GCRF Process Evaluation Report, Stage 1b

Hubs Process Evaluation

Date: 4 April 2024
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Contents

Hubs Process Evaluation

List of acronyms

AB	Advisory Board
AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ASC	Afghan Solidarity Coalition
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
CJN	Coastal Justice Network
Co-I	Co-Investigator
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFID	Department for International Development
DP	Delivery Partner
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EG	Executive Group
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected States
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
FY	Financial Year
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
GESIP	Gender, Social Inclusion and Poverty
GNI	Gross National Income
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IDev	International Development
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IR	Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Low or Middle Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEQ	Main Evaluation Question
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PI	Principal Investigator
PO	Project Officer
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
R4D	Research for Development
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
RC	Research Council
RMT	Research Management Team
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSF	Small-Scale Fisheries
TAG	Teen Advisory Group
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
Ts&Cs	Terms and Conditions
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research Innovation
UMIC	Upper-Middle-Income Country
UN	United Nations
VfM	Value for Money

Executive Summary

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is a £1.5 billion fund overseen by the United Kingdom's (UK's) Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The GCRF evaluation examines the fund's achievements, from activities to impacts, using its Theory of Change over a five-year period from 2020 to 2025. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b (2021–2022), and assesses how well GCRF's large-scale strategic initiatives are working, and their achievements thus far. It focuses on the Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme, a GCRF 'signature investment' aimed at challenge-led and impact-focused interdisciplinary research to address intractable development challenges.

Key points

- The interdisciplinary research Hubs embody the spirit of GCRF through their focus on achieving the "gold standard" in international development research: excellent research that has real-world impact.

- To fulfil that ambition, the Hubs have needed to innovate and to disrupt existing delivery systems and processes.

- It has taken time to develop new systems underpinned by the principle of truly equitable partnerships with the Global South.

- Investing time has created networks that have demonstrated resilience in the face of Covid-19 and the Official Development Assistance (ODA) budget reductions – networks that have the capacity to outlast funding cycles and that are showing potential to push boundaries and go beyond the norm in research for development.

GCRF evaluation

The GCRF evaluation assesses the extent to which the GCRF programme has contributed to its objectives and impact. The overall evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF Theory of Change (ToC) over the life of the fund. The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. The second stage, Stage 1b (2021–2022), involves six process evaluations of GCRF's signature investments. This report forms the process evaluation of the Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme. It answers the overarching evaluation question "*How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?*" as it relates to the Hubs programme.

Overview of the Hubs programme

The Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme is a large-scale GCRF investment which aims to deliver innovative solutions to complex development issues through challenge-led interdisciplinary research. It is based on the fundamental principle of equity between Global South and Global North partners. Managed by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), with an overall investment of £200 million, distributed between twelve interdisciplinary Hubs, the programme represented an ambitious investment in research for development, calling for radical new ways of working to meet GCRF's strategic goals.

Each Hub was awarded from £13 million to £15 million over five years. The awards are administered by UKRI and co-funded through the Research

Councils. Thematically the Hubs span a number of different sustainable development goals and challenge areas. All the Hubs have formed extensive networks across the UK, the Global South and beyond. This includes 657 research partnerships across 55 countries, with 21% based in least developed countries, 47% in lower-middle-income countries and 32% in upper middle-income countries.

The Hubs have operated in the challenging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Additionally, with the reduction in BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI in the financial year (FY) 2021/22, the Hubs' funding was cut by up to 70%, and a formal stage gate review was initiated to inform ministers' decisions on the continued funding for the programme for FYs 2022/23 and 2023-24. After the 2021 Spending Review, full funding was reinstated for the remaining term of the Hubs.

Evaluation approach

The Hubs process evaluation has taken place at two levels: whole-programme level and individual award level. Following an initial portfolio-wide desk review, a sample of four awards was selected for in-depth analysis. Methods included secondary data and document review, key informant interviews at the award and programme level, and analysis of a GCRF Fund wide survey.

Evaluation findings

The Hubs' structures and processes have been critical to establishing the programme in a way that embodies GCRF principles, with equitable partnership a particular strength. The Hubs' readiness to develop new structures and processes over time has driven innovation and learning at the programme and award level. Lessons are emerging for future complex research for development programmes. (EQ 1)

The Hubs are well managed by UKRI and have effective structures and processes in place. More in-depth UKRI guidance was needed at the inception of the programme, due to its complexity and scale.

The Hubs have invested time to develop innovative structures and processes to respond to the requirements of the complex and ambitious call. There are excellent structures in place to support equitable partnerships, with fairness considerations well integrated throughout, including a strong focus on co-design and co-delivery. These elements form a critical pathway to development impact.

There is no clear framework in place for gender equity and social inclusion at the programme level. The Hubs have developed structures and processes to support gender responsive research, but consideration of social inclusion is less systematic in research design and implementation.

While significant learning is emerging at the award level, it is not being well captured at the programme level in order to build synergies effectively and contribute to legacy. The Hubs will provide foundations for future programmes and it is critical for learning to be effectively captured.

Capacity strengthening is central to the Hubs programme as a key pathway to addressing development challenges. The Hubs are going beyond structured approaches to support the capacity of researchers, and are enhancing and strengthening interactions in their networks. This is building capacity across the UK and Global South research and innovation (R&I) ecosystem. (EQ 2)

The Hubs programme has developed complex, non-linear processes to support capacity strengthening for development outcomes. Structured approaches largely focus on the development of early career researchers. The programme also provides valuable informal opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration and skills transfer across the Hubs network.

Developing and widening the network of stakeholders beyond the research community has been an important aspect of capacity building. Including communities, local organisations, national and international policymakers helps to ensure the strength and sustainability of the connections beyond the lifetime of the fund.

At the organisational level, co-created policies and frameworks have been established in an iterative and adaptive way, which will enhance institutional capacity to conduct research for development in both the Global North and the Global South.

Cuts to the Hubs' budgets as a result of reductions in the BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI represent an obstacle to fairness in capacity building. Newer partnerships have suffered direct cuts, while more established partnerships have been preserved. This has the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities in the Global South.

The Hubs have taken time to develop innovative structures and processes to deliver interdisciplinary research with development impact while trying to overcome operational challenges and systemic barriers to working effectively in low-to- middle-income country (LMIC) contexts. Despite inefficiencies during set-up that had implications for effectiveness and equity, the Hubs are a rich source of learning for other complex development programmes focused on impact and equity. (EQ 3)

A longer set-up period was needed for the Hubs programme to establish complex networks and partnerships with Southern institutions in an equitable way, particularly as there were few precedents within the UK R&I community and limited guidance from UKRI.

UKRI and research organisation requirements for financial management and due diligence were challenged by the needs of LMIC partners. Payments in arrears had negative implications for efficiency and equity when applied to Global South institutions with few financial reserves. Some research organisations, supported by UKRI, created bespoke financial and assurance processes in response, but these have not been applied strategically and consistently across the Hubs programme, raising a question over transparency and fairness.

The risk management approach at the programme level placed the burden of managing risk on lead research organisations. This was not sufficient to respond to the varied risks of operating in fragile and conflict affected states, and in LMICs. A more balanced and holistic approach is needed to avoid delays and risks and to ensure uniformity across the portfolio.

The ODA budget reductions, and responses to them, have raised fairness concerns. While the Hubs made significant efforts to protect Southern partners from funding cuts, some partnerships in low-income countries were terminated. Some Hub researchers took pay cuts or worked pro bono.

The Hubs have made good progress towards their desired outcomes, successfully responding to the challenges of Covid-19 and the reductions in ODA funding. Working with broad, inclusive networks has allowed the programme to develop shared understanding of development challenges and to influence change at a local, national and international level. (EQ 4)

The Hubs have produced a significant number of outputs, which are starting to be taken up by national policymakers and local communities. Budget cuts as a result of BEIS ODA funding reductions have constrained progress in translating these results into longer-term outcomes, despite the programme demonstrating resilience in maintaining its networks and refocusing its activities.

The programme led a strong, adaptive and agile response to Covid-19. The Hubs developed innovative ways of working; leveraged partnerships to maintain research progress; supported the digital inclusion of Southern research partners and communities; and demonstrated relevance through Covid-19 policy and research.

Stakeholder engagement has been a strength. The Hubs are amplifying the voices of communities, leveraging partnerships with change champions, influencing change at a local, national and international level, and working with policymakers. Strategic engagement with non-academic local partners has been limited by UKRI restrictions on their funding eligibility.

As the Hubs enter the final stage of delivery, finding synergies and leveraging these networks will be crucial to scaling up innovations and achieving transformative change.

The Hubs have successfully overcome significant barriers, largely due to their networks, which have afforded them flexibility and adaptability, linking them to the right people to take timely advantage of opportunities. (EQ 5)

Key barriers faced by the programme included the Covid-19 pandemic and operational challenges to working in lower and middle income countries.

Financial and due diligence requirements were a particular challenge.

The size, scale and scope of the awards, UKRI's support for adaptations, equitable in-country and international partnerships, and the Hubs networks are key factors enabling the Hubs to continue making progress towards outcomes. Additionally, UKRI's flexibility at the operational level has been important in supporting Hubs to respond and adapt to challenges of working in LMICs, of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts.

GCRF is an innovative, research for development (R4D) funding mechanism in its holistic approach, its focus on interdisciplinarity and its emphasis on equitable partnerships and impact. While challenging for the Hubs, their response to Covid-19 and the ODA funding reductions have shown the value of the research, and the resilience and equity of the networks created. (EQ 6)

There is broad consensus among Global South and Global North partners that GCRF is an innovative R4D funding mechanism. Within this, the size, scale and scope of the Hubs was cited as a key differentiator of the programme and fundamental for enabling research with development impact.

There is clear added value in the Hubs' networks, which amplify research results, creating greater potential for impact, and directly benefit research and project partners. Resilient networks have allowed the Hubs to adapt and respond to Covid-19. The survival of many partnerships despite the ODA reductions confirms the value of the network and of its principles of fairness and mutual respect.

