



ESRC
Delivery Report
2006-7

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Delivery Report provides detail on the achievements of the Economic and Social Research Council during 2006-7, as well as progress against the targets set out in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2006.

In 2006 ESRC has been working to embed the two new responsive mode schemes, set up in 2005. The Large Grants scheme was set up to offer groups, networks and projects funding between £1.5m and £5m (post FEC). 24 applications were received under the first round of the scheme and four awards were made. The First Grants scheme was introduced to offer early career researchers an opportunity to move into research management and direction. The first round of the scheme attracted a total of 152 applications and 28 awards were made.

The Council agreed to fund two applications to the 2005/06 centres competition, the Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability Centre at the University of Sussex, which came into being on 1 October 2006, and the Centre for Microdata Methods and Practice at the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Commissioning took place under a number of new and ongoing programmes: for instance, the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme; New Dynamics of Ageing Programme; the Teaching and Learning Research Programme; the Public Services Programme; and the Stem Cells initiative on capacity building and raising awareness.

Following the ESRC's Demographic Review of the Social Sciences in 2005, the Council introduced a number of measures and activities in areas where particular problems were identified for the long-term health of disciplines. Continuing with the implementation of discipline-specific strategies, the Council has completed the commissioning of a major new £20 million initiative in Language Based Area Studies. Co-sponsored with the AHRC, HEFCE and the Scottish Funding Council, these collaborative capacity building centres have more than doubled the number of ESRC-supported studentships in area studies.

As part of the ESRC's National Datasets Strategy for the social sciences, the Council was successful in securing funding through the Large Facilities Capital Fund for the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS). With a proposed sample size of some 40,000 households this will be the largest panel study in the world, creating groundbreaking opportunities to advance understanding some of the most complex research and policy issues posed by modern-day society.

The Council has also made major strides in expanding the range of international datasets available to the UK social science community. This includes access to further sweeps of the European Social Survey and International Social Survey Programme, and commissioning of four scoping studies to look at the availability and nature of microdata for research purposes in Brazil, China, India and South Africa. The ESRC is taking the lead in establishing an International Data Forum, and to this end organised a major conference hosted by China to discuss the development of a more coherent international data infrastructure for social and economic research.

The ESRC has enhanced and extended its knowledge transfer activities. The Council has forged new partnerships with the Department for Education and Skills and the Office

for National Statistics, and has extended its collaborative studentship schemes with the Department for Food and Rural Affairs, Department for Transport, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Executive. The CASE (Collaborative Awards in Science and Engineering) studentship scheme has also been expanded, and the priority for the 2007 scheme is collaboration with the private sector. Major new Ventures have been agreed on public health, with the MRC, Wellcome Trust and Cancer Research UK; transport, with the DfT and the Scottish executive; and spatial economics, with the DTI, the Office of Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government.

In March 2007 the Council launched a new magazine, Britain Today, which offered a concise analysis of research on issues of relevance to the state of the nation in 2007, showcasing the diversity of ESRC-funded research. The annual ESRC Social Science Week was successfully rebranded and extended to become the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2007. The festival celebrated some of the very best British social science research as well as highlighting the ways in which social science touches everyday lives.

Key organisational developments included the decision to create a new impact management team within the office, full participation in the Shared Services Centre project, and the streamlining of our studentship payment systems through greater devolution to the HEIs.

2. RECENT SUCCESSES

2006 was an exciting year for the ESRC: below are some of the highlights of the year.

2.1 Delivering World-Class Social Science

2.1.1 Seizing Opportunities in Research

2006 saw the first completed rounds and the commissioning of the second rounds of the ESRC's Large and First Grants competitions.

The first round of the **Large Grants** scheme attracted 24 applications by its closing date at the end of January 2006. 4 awards were made; these were in the disciplines of economics, geography, social policy and management. The successful applications were from the Universities of Bristol and Sheffield, Queens University Belfast (in collaboration with the University of Ulster) and the London Business School. The second round of the scheme attracted 21 applications by its closing date at the end of October 2006.

