilot 'Super FoF', which BBSRC

developed in the light of a realisation that more strategic funding was needed to support projects of longer than 12 months duration; and second, through the introduction of a Pathfinder (pre-FoF) Scheme by which BBSRC allocates – typically within 30 days - ‘small amounts of funding [£6-10K] to carry out preliminary commercial activities [e.g. the gathering of expert advice, market assessments, dialogue with licensees]’. The stakeholder indicated in her interview that since the introduction of Pathfinder there has been an improvement in the quality of FoF applications. A similar Pathfinder Scheme has been introduced by NERC⁶.

EPSRC, which commissioned its own review of ‘follow-on’ funding in 2009 (Hill et al, 2009), has followed a different route. They closed their FoF Scheme, and will, from summer 2012, operate an algorithm-based system for administering ‘follow-on’ funding to institutions demonstrating a ‘critical mass’ of research excellence.

10. FoF Scheme: Value for Money

We addressed the thorny challenge of measuring ‘value for money’ in three distinctive ways, each offering a different perspective on the concept, and each contributing to an overall, three-dimensional picture of value for money. **First**, using Landry et al’s (2001) model of research utilization as a template, the model’s six stages – *Transmission; Cognition; Reference; Effort; Influence; and Application* – were translated into a series of questions and posed to award holders in the aforementioned survey. Certain obvious shortcomings notwithstanding (e.g. the validity of self-reporting), we consider it a suitable method for estimating and categorising the significance and reach of the achieved impact in at least broad-brush terms.

The results – which are presented below in Table 7 - demonstrate that FoF projects have yielded considerable (and advanced) impact, with 90% (n=38) of (anonymous) respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that research users had made efforts to adopt and implement the knowledge and insights conveyed; and almost two thirds (65%) (n=28) agreeing or strongly agreeing that knowledge and insights conveyed to relevant Project Partners and/or users during the award duration (or subsequently) have given rise to application and implementation.

Landry Classification	Survey question related to Landry Classification	% of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing that their project achieved the appropriate impact	No of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing that their project achieved the appropriate impact
Stage 1 - Transmission: I transmitted my research results the practitioners and professionals concerned.	Knowledge and insights gained during the original research have been further conveyed to relevant users.	95.4	41
Stage 2 - Cognition: My research reports were read and understood by practitioners and professionals concerned.	Knowledge and insights conveyed to relevant users have been cognized and understood.	88.1	37
Stage 3 - Reference: My work has been cited as a reference in the reports, studies	Knowledge and insights conveyed to relevant users have been cited in these organisations’ reports, studies and strategies of action.	81	34

⁶ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/available/schemes/followonfund.asp#docs>

and strategies of action elaborated by practitioners and professionals.			
Stage 4 – Effort: Efforts were made to adopt the results of my research by practitioners and professionals	Efforts have been made on the part of the relevant users to adopt and implement the knowledge and insights conveyed.	90.5	38
Stage 5 - Influence: My research results influenced the choices and decisions of practitioners and professionals	Knowledge and insights conveyed to relevant users have influenced their choices and decisions.	83.8	36
Stage 6 - Application: My research results gave rise to applications and extensions by practitioners and professionals concerned	Knowledge and insights conveyed to relevant users during the award duration (or subsequently) have given rise to application and implementation.	65.1	28

Table 7: Source: Online survey of award holders, adapted from Landry et al (2001)

Our **second** approach to measuring value for money centred on an examination of the *distinctiveness* of the FoF Scheme. Thus, in our survey of unsuccessful applicants, 75% (n=58) revealed that they had *not* sought out alternative funding in the aftermath of the ESRC’s decision - with the consequence, perhaps, of that particular academic-non-academic union dissolving. Of those that did submit to alternative funders, only 20% (n=4) were *fully* successful: validation, perhaps, of the earlier decision, but also, and more importantly we suggest, illustration of the value of a scheme whose terms and conditions allow for the bundling together of a *series* of work packages and activities otherwise likely to be pursued independently of one another. It is, in this context, interesting to note that 45% (n=9) were *partially* successful in the task of seeking out alternative funding.

Third, we carried out a more conventional analysis of the range of outputs documented in each of the 18 End of Award (EoA) reports made available to us. The 18 projects represent a total spend of £1,095,198 (80% FEC). Table 8 below presents a breakdown of the *un-weighted* outputs (n=206⁷) gleaned from our reading of EoA reports and, where necessary, from ‘cross-checks’ with project proposals.