Conclusions

The Hubs programme is an innovative R4D programme which embodies the spirit of GCRF in seeking innovative solutions to complex development problems through challenge-led interdisciplinary research and equitable partnerships.

The Hubs are producing relevant, challenge-led and impact-focused research, and are making good progress along their ToCs towards outcomes and impact, despite the challenges presented by institutional set-up delays, Covid-19, and ODA funding reductions. The Hubs' networks have been

key enablers in overcoming barriers and achieving progress towards desired outcomes and impacts.

To fulfil the ambition for equitable partnerships and the delivery of excellent research with impact, the Hubs have set up novel structures and processes. This has taken time and has led to set-up delays but has significant value.

There has been tension in the attempt to develop novel, transformative structures and processes within the old operating system. The dual challenge of creating new ways of working, and disrupting and changing old ways of doing things, has challenged the Hubs and has taken time. While UKRI has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in supporting the Hubs to devise their own solutions, the lack of a strategic and consistent approach has contributed to slowness and irregularities.

The Hubs programme is a rich repository of learning for the design and set-up of other complex development programmes. There is a need for this learning to be more effectively captured at the programme level.

Lessons and recommendations

For the Hubs programme:

Lesson 1: Impact depends on relationships with partners and stakeholders.

Recommendations

1.1: Hubs need to develop an impact strategy guiding the final two years of delivery, clearly identifying key stakeholders and outlining roles, responsibilities and resources for partners in influencing change.

1.2: Hubs need to reassess their use of the 'Flexible Fund', ring-fencing it to support impact activities at a local, national or regional level.

1.3: The Hubs could empower local partners to proactively identify leverage points for impact, including providing resources to pursue locally led initiatives.

Lesson 2: Networks have the potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts.

Recommendations

2.1: UKRI needs to provide clear and consistent guidance on impact activities for the final phase.

2.2: UKRI should consider using its convening power to bring researchers, in-country decision makers and global players together in forums to discuss key strategic challenges and findings from the Hubs programme.

2.3: UKRI could consider creating an 'impact fund' or 'regional opportunities fund' (or redesign the 'flexible fund' for impact), with clearly defined guidance for its usage.

2.4: UKRI should consider enhanced eligibility criteria for third sector organisations in a new impact-focused fund.

Lesson 3: Learning needs to be systematically integrated at all levels. The failure to capture programmatic learning is a significant risk and would represent a considerable loss for the legacy of the programme.

Recommendations

3.1: UKRI needs to create opportunities to convene awards to enable strong cross-award collaboration and knowledge sharing (inclusion and funding for non-UK partners should be encouraged).

3.2: UKRI could consider commissioning a learning review of the Hubs, including management processes, design and delivery mechanisms, and approaches to impact.

3.3: UKRI needs to develop a legacy framework for the Hubs programme, including approaches to synthesise findings across the awards.

For the design of GCRF's successor fund:

Lesson 4: Size, scale and scope of funding matters for delivering excellent research with development impact, supported by the kinds of systems that the evaluation has found to be effective.

Recommendations

4.1: BEIS should consider including a fund for large awards of the size, scale and scope of the Hubs in future research for development investments, with investment in effective systems to match the scale of ambition.

4.2: Delivery partners (DPs) should develop proposals for programmes which clearly place emphasis on challenge-led and impact-focused research and on equitable partnerships.

Lesson 5: Delivering transformative change requires not only the right policies and processes but also an enabling environment at the funder level to establish bespoke and flexible approaches for working in LMIC settings.

Recommendations

5.1: DPs need to establish clear policies and guidance for research organisations at the outset of the programme for advance payments and assurance processes and the associated risk management approaches.

5.2: DPs need to take proactive steps to capture lessons from the Hubs programme.

Lesson 6: Fair and equitable partnerships are key routes to delivering development impact, but require specific structures and processes to embed equity in operations and implementation.

Recommendations

6.1: Drawing on the success of the Hubs programme, DPs need to emphasise impact-focused research and equitable partnerships in the funding call.

6.2: DPs need to ensure sufficient timescales and provide travel grants to allow for genuine co-design with partners during the proposal phase as in the Hubs programme.

6.3: DPs need to provide clear guidance for implementing partners on structures and processes for equitable partnerships (e.g. governance structures, codes of conduct, gender strategies, etc.).

Lesson 7: A hands-on approach to management, particularly in the inception phase, is needed by the delivery partner. This is to ensure that core processes and structures, such as a gender and inclusion strategy, are prioritised and implemented within awards and supported by ongoing review.

Recommendations

7.1: DPs need to provide clear and detailed guidance at the inception phase on policies, frameworks and structures required.

7.2: DPs need to mandate the requirement for a code of conduct and a safeguarding and gender and social inclusion strategy during the inception phase.

Lesson 8: The time frame for the set-up of a programme of such complexity and scale needs to be extended, with an explicit recognition of the trade-offs. A flat spend profile should be avoided.

Recommendations

8.1: DPs should consider agreeing longer inception periods to reflect the complexity of the programme, range of stakeholders and level of ambition.

8.2: DPs should consider establishing a longer funding cycle to accommodate partnership development in the early stage and dissemination, impact activities and synthesis in latter stages.

8.3: DPs should consider adopting a curved spend profile to recognise the time needed in the first year for institutional set-up and to avoid large underspends.

8.4: DPs should consider allowing flexibility in virement procedures to accommodate the challenges among some LMIC partners in disbursing funds.

8.5: DPs need to provide flexibility in the programme for iterative planning and staggered collaboration agreements to increase agility and avoid set-up delays.

Lesson 9: Implementing programmes of such scale and ambition in LMIC settings means there is greater exposure to risk. This requires a strategy to risk that is grounded in a better understanding of risks in LMIC and FCAS and of engaging in these settings.

Recommendations

9.1: DPs should consider following good practice in developing flexible and shared risk frameworks with partners to ensure the onus of managing risk is not placed on implementing partners. alone.

1 Introduction

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) evaluation examines the fund's Theory of Change (ToC), from activities to impacts over a five-year period, running from 2020 to 2025. The evaluation is structured into three stages owing to the complex nature of the fund. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b, which examines GCRF's large-scale, strategic GCRF initiatives. It focuses on the Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme, a GCRF 'signature investment' aimed at challenge-led and impact-focused interdisciplinary research to address intractable development challenges.

1.1 Overview

GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund announced by the United Kingdom (UK) government in late 2015, an unprecedented investment into pioneering research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. GCRF forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment and aimed to contribute to the achievement of the UK's 2015 aid strategy's goals.

GCRF aims to harness UK science in the search for solutions to the challenges faced by developing countries while also developing the UK's ability to deliver cutting-edge research and innovation (R&I) for sustainable development. GCRF is implemented by 17 of the UK's research and innovation funders, which commission R&I as delivery partners (DPs).

GCRF's ToC sets out GCRF's expected impact, to emerge over a ten-year period:

> *"Widespread use and adoption of GCRF-supported research-based solutions and technological innovations enables stakeholders in LMICs [low-to-middle-income countries] to make progress at scale towards addressing complex development challenges. These efforts will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs [sustainable development goals], enhancing people's wellbeing, improving equality for people of all genders, promoting social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability in developing countries. These improvements will be sustained into the future by enduring equitable research and innovation partnerships between the UK and LMICs, and enhanced capabilities for challenge-oriented research and innovation in all regions".*

The GCRF strategy sets out three objectives to support this impact:

- Promote challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, including the participation of researchers who may not previously have considered the applicability of their work to development issues.

- Strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers.

- Provide an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

Through these objectives, GCRF aims to contribute to realising the ambitions of the UK aid strategy and to making practical progress on the global effort to address the United Nations' (UN's) SDGs. As a secondary objective, GCRF also aims to build the position and role of the UK R&I sector as global leaders in addressing global development challenges. GCRF's ToC and the ambitions set out in its the strategy provide the overall framing for the evaluation to assess progress.

1.1.1 GCRF's evaluation, Stage 1b – Understanding GCRF's processes and early results

The purpose of GCRF's evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact. The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the life of the fund (see Annex 1). The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. The evaluation started in 2020, when GCRF was in the final year of its first phase of five years (2016–2020). Stage 1a (2020–2021) examined the foundations for achieving development across the fund, addressed through four modules: management; relevance and coherence; fairness; and gender, social inclusion and poverty (GESIP).

Stage 1b began in April 2021 with six process evaluations of GCRF's 'signature investments' – large-scale programmes that aim to deliver on GCRF's strategic objectives and where there has been considerable investment into programme management processes to promote excellent ODA R&I with development impact. In addition, a fund-wide survey and a Value for Money (VfM) assessment were also conducted in this phase.

This stage seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question:

How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?

This report focuses on the process evaluation of the Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs ("Hubs") programme.[1] The Hubs programme is a GCRF 'signature investment' aimed at challenge-led and impact-focused interdisciplinary research to address intractable development challenges.[2]

> #### What is a 'programme' in GCRF?
>
> In the GCRF context, programmes are designed and managed by GCRF's DPs. They involve the allocation of an amount of funding for the commissioning of a specific portfolio of grants. A set of specific objectives guides commissioning of projects to contribute to GCRF's goals. Programmes often specify ways of working, e.g. in partnership with institutions in low and middle income countries, through interdisciplinary work and involving stakeholder engagement. Research topics and countries are not usually specified, although in the innovation programmes, development challenges and geographies are framed and awards commissioned to respond to these. The 'signature programmes' involve more hands-on management of the portfolio by the funder than other calls, in order to optimise the portfolio's development impact potential. This programme management includes elements, such as policies and frameworks, that have to be met, e.g. gender, equity and inclusion; detailed monitoring and reporting; cohort linkages; support for skills building from the programme level; and links to wider networks of collaborators and research users.