The first round of the **First Grants** scheme attracted a total of 152 applications by its January 2006 closing date. 28 awards were made, with the disciplines of Psychology (7), Sociology (6) and Economics (3) receiving the largest number. The second round of the scheme attracted 167 applications by its January 2007 closing date.

933 Standard and Small Grant and Fellowship applications were considered by the Council in 2006/07. 259 were recommended for awards, which represents an overall success rate of 28%. 30 Professorial Fellowship applications were received in this year and 5 awards were made, which represents a success rate of 17%.

2.1.2 Creating Opportunities

The joint ESRC/AHRC **Religion and Society Research Programme** was launched at the end of 2006. The programme will be the first UK research programme to foster collaborative endeavours across the arts, humanities and social sciences in order to advance understanding of the complex interrelationships between religion and society.

The Council agreed to fund two new Centres as a result of the 2005/06 centres competition: the Social, Technological and Environmental Pathways to Sustainability Centre at the University of Sussex, which came in to being on 1 October 2006, and the Centre for Micro-data Methods and Practice at the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Funding was agreed for a new £3m Targeted Initiative on Science and Mathematics Education. The commissioning of new work has taken place on a number of research programmes: New Dynamics of Ageing; Public Services: Quality, Performance and Delivery; a new phase of the Teaching and Learning Research Programme on technology enhanced learning; third phase of the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme, Advanced Institute of Management Research (AIM) Mid-Career Fellowships; and the programme of capacity building and awareness raising under the Stem Cell Initiative. Commissioning was also completed for the AIM targeted initiative on innovation, which will promote and support world-class theoretical, empirical, policy and practice-oriented research in this field. Eight projects were funded.

2.2 Strengthening our future capacity – people and disciplines

The Council is continuing to respond to the findings of the **Demographic Review of the Social Sciences** and is taking further steps to address the issues identified in order to secure the future of the social science base.

Initial evidence has indicated that the enhanced stipend levels in Economics and Advanced Quantitative Methods that were introduced in 2005 are helping to improve recruitment and retention. Recent figures have shown that more of the Council's 1+3 Economics students are continuing on to their PhD (80% continued to their PhD in 2006, compared to 60% in 2005). Application numbers in the area of Advanced Quantitative Methods almost doubled in 2006 compared to the previous year, and there has been a significant increase in the overall level of investment in studentship and fellowship funding in these targeted areas.

In October 2006 the ESRC devolved payment of students stipends to institutions. The ESRC now makes bulk payments to institutions on a quarterly basis. These changes were introduced with the aim of giving greater flexibility to institutions by reducing the need to refer to ESRC on relatively minor administrative issues.

Two rounds of the **Researcher Development Initiative** have now been completed (the third round is currently being commissioned). The initiative, which aims to provide advanced training for researchers across the academic life course, has seen a major investment in advanced training and mid-career re-skilling in areas such as Economics, Management and Business Studies and Quantitative Methods.

The Council has completed the commissioning of a major new £20 million initiative in Language Based Area Studies. Co-sponsored with the AHRC and Funding Councils, the initiative has created five new collaborative capacity building centres, covering China, Japan, Eastern Europe and the Arabic-speaking world. The initiative has more than doubled the number of ESRC studentships in area studies.

2.3 Strengthening our future capacity – research resources

The Council received funding from the Office of Science and Innovation's Large Facilities Capital Fund and began commissioning for the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), a major new longitudinal study of the UK population, which will be the largest of its type in the world. The Study will provide valuable new evidence to inform research on issues of importance to a wide scientific community of interest and will assist with understanding the long term effects of social and economic change as well as policy interventions designed to impact upon the general well-being of the UK population. The Council has now appointed a team to undertake the scientific leadership of the study and the team has launched a consultation with the social science and biomedical user communities to identify and develop the topics for inclusion in the survey. A governing body will be established with an independent Chair, whose appointment will commence in September 2007.