Activity	Total
Seminar	123
Workshop	34
Development of Dissemination Materials	17
Development of Training Materials	9
Multimedia	9

⁷ Although highly problematic, this represents an average cost of £5316 per activity

Conference	7
Network	3
Placement	2
Exhibition	1
Formation of Community Interest Company	1
Total	206

Table 8: Source: End of Award Reports

11. FoF Scheme: Conclusions

- The FoF Scheme has been successful in providing social scientists with the opportunity to undertake additional knowledge exchange and impact generating activities across all three sectors of the economy. The Scheme has been highly prized by users, both for its more obvious instrumental effects and accommodation of often-substantial inputs from users themselves.
- Projects have demonstrated a willingness and ability to forge new partnerships and working relationships (across a range of sectors), while also consolidating existing relations through more dedicated joint working and information sharing. Indeed, most of the 68 projects amounted to elaborations on projects completed in the preceding two years.
- While the assessment process (and Reviewer College) has clearly been open to supporting excellent applications of non-ESRC (or other RCUK) provenance, by far the majority of awards built on previous ESRC (or other RCUK) investments. There appears to exist a tension, then, between allocating resources quickly and straightforwardly to projects demonstrating obvious excellence and impact potential (as measured through standard Evaluation procedures, for example), and doing so in a way that is consistent with wider ESRC protocols regarding quality assurance, transparency and accountability. If, as one Reviewer suggested, the FoF scheme represented an opportunity to *retrospectively* ‘bolt-on’ impact-generating activities to projects conceived in a different climate (i.e. in which Pathways to Impact Statements were not the norm), the Office’s approach to negotiating this tension will depend in part on its view of whether the new impact imperative will render the FoF scheme void.
- There appears at a minimum, though, to be substantial merit in a FoF scheme dedicated to catering for innovative and experimental forms of knowledge exchange. There also appears to be merit in fixing funding to at least the current threshold (£125K fEC). This, a number of award holders reported, was considered necessary to the day-to-day engagement with users (e.g. via full-time Research Assistants/Associates or ‘Knowledge Brokers’) upon which so many projects turned.
- While on the one hand, the extension of projects actively pursuing a strong and ‘live’ impact trajectory (as in the case of projects in their later stages, for example) might deliver a number of ‘quick wins’, there was a fear amongst Reviewers that this might be to the detriment of longer term strategic thinking and engagement with deeper and underlying societal issues.
- Countless respondents (including several award holders reflecting on past experiences) cited the difficulties associated with sinking time and resources into a developmental process unlikely (current success rates ensure) to yield financial reward. Such concerns are no less salient to other of the ESRC’s schemes and initiatives, of course, and need to be seen in the wider light of ‘over-subscription’ – a reality with which all applicants (and their Project Partners) should be familiar. Yet many interviewees described their relationships with Project Partners as fragile and often transitory. Hence, in this light, the absence from recent ESRC documentation (e.g. ‘Demand Management – Next Steps’) of any meaningful reflection on demand management as it relates to *non-academic* bodies should perhaps be reviewed.
- Although there was a broad consensus that the advice and guidance emitting from the ESRC was of a good quality and generally ‘fit for purpose’, more negative comment centred on the quality and efficiency of the peer review process. Given the relative nascence of the scheme such comments are not, perhaps, surprising;

nor are they necessarily at variance with the Office view. Indeed, many of the procedural shortcomings pointed to have already been demonstrably rectified.

- Some award holders felt their earlier application would have been jeopardised had a forced requirement for ‘cash’ co-funding been in place. Some concerns were also raised about ‘in kind’ support; principally, that it can be awkward to calculate and invariably degenerated into a process of ‘creative accounting’ - a potentially harmful scenario.

12. FoF Scheme: Recommendations

- To reflect on whether the FoF scheme represents the optimal vehicle for delivering ‘follow-on’ funding, given the large numbers of awards accruing to applicants boasting previous, and typically very recent, ESRC (or other RCUK) funding. While the preservation of a level playing field is important, as is the delivery of funding at a level sufficient to facilitate meaningful communications and engagement activities – considerable resource is sunk into the development of research programmes already partially ‘tested’.
- To consider, in the light of those findings detailed in Section 3, alternative means of dispensing ‘follow on’ monies – whether through greater use of Office-ratified (and hence financially limited) cash-based extensions; or the development of an agreed ‘impact contingency’ that becomes available to award holders once a specified level of ‘direct’ or ‘indirect’ support from Project Partners can be demonstrated. This would incentivise the pursuit of knowledge exchange opportunities for those both (ordinarily) reluctant to pursue such openings, and those keen to firm up long-term relations with key partners. As well as reducing the administrative overhead associated with considerable numbers of applications to the FoF, such a system would potentially perform a role in respect of demand management, too.
- To give consideration - on the basis of comments suggesting that failed applications and/or imperfect commissioning processes unnecessarily compromised non-academic links – to demand management as it relates to a scheme with such a strong emphasis on collaboration beyond the academy.
- To reflect, once again in the context of value for money, on the clarity and transparency of the FoF scheme’s stated intentions and provisions (e.g. in regard to the funding of applications of alternative provenance e.g. Nuffield Foundation, Leverhulme Trust etc.), and a reality in which the vast majority of applications are able to cite some form of previous ESRC (or other RCUK) funding (see Table 3). We recommend the Office gives careful consideration to the disclosure of such information, possibly via free briefing sessions or (more realistically) information-giving web-based seminars (as was suggested by Reviewers and unsuccessful applicants).
- One award holder noted that the Office hadn’t been able to provide the level of facilitative service hinted at in the initial ‘post award’ correspondence. We therefore suggest that the Office re-visits this earlier pledge in the light of current workloads. Of perhaps more general applicability is the suggestion that the Office may wish to consider the mechanisms by which ‘best practice’ – in regard to the Research Councils’ wider efforts to facilitate and add value to supported projects – is pooled and transmitted across Council boundaries.

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