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1 During this phase, six process evaluations of signature investments were carried out, including GROW (UKRI); Interdisciplinary Hubs (UKRI); FLAIR (Royal Society); International Partnerships Programme (UKRSA); Challenge Leaders and portfolios (UKRI); and the Four Nations Funding Councils' awards to UK higher education institutions.
2 Interdisciplinary Research Hubs Call (UKRI internal document)

1.2   Structure of the report

The structure for this report is as follows:

Section 1 provides an introduction to the Hubs programme and provides an overview of the process evaluation. It sets out the context of the wider evaluation process as well as situating it within the strategic and policy context for this specific evaluation.

Section 2 describes the approach and methodology, including evaluation questions (EQs) and criteria as well as the data collection instruments, sampling approach and analysis.

Section 3 presents the findings against each of the EQs.

Section 4 provides conclusions, lessons and high-level recommendations for the design of similar initiatives.

1.3   Overview of the Hubs programme

The Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme (2019-2024) is a large and ambitious GCRF investment focusing on delivering innovative solutions to complex development issues through challenge-led interdisciplinary research based on the fundamental principle of equitability between partners in the Global South and Global North. The Hubs programme speaks to the essence of GCRF: equitably bringing together the perspectives, expertise and experiences of coalitions of actors across the Global South and Global North to develop new lenses for 'seeing' complex development challenges and novel approaches to address them, contributing to sustainable development.

With an overall investment of £200 million, distributed over twelve interdisciplinary Hubs, the scale and scope of the programme represented an ambitious investment by GCRF into research for development impact. The programme called for new ways of working to meet GCRF's strategic goals, and the Hubs have been innovative in developing novel structures and processes to meet the ambition, but have also experienced challenges.

The funding call, launched in July 2017, provided the strategic framework for the Hubs. The call emphasised the need for the Hubs to establish equitable partnerships and deliver challenge-led and impact-focused interdisciplinary research.[3] It aimed to build on UKRI's learning that success in development "requires a depth of understanding that can only be achieved through equitable partnership and engagement of diverse stakeholders such as industrial sectors, civil society groups, NGOs [non-governmental organisations] and governments",[4] specifically in the Global South. In addition, the call was an acknowledgement that some of the world's greatest challenges, seemingly intractable, are multidimensional and complex, cannot be solved by "any single organisation, or from one sectoral or disciplinary perspective",[5] and cut across the SDGs.[6] The call therefore called for Hubs that were interdisciplinary, that were founded on equitable partnerships between the Global South and the UK, that were challenge-led, and that were impact-focused. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) Rapid Review, published in 2017, welcomed the call for thematically focused, interdisciplinary research Hubs as a potential avenue to improve GCRF's focus on development impact, providing a focused strategic approach – which it had identified as lacking in the GCRF programme as a whole – in its review.

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3 Hubs Funding call (UKRI internal document)
4 UKRI (2019). UKRI GCRF Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs. Retrieved from https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UKRI-190821-GlobalChallengesResearchFundHubBooklet-June2019.pdf
5 Hubs Funding call (UKRI internal document)
6 Ibid.

The scoping and framing of the call took place in the context of an event at Wilton Park in October 2016, which brought together Southern and UK partners to discuss how to optimise development impacts of ODA research investments. The 2017 ICAI Rapid Review identifies the Wilton Park event as one of a limited number of opportunities to bring in Southern perspectives on GCRF at an early stage. A position paper was subsequently developed by RCUK (now UKRI) and the GCRF Strategic Advisory Group (SAG). This position paper formed the basis of the Research Councils Collective Fund joint proposal for Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs, which was submitted to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in January 2017 and approved for funding in March 2017. In 2017, RCUK also bid and secured funding from BEIS specifically for a Global Engagement Programme. This included a series of flagship meetings in Delhi, Bogota, Pretoria and Nairobi that year - the agenda for these meetings directly informed the development of equitable partnerships, networking and interdisciplinarity. It brought together experts and policy/practitioners from UK and internationally.

The Hubs commenced activities in February 2019 after a twenty-month long proposal, assessment and inception phase.[7] The lengthy lead time was unusual for UKRI and was specifically intended to support the development of partnerships and the co-development of proposals during the design phase of the Hubs.[8] Twelve interdisciplinary research Hubs were funded, each awarded between £13 million and £15 million over a period of five years. The awards are administered by UKRI and co-funded, given their interdisciplinary nature, by more than one Research Council (RC), the constituent bodies of UKRI. One RC is assigned as the lead, and the majority of the Hubs are led either by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) or by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

Thematically the Hubs span a number of different SDGs and challenge areas, and each award (led by a UK institutions) has formed expansive networks between institutions within the UK, and between the UK and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) countries in the Global South. Overall, the Hubs boast 657 research partnerships across 55 countries. The majority of partnerships in OECD DAC countries are in India (60), followed by South Africa (27), Bangladesh (20), Vietnam (18), Kenya (17), Nepal (15), Sri Lanka (14), Turkey (10), Colombia (9), Ghana (8), Malaysia (7), Maldives, Ecuador, Fiji (6), Ethiopia (5), Brazil, Indonesia (4 each), Thailand, Tanzania (3 each), Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, El Salvador, Sierra Leone (2 each), Benin, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Gabon, Haiti, Ivory Coast, Jamaica, Myanmar, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Sudan and Zambia (1 each).

Figure 1: shows the distribution of Southern research partners across the OECD DAC listed country categories, with 21% in least developed countries, 47% in lower-middle-income countries and 32% in upper-middle-income countries.

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7 UKRI GCRF Interdisciplinary Research Hubs Overview presentation (UKRI internal document)
8 Ch9. Call 2 proposal: RCUK GCRF Collective Fund Call 2: Global Challenges Research Hubs (UKRI internal document)
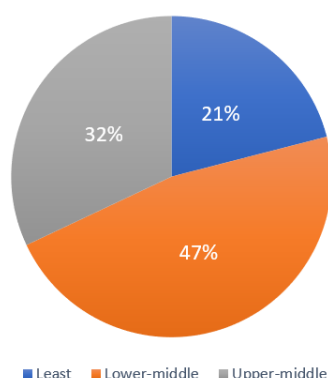
1.3.1 Stage gate review 2021

After one year of implementation, the Hubs entered a vastly different context to carry out 'research for development' (R4D) as they confronted Covid-19 and, subsequently, the reductions in ODA funding (see Section 1.4 below). In this context, a UKRI stage gate review that had been factored in towards the end of the second year in 2021 took on a new aspect as a rigorous and formal evaluative exercise. This was specifically requested by BEIS in order to inform BEIS Ministers' decisions on the continued funding for the programme for 2022–2024. The review was redesigned to provide an evidence-based independent assessment of the Hubs against their strategic alignment with Her Majesty's Government HMG (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)-led) thematic priorities, the quality of their research, their VfM, progress against outcomes, future direction and potential to deliver impact.[9] The review was completed in September 2021. The outcome of the review process was announced after the 2021 Spending Review, and the Hubs were informed of BEIS's decision to maintain their funding for the remainder of their term.[10]

1.4 Strategic and policy context

The first years of GCRF's evaluation, 2020–2022, have seen significant changes in the strategic, policy and economic context of GCRF. This includes a new policy framework that integrates defence and foreign policy, including ODA, and significant budget cuts for 2021–2022 as a result of a reduction in the UK's ODA commitment from 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) to 0.5%, following the budget impacts of the UK government's large-scale response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021 the policy decision was made to wind down GCRF by 2025, with implications for the evaluation.

The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR), published in March 2021,[11] sets out the broader UK policy vision for foreign policy, including ODA, to 2030. This vision includes an increased commitment to security and resilience in the context of UK national interests in collaboration with other nations. Although it emphasises a focus on multilateral solutions, the IR does not focus in detail on international development, the strategy for which has not yet been published at the time of writing but which is due in 2022. It nevertheless now guides the work of the new FCDO (formed in August 2020 by merging the

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9 GCRF Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs Review: Project outline (UKRI internal document)

10 UKRI (2021). Update following 2021 Spending Review – GCRF and Newton Fund. Retrieved from https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/UKRI-181121-StatementFollowing2021SpendingReviewGCRFAndNewton.pdf

11 'Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', March 2021 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf

Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID)), and that of all ODA-spending departments, including BEIS, which funds GCRF.

As the outcome of the IR, a new strategic framework outlines the government's national security and international foreign policy objectives.

Science and technology are central to achieving the policy objectives, with a focus on emerging technologies in particular and the translation of innovation into practical applications, including in developing countries. In this sense, GCRF continues to remain relevant. Further, the national Research and Development (R&D) roadmap outlines that ODA will continue "to support R&D partnerships within developing countries sharing research expertise in support of the SDGs", with Science and Technology remaining one of the UK's strategic priorities for ODA spending.[12]

The review also sets out seven priorities for UK aid, including supporting open societies and conflict resolution, humanitarian preparedness and girls' education, with climate change a high priority. The review reiterates the UK's commitment to the SDGs and states that poverty reduction will remain central to the work of FCDO.

Alongside a new foreign policy and international development framework, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on ODA spending and management, with resulting cuts to the GCRF budget in 2021–2022. The economic recession and resultant fiscal policies have affected the Spending Review that was carried out in autumn 2020, limited to a one-year time frame. Reflecting the economic impact of the pandemic, the ODA commitment was reduced from 0.7% to 0.5 % of GNI as a temporary measure.[13] While the IR commits to "spend 0.7% of GNI on development when the fiscal situation allows", the ODA reduction in 2021 resulted in spending cuts for ODA-spending government departments – including BEIS, with consequential cuts to GCRF and the budgets of its DPs.[14]

On 11 March 2021 UKRI stated that the BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI "has reduced significantly in planned ODA expenditure for FY21/22, leading to a £125m budget and a £120m gap between allocations and commitments".[15] The implementation of these sudden budget reductions, which amounted to around 70% of committed spend, affected all GCRF's DPs and investments across the board, with grants being delayed, reprofiled or, in some cases, terminated. In March UKRI, as the largest DP involved in GCRF, stated that it would be unable to provide new GCRF funding beyond July 2021.