The Council agreed in April 2006 to extend funding for the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS). The next phase of funding will continue to place a particular emphasis on providing access to a wide range of international datasets and will continue to develop

'added value services' to enhance access to and use of large and complex datasets, including the new UKHLS.

The Council has taken the lead in organising a major conference in China, in collaboration with social science funders from across the globe, to discuss the development of an International Data Forum to provide a more coherent international data infrastructure for social and economic research. The International Data Forum Foundation Conference (Beijing, 5th-7th June 2007) was designed to bring together key players to help shape the constitution of the Forum. The conference is being funded by the ESRC, the University of Warwick and funding bodies from the US, China, Canada, Netherlands and Germany.

2.4 Engagement and Partnerships

2.4.1 Knowledge Transfer and Impact

As part of ESRC's commitment to increasing the economic impact of its research and its wider impact on policy and practice, the Council agreed a Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Strategy. The key elements of this strategy are:

1. creating and supporting economic **impact through knowledge exchange, people transfer and infrastructure**, data, information resources and methodologies, and specifically:
 - a. engaging with potential users of our research to identify and develop new research opportunities;
 - b. extending the range and impact of our knowledge transfer activities, including the movement of people between academia and user organisations, which ESRC sees as one of the most effective mechanisms for knowledge transfer.
2. playing a **leadership role** within the social science community by:
 - a. raising awareness of and demonstrating the importance of knowledge transfer activities and economic impact
 - b. creating an environment within academia to enable and encourage researchers to undertake knowledge transfer as a valued and recognised part of the research process
 - c. promoting research, including the development of new methodologies, into the impact of research, science and technology on the wider economy and society
3. **communicating the economic impact** of the social sciences, specifically developing measures and analytical tools to identify the economic impact of its investments and to inform the development of more effective knowledge transfer mechanisms in the future.

The ESRC **Ventures Scheme**, introduced in 2005, offers the opportunity to collaborate with a wide range of organisations across all sectors who are willing to co-fund research. In the past year research projects have been commissioned under the Grand Challenges

(AIM) initiative, with EPSRC; the Technology Enhanced Learning Venture, with EPSRC; and the Corporate Governance Ideas Factory, with DTI and AIM. Other new ventures have been agreed on transport, spatial economics and public health, to name but three.

ESRC's **Placement Fellows Scheme**, launched in early 2006, provides an important channel for promoting knowledge transfer between academic departments and 'partner organisations' (currently government departments and devolved administrations) and the staff employed in them. The scheme allows researchers to spend time in a particular organisation to undertake policy-relevant research and to upgrade the research skills of 'partner organisation' employees. The first round of the scheme funded 6 placements in 4 participating government departments. The second round of the scheme funded 5 placements in 4 participating departments.

The first year of the **Impact Grants Scheme**, which provides funding for existing and past ESRC researchers to undertake new knowledge transfer activities, had a strong focus on generating impact with the business sector. 7 awards were made in the first round and 14 were made in the second round. Awards included topics such as facilitating entrepreneurial regeneration; business and the knowledge-based region; and understanding the attitudes and behaviours of SME owners/managers.

2.4.2 Communications

The **ESRC Society Today** web portal is a key tool to support the delivery of ESRC's Knowledge Transfer and Science in Society activities, and in 2006/7 relevant content and services have been developed to support these, including a Knowledge Transfer Guide and a 'what is social science' section. The technical and support infrastructure has been consolidated and extended and key enhancements include: the development of a subject repository of social science publications; improvements to content indexing of third party sites; and a new improved search functionality.

ESRC's exposure to the media has been strong during the 2006/07 financial year with around a 23% increase in March 2007 coverage compared to that achieved in the same month in 2006. The quality of the coverage is also increasing; strong relationships are being built with the national daily and Sunday newspapers. Coverage in national newspapers rose from 17% of the total coverage in April 2006 to 31% in March 2007. Specialist titles are also a target for the ESRC media strategy and account for around 19% of the total media coverage. Links with the broadcast media have also been strengthened this year with more exposure for ESRC funded research on radio programmes such as the Today Programme and Woman's Hour, and TV programmes such as BBC Breakfast and Newsnight. Stories originating from the ESRC are consistently covered by mainstream news programmes.