September 2021 saw a return to a three-year Spending Review and an improved picture for GCRF after the turmoil of the coronavirus pandemic, although – in response to the new policy framework – the decision was made to wind down BEIS's ODA funds, GCRF and Newton by 2025. Following this budget, BEIS's ODA allocation stabilised and some improvements were seen. Existing GCRF commitments are now able to be met until March 2025, which means that commissioned projects, including the large-scale flagship programmes, will be supported for the remainder of their terms to 2025. The Hubs programme, specifically, which commenced in 2019, underwent a stage gate review in September 2021, as mentioned in section 1.3.1, which concluded the programme would continue to receive funding until the end of its term in 2024.

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12 'UK Research and Development Roadmap', July 2020
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896799/UK_Research_and_Development_Roadmap.pdf
13 'Spending Review: Reducing the 0.7% aid commitment Insight', Thursday 26 November 2020
https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spending-review-reducing-the-aid-commitment/
14 'Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', March 2021
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age-_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf
15 UKRI Official Development Assistance letter 11 March 2021 https://www.ukri.org/our-work/ukri-oda-letter-11-march-2021/

The cuts from 2020/21, however, will not be reimbursed, so projects are having to accommodate net budget reductions by reducing their scope.

The policy decision to wind the fund down by early 2025 means that spending in 2022/23 is on a declining trajectory, from £124 million in 2022/23, £77.9 million in 2023/24 and £14.6 million in the final year of 2024/25. These circumstances represent a curtailment in the original ambition envisioned for GCRF in its ToC, which was to maintain investment in development R&I over a 10-year period.[16] The assumption at the time the ToC was developed (2017–2018) was that there would be a second, impact-oriented, phase of GCRF from 2021 to 2025. In this phase, it was expected many of the larger awards (notably UKRI's Interdisciplinary Hubs) and other investments would shift focus on to impact activities. With the winding down of the fund, these investments will now not take place, with implications for the achievement of GCRF's mid-term outcomes and impact.

Effectively, there are only two years of R&I activity remaining, as in the final year, programmes will be focused on finalising outputs. Award teams and, potentially, partnerships will disband and move on. BEIS has decided nevertheless that the evaluation will continue to track GCRF up to its close in March 2025. For Stage 1b, the evaluation has been adjusted to take these challenges into account, with specific EQs focusing on the impacts of Covid and budget reductions. For future phases, the evaluation is in the process of being refocused to reflect the winding down of the fund and the need to capture lessons and document GCRF's accomplishments and legacy for LMICs and the UK.

1.5 Aims and scope of the Hubs process evaluation

The Hubs process evaluation aims to answer the Main Evaluation Question (MEQ) – *How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?* **– by investigating structures and processes involved in commissioning, managing and implementing Hub awards, and the extent to which these have promoted excellence in ODA R&I, as well as their early results.** The Hubs evaluation encompasses an evaluation of the awards themselves as well as the programme processes and how these have cascaded to and been applied at the award level, in order to develop a holistic assessment of the programme and its portfolio. The evaluation sets out a series of sub-EQs and criteria (see Section 2.2) that aim to capture processes and structures that we would expect to see in an ODA Challenge Fund such as GCRF, building on the findings from Stage 1 (see below). Data collection took place from January to April 2022, with analysis taking place from April 2022 to June 2022.

Evaluation users

Our evaluation design is grounded in a utilisation focus. This requires having clarity on who the different stakeholders of the evaluation are at the start of the evaluation, as well as how and when they want to use the findings. The evaluation is designed in such a way that it engages stakeholders at the most appropriate moments in the process. Ultimately, a utilisation-focused evaluation should be judged on its utility and actual use.

The primary users of the evaluation are BEIS, including the Science and Research Analytics Team, the wider ODA team in Swindon and London offices, including the Research Management Team (RMT), D-MEL Team and Programme Management Office, and the DPs.

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16 Barr, J. *et al.* (2018). GCRF Foundation Stage Report https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation

2 Approach and methodology

The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund. For Stage 1b, we developed an evaluation framework to assess how well 'ODA excellence' has been supported in the signature investments, drawing on the findings from Stage 1a, GCRF's ToC and the literature on challenge funds. This section provides an overview of our approach and the EQs and criteria that the process evaluation aims to answer. It also summarises our data collection method, sampling, data analysis and our key strengths and limitations.

2.1 Overview of approach

The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund (see the Inception Report 2020 for more details). The Stage 1b process evaluations (together with the survey and VfM assessment) provide an opportunity to test the early stages of the GCRF ToC and its assumptions to understand how the signature investments have integrated the key processes and strategies proposed in the ToC into their programmes in order to optimise the ODA excellence and impact potential of their awards.

Stage 1b of the GCRF Evaluation focuses on *MEQ2: How are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?* While the focus is on process, the evaluation also seeks to capture insights on context, causal mechanisms and early-stage outcomes.

2.1.1 Conceptual framing of 'ODA research excellence' in GCRF

From April to June 2021, the evaluation completed a scoping phase to finalise the approach and method for Stage 1b. To deliver on its ambitions, GCRF goes beyond considering research excellence alone to promote challenge-led, excellent research with impact. This incorporates a wider understanding of what GCRF as an ODA fund should strive towards, which we term as 'ODA research and innovation excellence'.

However, in Stage 1a, the evaluation found that some investments in the portfolio are more aligned with ODA challenge-led R&I than others. The evaluation concluded that approaching GCRF more explicitly as an ODA R&I challenge fund would provide more insights into 'what good looks like' for GCRF's performance (see Box 2).

> **Findings from Stage 1a, 2020–2021**
>
> The process evaluations build on the findings from Stage 1a. The Stage 1a Management Review and Synthesis Report on the integration of relevance, fairness, gender, poverty and social inclusion on GCRF was published in February 2022.[17] Overall, the Stage 1a evaluation found that GCRF is making clear progress in terms of establishing the foundations for development impact – becoming relevant, coherent, well targeted, fair, gender-sensitive

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17 Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): Stage 1a evaluation https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-stage-1a-evaluation

and socially inclusive. Strengths were seen especially in the 'signature investments', including the Hubs. However, inherent challenges in the fund's size and complicated delivery architecture meant that progress has been varied across the portfolio, and important gaps remain, especially around managing for development impact and how poverty is addressed. The evaluation recommended that GCRF:

- **establish a more consistent Challenge Fund identity, with the cultures, shared ownership and management structures to support this.** A Challenge Fund identity and associated processes were seen most strongly in the signature investments, with the need to explore this in more depth in Stage 1b process evaluations through specific criteria.

- **establish quality standards for 'ODA R&I excellence', to optimise the combination of excellent research and innovation with development impact.** The synthesis identified an unresolved tension that at times privileged conventional research excellence and took a lower, compliance approach to the fundamentals of development impact. The need to integrate and promote both dimensions of excellence in ODA R&I was brought into the Stage 1b process evaluation framework to understand in more depth if this had been achieved in the signature investments.

- **establish a collective, fund-wide monitoring and learning process that supports learning between BEIS, the DPs and award holders to support adaptive management at different levels.** This is a fund-wide challenge but was also brought into the process evaluation framework to investigate the extent to which monitoring and learning were supported in the signature programmes.

To better frame GCRF's ambitions from the challenge fund perspective, and to define the key characteristics of a fund of this nature, we conducted a rapid scan of the literature for challenge funds in international development and mission-oriented R&I.[18]

Building on this review, the GCRF ToC and the findings from Stage 1a, a **single overarching evaluation framework** was developed for all six process evaluations and the fund-wide survey (set out in Section 2.2). The evaluation framework in Section 2.2 sets out the EQs and the combined criteria for assessing ODA excellence in the design and delivery of GCRF's signature investments. The specific features of each signature investment will be captured via tailored criteria within the evaluation framework (see Section 2.2 for the full evaluation matrix).

2.1.2 Summary of the evaluation method

The detailed method is set out in subsequent sections. In summary, the evaluation has examined the EQs through an iterative three-step approach:

1. **Examining the programme level to achieve a broad overview of the signature investment and its processes,** informed by a document review and analysis of the programme-specific subset of survey data.

2. **A deeper, qualitative dive into a sample of awards from within each investment to gain deeper insights into processes and early results from the programme,** informed by key informant interviews (KIIs) and triangulated with specific documentation from each award.

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18 Itad (2021). GCRF Evaluation Stage 1b Scoping Report

3. **A holistic assessment of the overall programme**, examining the extent to which programmatic approach has enabled the awards to work as a portfolio that is more than the 'sum of the parts'.

To increase the credibility and validity of evaluation findings, we used triangulation, which involved collecting data using a number of different methods and cross-verifying data across a number of sources. For example:

1. **Triangulation within interviews:** Triangulation was applied within interviews to explore issues from different angles and elicit examples to support reports of achievements. These examples were then cross-checked with other data sources.

2. **Triangulation between stakeholder types in both quantitative and qualitative data collection:** BEIS staff, DP programme managers, award holders and partners, increasing the number of different perspectives on a project/programme.

3. **Triangulation between interview data, survey data, award and programme monitoring information and other documentary sources:** This included project annual reports, reporting through Researchfish and programme review documentation that helped us to validate stakeholder testimony about processes and project achievements.

2.2   Evaluation questions and criteria

All Stage 1b process evaluations utilise a single overarching evaluation framework, which draws on the GCRF ToC outcomes and assumptions, as well as insights from the literature on challenge funds and mission-oriented R&I in international development (see Annex 1). The overarching EQ has been broken down in the evaluation framework into seven EQs and associated criteria to support the assessment of the ODA R&I processes.

These EQs were updated from the original Terms of Reference (ToR) to reflect the findings of the Stage 1b evaluation, a rapid literature review of challenge funds. The EQs were also adapted to reflect the structural and contextual changes around Covid-19 and an overall reduction in ODA funding that affected GCRF in 2021–2022.

Table 1: below sets out the detailed evaluation framework. Through detailed criteria EQs 1 and 2 examine the structures and processes that we would expect to find in a challenge fund to deliver ODA R&I with impact. EQ 3 examines the extent to which processes and structures have been efficient and timely and fair to partners; EQ 4 looks at the evidence for what has been achieved and emerging outcomes; EQ 5 explores the unique features of the signature programmes that have enabled them to overcome barriers in the thematic and geographical contexts; EQ 6 aims to establish the uniqueness and additionality of GCRF funding. Finally, EQ 7 captures lessons for future funds.

Table 1:   **High-level evaluation framework**

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
EQ 1. To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research and innovation with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?	1a. ODA R&I management (at programme and award level): • Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence • ToC and shared vision • Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge • Capacity needs assessed and identified • Risk factors identified and mitigated • Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort building; aggregate-level R&I into use) • Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19 • Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working • Promoting coherence between awards • Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy • Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and regular reporting 1b. ODA R&I excellence in design and implementation: • Relevance and coherence in design and delivery • Strategic/holistic/system lens, inlcuding interdisciplinarity • Negative consequences mitigated and a 'do no harm' approach • Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes • Inclusiveness addressed within design and research processes • Capacity needs identified and assessed • Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement • Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)	**Data sources:** KIIs with stakeholders at DPs, awards and partners Survey data with Principal Investigators (PIs) and Co-Investigators (Co-Is) Programme and award documents KIIs with stakeholders at DPs, awards and partners Survey data with PIs and Co-Is Programme and award documents KIIs with stakeholders at DPs, awards and partners Survey data with PIs and Co-Is **Methods:** Qualitative analysis and document reviews KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs Survey analysis Programme and award documents

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
EQ 2. To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?	- Clear ToC for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes - Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs - Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure - Fairness considerations integrated	
EQ 3. To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented: are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?	- Efficiency and timeliness of processes - Proportionality for size of investment - Fairness for partners - VfM rubrics	
EQ 4. To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes /impacts, and what evidence exists of these?	- Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples - Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress - Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)	
EQ 5. What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)	- Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes: - Maturity of the field - Research capacity strengthening - Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research) - Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves) - Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)	

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
	o Examples of success factors, e.g. the necessary factors proposed in the GCRF ToC for navigating barriers/facilitators o Networks, credible evidence/innovation and new capabilities mobilised to amplify change o Iterative engagement by GCRF programmes and projects, responding to opportunities to amplify change o Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model	
EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from: • how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19 • the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?	• Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental to achieving the outcomes or can be substituted • Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality, etc. (as defined in the VfM rubric) • Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding • Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for	
EQ 7. What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF?	• Specific insights and lessons from the award that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from, etc., success factors, reasons why • Capture also specific areas for improvement in the award, areas of underperformance and reasons why	

2.3   Selection and sampling

Four out of twelve awards were selected to be reviewed in-depth as part of the Hubs sample. Awards were chosen to achieve a spread in relation to the following features:

- sponsorship by lead RC
- SDG focus[19]
- number of countries/partner organisations
- geographical focus[20]
- percentage of funds going to Southern partners.

The awards were selected by creating a numbered list and then using a random online number generator, and the results were then checked against the criteria above.

A reserve sample was also chosen, to be used if needed for substitution. The final sample can be seen below in Table 2:.

Table 2:   Final sample for the Hubs process evaluation

Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub **£18.5 million** **15 partner countries, 16 partner organisations** **Lead organisation: University of Oxford**
Action Against Stunting Hub **£18.2 million** **6 partner countries, 17 partner organisations** **Lead organisation: London International Development Centre and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine**
Gender, Justice and Security Hub **£15.2 million** **11 partner countries, 27 partner organisations** **Lead organisation: London School of Economics and Political Science**
One Ocean Hub **£18.2 million** **11 partner countries, 56 partner organisations** **Lead organisation: University of Strathclyde**

Figure 2: shows the percentage of funds flowing to Southern partners across all of the Hubs, which ranged between 42% and 59%, with two outliers: the Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub (71%) and the Water, Security and Sustainable Development Hub (32%). Our sample includes the two Hubs with the highest percentage of funds to Southern institutions, as well as one in the middle range and one in the lower range (the sampled Hubs have the darker-coloured bars in the chart).

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19 The sample provided a good spread in terms of SDGs of focus (with the following SDGs covered: SDG1, SDG2, SDG3, SDG4, SDG5, SDG6, SDG8, SDG13, SDG14, SDG16, SDG17).
20 The sample provided a good spread in terms of geographical focus.

Figure 2: **Percentage of funds flowing to Southern Institutions in the Hub programme**
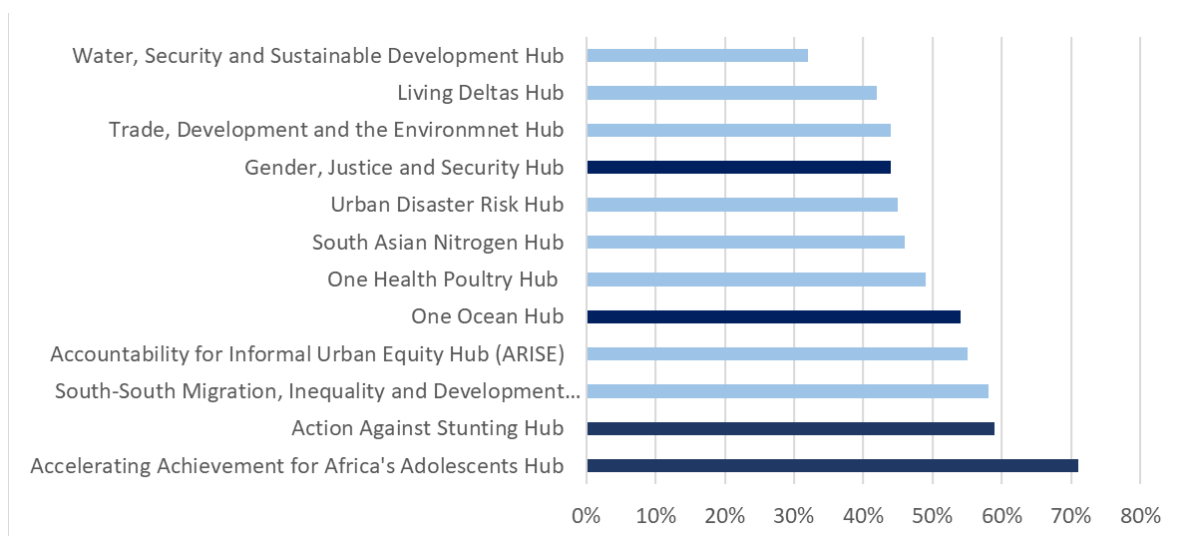
2.4   Data collection and overview of the evidence base

Data collection was conducted between the period of January 2022 and April 2022. The Hubs programme evaluation was originally anticipated to commence in July/August 2021. However, due to the decision to implement a stage gate review to determine whether the programme would continue to receive funding, an agreement was reached with BEIS to postpone the evaluation until after the results of the stage gate were known, to limit association between the stage gate and the evaluation and limit the bias in interviewee responses. The implication of the delay was a sense of weariness and wariness among Hub interviewees towards yet another evaluative exercise, which resulted in some initial reluctance to engage, which we refer to in section 2.6.

Data collection has been conducted through a mixed methods approach, with the three main sources of data including: programme and award level documents and data; KIIs; and survey data . Although Covid-19 impacted on award holders in terms of implementation, as detailed in Sections 1.3 and 3.4, there was no significant impact on the process evaluation, as it was designed as a remote exercise from the outset. All interviews were conducted remotely via MS Teams or Zoom.

Key informant interviews and document review

Table 3: provides an overview of the evidence base for the Hubs process evaluation.

Table 3: **Overview of the evidence base for the Hubs process evaluation**

Data source	Type	Number
Key informant interviews	Award-level stakeholders	49
	Programme staff at UKRI	10
	Total	**59**
Documents reviewed	Award level: application documents, collaboration agreements, annual reporting, stage gate reporting, Researchfish data	236

	Programme level: call guidance, Hubs ToC, reporting guidance, meeting minutes and communications materials	17
	Total	**253**

Document review

Documents were reviewed at both the programme and award level. At the programme level, documentation included call guidance, the Hubs ToC, reporting guidance, meeting minutes and communications materials. At the award level, documentation included application documents, collaboration agreements, annual reporting and Researchfish data. In total, 253 documents were reviewed, with 17 reviewed at programme level and 236 reviewed at award level.

Key informant interviews

KIIs were conducted concurrently with the document review and were done at both award and programme level. An interview guide was developed from the evaluation matrix for all the process evaluations and was tailored for the Hubs programme to cover aspects that informants could best speak to about the award or the programme. The interview guide is included in Annex 2. The core evaluation team also prepared draft text for interview requests, as well as a letter giving an overview on the process evaluation, which was attached to each email.

At the award level, project PIs were contacted for an initial interview and were asked to provide additional contacts for interview, such as Co-Is, early career researchers (ECRs) or non-academic stakeholders. Efforts were made to speak to Southern partners and ECRs wherever possible. On average, twelve KIIs were conducted at the award level. All interviews were conducted remotely via Teams or Zoom.

There was a good level of engagement with the evaluation. A total of 49 informants were interviewed, meeting the target set for 40–60 award-level informant interviews. In addition, ten programme-level interviews were conducted, with the UKRI Programme Manager and nine project officers.

59% of award-level informants were female. All but one of the programme-level informants were female. 65% of award-level informants were based in the Global South.

KIIs are referenced as sources, using code numbers in footnotes to show the links to the underlying evidence; key documents are also referenced. 'A' denotes award-level interviews ('A1', 'A2', etc. references each award; the number following the decimal, e.g. 'A1.14', denotes the informant) and 'P' denotes programme-level interviews.