Many of the ESRC's media stories attract international coverage, with articles appearing during the 2006/07 financial year in the USA, Australia, New Zealand, Germany, Denmark, India, Brazil, Mexico, Finland, Austria, Ghana, South Africa, South Korea, Greece, Portugal, Malta and France, amongst others.

2.4.3 Science and Society

The annual ESRC Social Science Week was successfully rebranded and extended in 2007 to become the **ESRC Festival of Social Science 2007**. The festival, part of National Science and Engineering Week, celebrated some of the very best of British social science research and highlighted the ways in which it makes a difference to our lives.

Over 70 events were organised in more than 25 UK towns and cities. Some 4,800 people attended the events, ranging from conferences to workshops and debates, exhibitions, film screenings, plays and policy briefing, gaining vital insight into the 'whys' behind issues at the forefront of life in today's global society.

As part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science 2007 three A-level/Higher debates were organised on the topic of Youth and Representation in the Media in Glasgow, Newcastle and Brighton.

The ESRC's theme for its **Annual Debates 2006** was 'Choice in Education'. Three debates, held in London, Cardiff and Belfast during November, allowed experts and the public to discuss whether choice exists in British education, and the range of anticipated and unintended impacts it might have for good or ill.

The first ever **ESRC Open Meeting** was held in July 2006 in London. The meeting was open to the general public and individuals from all sectors were encouraged to attend and present their views. The aim of the event was to provide an opportunity for people outside ESRC's core community to hear about the Council and comment on its future strategy.

Each year the ESRC takes an active part in the **BA Festival of Science**, one of the UK's biggest science festivals. In 2006 the ESRC hosted a debate in Norwich entitled *Making a Drama Out of a Crisis: striking the balance between the public's right to know and outright panic*. The ESRC also sponsored a number of events at the festival, including the BA Perspectives competition and a follow up to the National Science Week event 'Click for the Climate'.

The Edge, published three times a year, brings the latest and most topical social science research to key opinion formers in business, government and the voluntary sector.

In March 2007 Council launched a new magazine, Britain Today, which offered a concise analysis of research on issues of relevance to the state of the nation in 2007, showcasing the diversity of ESRC-funded research. The magazine achieved a wide distribution and was sold at WHSmith.

ESRC is participating in the BA CREST (Creativity in Engineering, Science and Technology) awards scheme and the Researchers in Residence scheme, which places PhD and post doctoral researchers in secondary schools across the UK.

2.4.3 International Collaboration

Since April 2006 the ESRC has received nearly one hundred research proposals under the terms of its bilateral agreements. In addition to the eight bilateral agreements signed in 2005, the Council has now signed agreements with South Korea and Quebec, as well as with the US National Science Foundation (NSF) and the French CNRS/Ministry of Research. Under these agreements five awards were made with NSF for collaborative

workshops in e-Social Science/Cyber-infrastructure and Human & Social Dynamics, and five workshops were funded with the French agencies in the areas of migration, health, cognition and productivity. The Council is exploring further promising collaborations with NSF in 2007, and bilateral agreements are under currently under negotiation with Norway, South Africa and Hong Kong.

The ESRC rejoined the International Social Science Council (ISSC) along with Canada, Norway, Germany and the Netherlands, in order to ensure a place for the UK in fostering global multilateral developments in key areas.

In September 2006 ESRC announced a new joint scheme with the British Academy to fund Visiting Fellowships from South Asia and the Middle East. Nineteen fellowships were awarded in April of this year, 12 from the Middle East and 7 from South Asia.

The ESRC has been an active member of the NORFACE ERA-NET (New Opportunities for Research Funding and Co-operation in Europe) and collaborated in an international call for a pilot programme on Re-emergence of Religion as a Social Force in Europe, in which two UK-led teams were successful.

The Council contributed to substantial reform of the 35-country European Cooperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research (COST) networking scheme. ESRC's contribution was warmly welcomed by the UK COST team at the Office of Science & Innovation.

2.5 Measuring and Improving our Performance

A range of new impact evaluation activities were completed, including: a review of the responsive-mode Small Grants scheme; an evaluation of the impact of two centres (the Centre for the Micro-economic Analysis of Public Policy at the Institute of Fiscal Studies and the Centre for Micro-social Change at the University of Essex); a review of the Innovative Health Technologies Programme; and an investigation of the use of bibliometric indicators to assess impact in the Social Sciences.

Results from the first international benchmarking review to assess the quality of UK research in a global context provided a very positive assessment of UK Social Anthropology. The review of Political Science and International Relations will be completed shortly and a review of Economics in partnership with the Royal Economic Society and the Conference of Heads of University Departments in Economics is underway.

The ESRC evaluates all research grants funded and in 2006 some 337 projects were peer reviewed. The quality of individual projects was very high this year. 29% of awards were evaluated by reviewers as 'outstanding' (representing a 6% increase on the yearly average), with a matching fall in the number of projects graded 'problematic' (down to 3% of all projects).

3. PROGRESS IN MANAGEMENT

As part of the ESRC's Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Strategy, a new impact management team was created within the Communications and Information Directorate, to allow for a greater concentration of effort and expertise in this area. The team came into effect in April 2007.

The ESRC has also brought together the strategic and operational aspects of its work on research resources and training and development in one place, to achieve a concentration of expertise and ensure greater efficiency and coherence.

In step with other research councils the ESRC has moved towards a more devolved system of decision making in relation to the administration of its studentships. Institutions can now select quota and competition students and take decisions on academic and residential eligibility. In October 2006 the ESRC devolved payment of students stipends to Institutions. The ESRC now makes bulk payments to institutions on a quarterly basis. These changes were introduced with the aim of giving greater flexibility to institutions by reducing the need to refer to ESRC for advice.

Between December and April, the Council carried out a review of the way in which its various Boards and Committees work together to deliver its strategic priorities. This identified the scope for greater collaboration and synergy across all of the Council activities. The ESRC has also established a comprehensive review of its various responsive funding schemes to ensure that they are meeting the Council's strategic priorities and to identify ways to further encourage and support more ambitious and innovative work through the responsive mode.

4. PROGRESS AGAINST TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The ESRC Scorecard includes 23 Key Deliverables, divided further into 61 Milestones, of which 59 were due for completion in 2006-7. Achievements against the milestones can be summarised as follows:

Milestones fully achieved , or to be achieved , but with some delays	Milestones not fully achieved	TOTAL	Milestone delivery date beyond 2006/07
58*	1	59	2

* The following eight milestones will be achieved, but with some delay to the original timescale: Conclude general bilateral agreements with at least five further partner countries (2:1); Develop a series of ESRC publications to highlight the findings from the Science in Society Research Programme (17:3); Commission up to three initiatives on security and terrorism with appropriate co-funding bodies (4:4); To allocate no less than 10 studentships and postdoctoral fellowships a year (or no less than 50 overall) in each of the priority areas of Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Eastern European Studies (11:4); To allocate no less than 80 studentships in economics, 40 in advanced quantitative methods, 25 in socio-legal studies and criminology and 10 in social work, each year (9:1); To allocate no less than 25 fellowships in economics and 20 in advanced quantitative methods, each year (10:1); To launch a new investment on evaluation research methods (14:3); To design a pilot study for a new British Household Panel Study (15:4).

(The 2006-7 Scorecard, in the ESRC Delivery Plan 2006, is available at:
http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery_plan/index.aspx)

One of the 59 milestones set for the year was not achieved in full.

- 1:2 *“To achieve and maintain a standard grant success rate of 22 per cent from 2005-6, based on the level of demand in 2004-5.”* The overall average value of awards has risen this year, post FEC. The success rate is therefore lower than originally anticipated.