Survey data

As part of Stage 1b, a GCRF fund-wide survey was developed by the core evaluation team. The main aim of the survey was to quantify the process, mechanisms, early results and achievements that GCRF award holders and DPs have contributed to. The survey aimed to test a selection of core and sub-hypotheses related to these elements. The survey data ensured compatibility with the qualitative analyses from the signature investment process evaluations and alignment to the EQs for Stage 1b.

The award holder fund-wide survey consisted of 39 questions, gathering data from award holders on: General Project Information; Structures and Processes for Project Implementation;

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL); Achievements; Utilisation of GCRF-Funded Research; Covid-19; and Budget Reductions.[21]

The award holder survey was launched on 20 October 2021, running until 19 November 2021. It was sent to approximately 10,472 people across the whole of GCRF, including PIs, Co-Is, researchers, fellows, and others involved in GCRF grants. In total, 3,612 people responded to the survey, and there was a total of 290 responses from those affiliated with Hubs projects. This represents a 44% response rate for Hubs award holders. Given the aforementioned delay of the Hubs evaluation, the survey was sent to those affiliated with Hubs projects in January 2022. 47% of Hubs survey respondents are affiliated with UK institutions and 4% with other Global North institutions, with the rest affiliated with institutions from lower or middle-income countries. The majority of respondents (71%) are affiliated with universities, followed by research institutes (22%), NGOs (4%), and government (2%). Survey data has been used to triangulate findings from interviews and documentation review.

2.5 Data analysis

Award-level analysis

Documentation was initially reviewed and categorised as data, context or evidence. All documents categorised as evidence were further coded in MaxQDA using a common codebook structured to reflect EQs. KII transcripts were also coded in MaxQDA using the same common codebook. The coding framework is included in Annex 3.

All informant interviews were structured according to the interview guide, which was linked back to the main themes in the EQs and the criteria (see Annex 2).

Data from award-level interviews and documentation review was summarised in a standardised award level write-up, which was laid out according to the EQs and evaluation criteria. The write-up included a project overview, a section for each EQ and an overall summary of judgements for the award. The award write-up template is provided in Annex 5. Evidence utilised for the award write-up included: documentary evidence that provides context or description for the award; documents and data that form part of the evidence for the award, e.g. policies or process guidance; and interviews with award stakeholders.

In the award level write ups, for EQs 1–4, a tailored rubric assessment was also used to provide a rating for the award's progress in relation to that EQ. The rubrics are included in Annex 4. EQs 5–7 did not include a rubric assessment. Confidence in evidence was also assessed for each EQ, using a red (low confidence), amber (medium confidence), and green (high confidence) rating, depending on the number of sources, the degree of detail for each source, and the consistency among the sources.

Programme-level analysis

Completed award-level write-ups were reviewed and collated into a Hubs programme-level write-up. This had the same structure as the award-level write-up, with sections for each EQ and an overall summary of findings for the Hubs programme.

The programme analysis template was the main tool used for integrating data from different sources and assessing confidence in the evidence. The analysed data was combined for each EQ and evidence was triangulated to build the evidence base. We used established techniques from

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21 A DP survey was also carried out. This consisted of 21 questions, gathering data from DPs for each of their GCRF programmes on: (i) General Information; (ii) Structures and Processes; (iii) MEL. For the purpose of the Hubs process evaluation, only data from the award holder survey was analysed.

qualitative analysis – identifying and interpreting themes, developing explanations, translating emerging themes and explanations back to test against the source data, juxtaposing and exploring contradictory findings, and triangulating findings between the three evidence sources to answer the EQs.

In the programme template, analytical narratives for each EQ were written up and the supporting evidence was documented. Our confidence in the evidence was then rated, as for the award-level write-up. In our analysis of each EQ, we considered how confident we were in the strength of evidence underpinning our judgements. This is based on how strongly the evidence emerges from the individual sources, as well as on the degree of triangulation possible between the sources.

As with the award write-ups, the programme-level write-up also included a rubric assessment for EQs 1–4 and a rating for confidence of evidence. .

Survey data analysis

The entire fund dataset was first prepared for analysis by removing data from respondents who did not provide consent to sharing data and removing 'special category data' from the dataset, specifically data on racial or ethnic origin and disability.

The analysis of survey data was conducted using the Stata statistical software, making use of its large-scale data processing capacity and extensive range of data analysis and visualisation tools. We conducted the following steps of analysis and stratified the data by four signature funds – GROW, IPP, FLAIR and HUBS.

Descriptive univariable analyses were used to describe the sample populations and to summarise all survey measures initially and provide tables of results linked to the hypothesis and sub-hypothesis stratified by signature programmes.

Summary bivariate tables showed the relationships between indicators and grouping variables, including further disaggregations. The typical disaggregations were:

- the respondent's country of origin – classified as low-income country, high income country or UK[22]

- the position of the respondent as a 'primary or secondary' researcher.

2.6   Strengths and limitations of our approach

Overall, the approach has worked well in relation to the objectives of the evaluation. Strengths include the following:

- Interviews included a **representative cross-section of different roles, levels of seniority, geographical location and disciplines**, and there was a **gender balance**, allowing the evaluation team to benefit from a rich mix of views and perspectives on the awards.

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22 We grouped countries using the World Bank's income classification, which groups countries economies into four groups: low-income countries (LICs); lower-middle-income countries (LMICs); upper-middle-income countries (UMICs); and high-income countries (or HICs). We also identified respondents from the UK as a separate category. We then grouped the respondents into three final categories as HMIC, LMIC, and UK-based respondents.

- In general, there has been a **good level of engagement** with the evaluation, including at the programme level, with interviews conducted with nearly all the primary project officers involved in the programme.

There have also been several key limitations with the evaluation:

- **The period of data collection for this process evaluation followed a stressful period for the Hubs, during which the Hubs faced a stage gate review and deep cuts to their projects as a result of reductions in BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI.** It also coincided with an intense period of rebooting activities and reprofiling budgets after funding was confirmed (towards the end of 2021) for the final two years. As a result, there was initial difficulty in gaining buy-in for the evaluation. This was overcome by carefully explaining the objectives of the evaluation.

- **The evaluation focuses in depth on a limited number of Hubs.** While this has the advantage of gaining the perspectives of a wide variety of partners and a full picture of each Hub, there is the risk of drawing general conclusions from a limited number of awards. We have mitigated this risk by speaking to a large number of programme-level informants, reviewing programme documentation and triangulating findings from the interviews, award and programme documentation with the survey.

3 Findings

This section summarises our findings against each of the seven EQs which, combined, address the Stage 1b MEQ: "How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?". The questions examine the Hubs systems, processes, barriers, enabling factors and emerging impact at both the programme and award levels.

3.1 EQ 1: To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?

> **Box 1. Summary of findings (EQ 1)**
>
> **The structures and processes put in place have been critical in positioning the Hubs programme as a highly innovative challenge-led ODA R&I programme that embodies the vision of GCRF.** A clear ambition to fully encapsulate GCRF's vision for challenge-led and impact-focused research bolstered by equitable partnerships has led to the emergence of novel and forward-looking structures and processes for challenge-led ODA R&I.
>
> - **The Hubs programme embodies the vision of GCRF to deliver challenge-led and impact-focused research.** To achieve this vision in the context of limited examples of good practice, the programme has needed to innovate and develop new structures and processes. **(3.1.1)**
>
> - **Clear language and emphasis in the funding call on equitable partnerships, challenge-led and impact-focused research, and a long lead time for proposal development,** were critical factors in the creation of a portfolio of high-quality impact-focused research Hubs. **(3.1.2)**
>
> - **The Hubs are actively and well managed at the programme level.** However, more guidance and hands-on support from UKRI was needed during the set-up phase. Lessons now need to be effectively captured across the cohort by UKRI to build synergies and contribute to legacy. **(3.1.3)**
>
> - **Driven by the ambitious and innovative requirements of the funding call, the Hubs are producing novel and forward-looking structures and processes for challenge-led ODA R&I.** These provide a framework for reference for future R4D programmes. **(3.1.4)**
>
> - **The Hubs go beyond establishing equitable partnerships with research partners.** They are ensuring that fairness considerations are woven throughout project design and delivery as a fundamental pathway to development impact. **(3.1.5)**
>
> - **The Hubs represent a strong example of learning by doing in the absence of a clear strategic UKRI framework for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion.** On the whole, the Hubs are undertaking gender responsive research. Inclusiveness has been addressed in a less systematic way. **(3.1.6)**

> • **The Hubs are relevant, challenge-led and well positioned for impact**. However, funding eligibility restrictions for local non-academic partners limit potential for impacts that rely on pathways of change at the local level. **(3.1.7)**

EQ 1 assesses the structures and processes of the Hubs programme and the extent to which they align with what we would expect to see in challenge-led ODA R&I.[23] Assessment is made on two levels: (1) *ODA R&I management*: the management structures and processes in place at the programme level as well as the award level; (2) *ODA R&I excellence in design and implementation*: award-level structures and processes for design and implementation, underpinned by considerations of fairness and inclusiveness.[24]

We first frame the signature investment in the context of the GCRF programme (3.1.1). We then assess the commissioning and selection processes for the Hubs (3.1.2) and the management structures at the programme and award levels (3.1.3). We follow this with an evaluation of the structures and processes for design and implementation at the award level, exploring research ethics (3.1.4), fairness considerations (3.1.5), gender equality and social inclusion (3.1.6). Finally, critical for achieving development impact, we assess the relevance and originality of the Hubs and their positioning for impact (3.1.7).