5. FUTURE TARGETS AND MILESTONES

The targets and milestones for 2007-8 have been published separately in the updated ESRC Delivery Plan and Scorecard 2007, available at http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/about/delivery_plan/index.aspx

Milestones for the coming year include activities to address the key research challenges set out in our Strategic Plan, for example to create new funding opportunities for research on climate and population change, to launch a new research initiative on science and maths education and a capacity building initiative in the area of behaviour and the neurosciences. We will be working with the funding councils to launch a major new initiative aimed at building capacity in advanced quantitative methods.

The team leading the UK Households Longitudinal Study have launched a consultation with the social science and biomedical user communities to identify and develop the topics for inclusion in the survey. A survey organisation will be appointed through open tender and a governing body, charged with protecting the longer-term interests of all who participate in, fund or make use of the study data for research purposes, will be established and an independent Chair appointed.

As part of ESRC's commitment to ensuring that UK researchers are able to undertake collaborative research with colleagues from across the globe Council will be establishing bilateral agreements with South Africa and India, increasing their collaborative activities with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and the NSF in the US and initiating discussions with Brazil on promoting more joint research between the UK and Brazil. A second round of the ESRC/British Academy Visiting Fellowships scheme for scholars from the Middle East and South Africa will be launched.

The ESRC will launch a range of new activities to ensure that its research findings are disseminated as widely as possible and to raise awareness of the impact of social science. A series of press briefings will be developed on topical research areas such as public health and the environment, to promote the work of ESRC's Professorial Fellows. A survey of the learned societies will be undertaken to gain an understanding of the extent of their Knowledge Transfer and public engagement activity and a survey will be carried out to examine the engagement of ESRC research investments with young people in the 16-18 year age group, and a plan developed to extend this. An ESRC brochure that highlights the diversity of ESRC business-related research and marketing materials that support business engagement will be produced.

6. THE GERSHON EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME

The Council has continued to work towards the agreed cross-Council efficiency targets for the period 2004/05 to 2007/08. The ESRC has exceeded the cross-Council target to spend at least 5% of its research budget on new initiatives. Spend on new initiatives was £6,528k, which is over 8% of the Council's expenditure on research in 2006/07. The Council has also increased its co-funding of new research by 150%.

Over the past year ESRC has played an active role in the development of a Shared Services Centre (SSC), the Research Council initiative to fully harmonise back office activities across all eight Councils by 2009. Senior ESRC staff were involved with the

initial discussions on achieving harmonisation and now that the implementation project for the Centre is underway, ESRC has appointed an internal SSC project board and a Change Team Leader to provide an ESRC input into the project and to provide information on project activities to ESRC staff. ESRC have senior representation on all five of the functional areas within the main Project (Grants, Finance, HR, Procurement and IT) to ensure current ESRC processes and policies are fully considered in the shaping of the new Shared Services Centre. The Council has actively encouraged staff to engage with the project and a number of ESRC staff were involved with the pilot 'Employee Engagement Groups' which were set up to gather information from staff to feed into the SSC's development.

7. SUMMARY FINANCIAL TABLE

The table below provides a summary of the actual spend, compared to the plans set out in the Delivery Plan 2006.

DELIVERY REPORT INCOME AND EXPENDITURE		
£k	2006/2007 PLAN	2006/2007 ACTUAL
Income		
Science budget – resource and capital (incl. FEC)	141,450	140,950
Other Income	18,673	16,362
EYF Brought Forward	8,519	0,162
Total Income	168,642	160,474
Expenditure		
Supporting World Class Research	90,138	80,396
Future Sustainability: Trained People and Building Capacity	46,399	46,853
Underpinning Research Excellence: Facilities and Infrastructure	17,364	18,679
Engagement and Partnership	4,659	4,668
Measuring our Performance: Evaluation and Efficient Administration	9,102	9,129
International	980	749
Total Expenditure	168,642	160,474