3.1.1   Framing the Hubs programme within the GCRF programme

> **Key Finding 3.1.1**
>
> The Hubs programme embodies the vision of GCRF to deliver challenge-led and impact-focused research. To achieve this vision in the context of limited examples of good practice, the programme has needed to innovate and develop new structures and processes. (EQ 1)

The Interdisciplinary Research Hubs programme is closely aligned with the GCRF Strategy. Reflecting the goals of GCRF, the Hubs programme focuses on delivering innovative solutions to complex development issues through challenge-led, interdisciplinary research, equitable partnerships and capacity strengthening in the UK and the Global South.[25] Equitable partnerships, in fact, have emerged as one of the defining features of the Hubs (see Sections 3.1.2 and 3.1.5). In this respect, the Hubs programme represents a significant process of learning for GCRF.[26] While the vision of the programme is framed in the UKRI ToC for the Hubs,[27] award holder KIIs indicate that the funding call (discussed in Section 3.1.2) stands out principally as the guiding framework for the conceptual design of the Hubs.[28]

The Hubs programme provides the needed strategic focus on high priority development challenges within GCRF. The 2017 ICAI review highlighted the lack of a strategic approach in the management of GCRF. This was identified as weakening the impact potential of the portfolio. ICAI therefore welcomed the call for thematically focused, interdisciplinary research Hubs.[29] This

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23 Defined in GCRF Evaluation Stage 1b Scoping Report (Itad, 2021) as going beyond research excellence alone, to promote challenge-led, excellent research with impact.
24 Itad (2021). GCRF Evaluation Stage 1b Scoping Report
25 GCRF Strategy https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623825/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-strategy.pdf
26 The 2022 GCRF Stage 1a Review of Management Processes found that while (equitable) collaboration with Southern Partners has gained greater emphasis in the GCRF strategy, implementation has been patchy.[32]
27 UKRI Hubs ToC (UKRI internal document)
28 UKRI Funding call (UKRI internal document)
29 ICAI (2017). Global Challenges Research Fund. A Rapid Review https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf

evaluation finds that the Hubs are providing the needed strategic focus. They are challenge-focused, relevant and have a strong potential for development impact (see detail in Sections 3.1.7 and 3.4). However, as discussed in Section 3.1.3, a stronger cohort approach would further progress towards synthesis and legacy and impact.

Lacking precedents, the Hubs have faced a number of challenges in putting processes and structures in place for challenge-led R&I with development impact. As we will discuss in Section 3.1.3, the evaluation finds that typically the host university had little experience of policies and frameworks essential for setting up a challenge-led ODA R&I programme. This relates to, for example, safeguarding, gender plans, equitable governance structures, risk registers, MEL plans, and collaboration agreements with new and established institutions in the Global South (see Sections 3.1.3, 3.1.4 and 3.1.6).[30] As such, the Hubs developed new processes and structures to achieve the ambition set out in the Hubs' funding, and this process of learning by doing led to set-up delays and challenges (discussed further in Section 3.3).

3.1.2 Commissioning and selection of the portfolio to deliver against challenges

Key Finding 3.1.2

Clear language and emphasis in the funding call on equitable partnerships, challenge-led and impact-focused research, and a long lead time for proposal development, were critical factors in the creation of a portfolio of high-quality impact-focused research Hubs. (EQ 1)

Funding call

The evaluation finds that the Hubs' funding call was an ambitious and unique call which has been critical to the conceptual design of the Hubs. In the KIIs, principally among award holders, the funding call was, almost universally, reflected upon as a powerful document inspiring new approaches to achieving development impact based on equitable partnerships. It was a point of reference for the Hubs when creating important structures and processes (see Sections 3.1.3, 3.1.4 and 3.1.5).

> *"The call itself did something really beautiful – just the call itself allowed us to think in a much bigger way over a much longer period of time and in a much more responsive approach to research for development". (Global South partner)[31]*

KIIs highlighted the funding call as innovative in the UK R&I community in its scale and scope, calling for networks of researchers to deliver challenge-led, interdisciplinary research with a clear impact focus. The call also emphasised the importance of meaningful and equitable partnerships between the UK and Global South researchers and partners, which has indeed emerged as a key strength of the Hubs (see Section 3.1.5).[32]

There was an explicit emphasis in the call on going beyond 'research excellence' to an impact-focused approach. Hub proposals were assessed not only on the novelty of their proposed research and approaches but also on their proposed plan to translate research into real-world

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30 P11 , A1.11, A3.3
31 A3.3
32 Hubs Funding Call (UKRI internal document)

outcomes and impact. The call recognised the importance of building capacity in the UK R&I community to deliver development impact. It also recognised the importance of partnering with NGOs and third sector organisations (including funding eligibility criteria) – although this is one area where the call possibly did not go far enough (see positioning for impact – Section 3.1.7). Our review of the sampled awards' proposals shows that the rigorous assessment criteria around impact in the funding call resulted in a strong framing of impact in the Hub proposals.

Meaningful and equitable engagements with Southern partners were at the heart of the call – a key route to delivering development impact. The early focus on equitable partnerships in the call has ensured that meaningful and equitable partnerships have emerged. In the KIIs there was general agreement that relationships within the Hub were equitable, notwithstanding the reductions in ODA funding (this is discussed in detail in Section 3.3.3). Southern partners expressed feeling like equals and feeling empowered to make decisions relevant to their country projects and to pursue impact opportunities. The evaluation finds it is through networks and partnerships that the Hubs have responded to challenges, seized opportunities and demonstrated agility, critical to making progress towards development impact (see Section 3.4 for more detail).

Proposal development process

A long lead time for proposal development ensured effective co-creation between Southern and UK researchers. The call mandated that proposals were co-developed with partners in the Global South. In total, there were ten months from the point at which the call was launched in July 2017 to the point at which full proposals were submitted in May 2018; outline proposals were submitted in November 2017 (for comparison, the proposal development phase for GROW was five months). The majority of informants interviewed indicated that they were involved in project design during this phase. The evaluation finds that this extended proposal phase was critical in ensuring the co-creation of proposals.

Most informants felt the length of time for proposal development was sufficient. Only in one case was the length of time considered to be excessively long. Notably, however, PIs felt it could have been longer still.[33] Despite the latter view, the evaluation finds that there needs to be a balance between allowing sufficient time to build meaningful partnerships and to co-create proposals and the need for partners to be sufficiently compensated for their contribution to project set-up (many Southern partners could not receive salaries until collaboration agreements had been signed, as discussed further in Section 3.3.3). Ten months for proposal development appears to have been sufficient, although a longer inception phase (as discussed in Section 3.3.2) would have been beneficial.

UKRI travel grants also supported the co-creation of proposals. Atypically, UKRI[34] also provided travel grants during the second phase (March 2018) to enable partners to travel to in-person workshops to co-develop full proposals.[35] While this was considered a good idea in KIIs, some informants reported that the grants were given too late in the process to be useful.

Proposal review process

The multi-stage review process taken for Hub proposals was a good step towards equitable collaboration with Southern partners at a strategic level – important for ensuring the relevance and impact focus of proposals. The full proposals were assessed in a three-stage

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33 A3.1, A1.1

34 Technically RCUK. UKRI was established on 1 April 2018, bringing together the seven disciplinary research councils that were formally under RCUK, together with Research England, and the UK's innovation agency, Innovate UK.

35 UKRI Hubs Overview Presentation (UKRI internal document)

process: firstly by UKRI's International Development Peer Review College, a virtual group of international peer reviewers (90% from DAC countries);[36] secondly by an "Expert Review panel" that was interdisciplinary, international (including academic and non-academic representation from countries on the DAC list of ODA recipients) and impact-focused (including user communities and others to assess the likelihood of impact);[39] and thirdly, the Hubs were invited to interview, with the Hubs' Southern partners being encouraged to join in (in one case, mostly Southern partners attended the interview).[37] The involvement of Southern experts at the strategic level was identified in the GCRF Stage 1a Evaluation as critical to supporting effective delivery. A review of sampled awards' proposals shows this rigorous process has supported the selection of proposals that are of high quality and are interdisciplinary, challenge-led and impact-focused research.

3.1.3 Programme and award-level management

> **Key Finding 3.1.3**
>
> The Hubs are actively and well managed at the programme level. However, more guidance and hands-on support from UKRI was needed during the set-up phase. Lessons now need to be effectively captured across the cohort by UKRI to build synergies and contribute to legacy. (EQ 1)

Programme management structures

On the whole, UKRI's governance framework for the Hubs programme ensures effective and engaged management of the awards. The management structure is made up of the UKRI International Development (IDev) central team, the RC Project Officers (POs) and the GCRF Challenge Leaders.[38] The UKRI central team plays a primary role. It is responsible for developing guidance documents, risk management, managing Hub queries, cohort events, sharing success stories, and monitoring, evaluation and reporting. The central team also oversees the POs and Challenge Leaders. KIIs and programme documentation indicate that the differentiated roles and responsibilities of the three authorities ensure that they function in a way that is complementary and adds value. However, despite the structure working well on the whole, KIIs indicate there have been some inconsistencies in communication to the POs that have impacted the relationship POs were able to develop with award holders. This was particularly the case during 2021 when BEIS reduced its ODA allocation to UKRI, resulting in cuts to the Hubs, when sensitivities relating to the process impacted communication.[39]

The POs have played a key role in supporting the management of the programme. KIIs reveal the POs are expected to regularly engage with their Hub(s), provide reporting and flag up project or funding assurance issues to the UKRI central team.[40] The POs do not see their roles as solely a monitoring one. Many described their role as one of a "critical friend", providing advice and support, aggregating issues and concerns, and communicating with the central team on behalf of the Hubs and vice versa. Additionally, the POs see their value-add in their ability to provide RC-specific advice and expertise. On the whole, evidence from KIIs suggests award holders worked well with the POs and appreciated their support and expertise – despite initial concerns

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36 International Development Peer Review College, https://www.ukri.org/apply-for-funding/how-we-make-decisions/international-development-peer-review-college/

37 Hubs lessons learned (UKRI internal document), A2.5

38 The Challenge Leaders are no longer in place.

39 PO interviews

40 GCRF Hubs Internal Management roles and responsibilities (UKRI internal document)

over the potentially stifling effect of having a UKRI representative sitting on their advisory boards (ABs).

However, there is variability in the POs' function across the different councils, leading to inconsistencies in the way the Hubs are managed. Evidence drawn from KIIs shows that this variability is partially attributed to POs sitting in different RCs, with each RC interpreting the role slightly differently. In some Councils the PO role changed hands a number of times, impacting the relationship between the POs and the award holders. Evidence from KIIs also indicates that due to the interdisciplinary nature of the Hubs, occasionally the allocated RC was not as well suited as had initially been thought.

M&E is a central task of the UKRI management team, and robust structures have been put in place. Documentary evidence indicates that the Hubs developed detailed M&E plans, a ToC, a logframe, an updated risk register and a financial management plan at inception. Additionally, award holders were expected to report annually (as well as a one-off inception and mid-term stage gate) and report to UKRI through Researchfish, including against six additional categories.[41] Reporting from the Hubs feeds into a central UKRI M&E framework and enables UKRI to track progress against programme objectives (for example, this informed the stage gate review process).[42] However, evidence from documents shows that despite the strong focus on M&E systems, minimal guidance was provided on what they should look like. Consequently, the MEL systems of the sampled awards differ from each other, and over time most have evolved significantly, with the Hubs taking the lead in elaborating the M&E plans, with some Hubs developing sophisticated systems for M&E, incorporating learning into implementation. This is a clear area where learning could be better shared 37crosss the cohort and for future UKRI programmes working in complex settings.

UKRI guidance

The Hubs required more hands-on support and guidance than that provided by UKRI. The extent of the difficulties faced by the Hubs and the degree of "hands-on" support needed in setting up structures and processes were unanticipated by UKRI.[43] KIIs have indicated that to accommodate the high degree of variation among the Hubs, the central team issued general guidance and principles to support the Hubs in the set-up phase, for example principles for setting up governance frameworks, M&E and reporting guidance. However, the lack of specificity in the guidance was considered problematic for some awards. KIIs reveal awards felt they needed more detailed and specific guidance. In particular, lack of guidance relating to the risk register and safeguarding policies was mentioned a number of times.[44]

> *"[T]he Hubs in themselves are all quite different from each other. And I think that's a benefit of the programme […] But it's also a challenge […] for UKRI, in terms of […] all the different elements of allowing for that flexibility and diversity of the Hubs but still having some kind of framework. I know a lot of the Hubs, or several of them earlier on, were quite vocal about [wanting] some detail on […] for example exactly what a risk register should look like, exactly what a 'theory of change' document should look like […] and UKRI*

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41 Interdisciplinarity, Capacity Strengthening (in DAC countries), Capacity Strengthening (in the UK), Equitable Partnerships, Addressing relevant challenges, and Global networks
42 Hubs Audit Response (UKRI internal document)
43 UKRI Lessons learned (UKRI internal document), PO interviews
44 P11, A1.11

> *were trying to be flexible by saying these are the principles but we aren't mandating a specific template". (UKRI PO)*

Despite insufficient upfront support, UKRI has been responsive to the needs of the Hubs. Evidence from documentation shows UKRI provided support in a responsive way, for example providing an inception phase, refining guidance, responding to the Hubs' need for extra guidance (for example setting up workshops for the Hubs with the UKRI risk expert) and by accommodating the Hubs' bespoke approaches to financial disbursement and auditing (see Section 3.3). However, at times UKRI was unable to provide timely and adequate support, for example safeguarding and gender policies were being developed by UKRI at the same time as the Hubs. Also as regards UKRI, the Hubs were unprecedented in their scale and scope,[45] and informants noted that there were few precedents in the UK R&I community for setting up appropriate structures and processes underpinned by the principles of equitability and impact. Consequently, the Hubs have often taken the lead, innovating and learning by doing (discussed in Sections 3.1.4, 3.1.5 and 3.1.6). This process has taken time and has contributed to delays in the set-up of the Hubs (see Section 3.3.2).

Programmatic learning

The evaluation finds there has been considerable learning in the Hubs. However, efforts to share learning at the programmatic level and develop a cohort identity have not been sustained in a structured way to effectively build synergies and contribute to legacy. UKRI initially promoted coherence between the awards by bringing the cohort together in events to share best practice and learning. KIIs indicate, however, that with Covid-19 and the ODA cuts, fewer cohort events have been organised. Additionally, the potential contribution of the Challenge Leaders in this regard has not been fully realised in practice. While the Challenge Leader role included providing strategic advice and identifying common themes and issues cutting across the cohort, the extent to which the Challenge Leaders were extensively involved with their Hubs varied significantly (see Challenge Leaders process evaluation).[46]

Other less structured mechanisms to share learning and best practice across the Hubs have been more effective and enduring. Evidence from KIIs highlights that Hub directors often sit on the ABs of other Hubs, providing an avenue to share learning. Hub managers also have a network. They regularly meet and share knowledge and concerns with each other. The POs also regularly meet to hone consistent messaging for the Hubs and to share and aggregate Hub concerns and success stories to pass on to the central team. Documentary evidence also shows that occasionally Hubs have collaborated with each other on initiatives or events.

Award-level management

On the whole, the Hubs have strong structures and processes to manage the grants. However, the lack of clear guidance and effective sharing across the cohort has meant these structures and processes are variable across the Hubs. Generally (though terms may differ), governance structures consist of an AB (an independent oversight body required by UKRI); an Executive Group (EG) (the main decision-making body responsible for strategies and policies, implementation and risk management); a Senior Management Team (SMT) (responsible for the operational delivery of the Hub's activities); and various thematic committees or working groups (focus areas vary across the Hubs, for example equitable partnerships, gender or safeguarding).

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45 UKRI (2019). UKRI GCRF Global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/UKRI-190821-GlobalChallengesResearchFundHubBooklet-June2019.pdf
46 P11

Evidence indicates that the added value of the ABs has been variable across the Hubs. The UKRI-mandated ABs have an oversight function but also support the Hubs strategically with stakeholder engagement and impact. However, evidence from KIIs and documentation shows that the Hubs experienced challenges in attracting AB members who were not already project partners but who were still willing to offer their time to support the Hubs. Documentation reveals that UKRI was concerned, during inception, that some of the ABs were not sufficiently independent or were not representative enough in terms of gender or the Global South.[47] The evaluation finds that the lack of guidance from UKRI on AB ToR meant that the role and level of engagement of the ABs varied across the awards.[48] Additionally, the conflicting requirement for the ABs to provide an oversight function but also strategic support has impacted the overall effectiveness of the body. Reflecting this challenge, project-level documentation shows that some Hubs set up other high-level advisory groups comprised of project partners and end users (who were not independent) to support the Hubs with impact activities.

On the whole, the Hubs have well-defined governance structures that support fair representation of partners, although informants felt decision making was too centralised. Evidence from award-level documentation shows the EG included the breadth of the Hubs' research partners, including the PI, Co-Directors or Country Directors, and (in some cases) project partners. In this way Hubs involved partners across the project in key decisions. KIIs indicate, however, that the inclusion of individuals in the EG was dependent on the work package structure, which varies across the Hubs: it mattered whether it was divided by research discipline or by country, with the latter resulting in greater representation of country partners in the decision-making body. Some informants also highlighted concerns that the decision-making structures were sometimes ineffective or dysfunctional.[49] Some informants also expressed concern that decision making was too centralised. Evidence from KIIs indicates that some Hubs have acknowledged this and that steps towards decentralisation are being made.[50]

3.1.4 Award design and delivery: setting up new processes for ethical and fair research and safeguarding

Key Finding 3.1.4

Driven by the ambitious and innovative requirements of the funding call, the Hubs are producing novel and forward-looking structures and processes for challenge-led ODA R&I. These provide a framework for reference for future R4D programmes. (EQ 1)

The Hubs have enshrined the principles of equitable partnerships and ethics in new policies. A review of documentation shows that the Hubs have developed ethics policies that go beyond their host universities' ethics standards. The Hubs have moved towards a 'development ethics' approach, developing Codes of Conduct (or Practice/Ethics) which provide an ethical framework governing Hub behaviour and ways of working. Some Hubs adopted more of a top-down approach in developing these, while for others it was driven by a broad consultative and

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47 External Review Proform – Inception reports (UKRI. internal documents), P3, P11
48 P11, A3.2
49 A3.3 A.1.11, A1.16, A1.14
50 A3.3, A3.1, A3.16, A2.8

participatory approach resulting in a shared approach (see Box 2).[51] Evidence from KIIs strongly points to the latter approach leading to a huge sense of ownership and pride among both Global South and Global North partners, which has empowered those partners.

Documentation indicates that the Hubs also set up ethics boards/committees/working groups to oversee ethical issues. The survey shows that 95% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that local ethical approval was sought or consulted for their project.

> **Box 2. Fair partnerships form the foundations of a participatory Code of Practice**
>
> The **One Ocean** Hub, led by the University of Strathclyde, worked closely with research and project partners to co-develop a Code of Practice which set out approaches to fair partnerships. Researchers were encouraged to share 'bad practice' examples from previous international research collaborations in open discussions, online forums, "Living Aulas" and through anonymous submissions. Lessons and shared approaches for fair partnerships were incorporated in the Hubs Code of Practice, which underwent a process of revision over a period of five months. **(Award reference: NE/S008950/1)**

The Hubs also developed new policies   with respect to safeguarding with limited central guidance. Evidence drawn from KIIs indicates UK-wide safeguarding guidance (at the UKRI/BEIS level) had not yet been developed when the Hubs started. A range of evidence from KIIs and documentation points to this being challenging for the Hubs.[52]

> *"[W]hen this programme was set up, it was at such an early stage of UKRI and BEIS and everyone else developing safeguarding policies that everyone was learning at the same time, which made it a challenge for the Hubs".*
> *(UKRI PO)*

Partly as a consequence of this lack of direction, initial safeguarding policies were produced in a top-down way. However, some of these policies evolved based on broader consultation.[53]

3.1.5   Award design and delivery: Fairness for research partners and participants

> **Key Finding 3.1.5**
>
> The Hubs go beyond establishing equitable partnerships with research partners. They are ensuring that fairness considerations are woven throughout project design and delivery as a fundamental pathway to development impact. (EQ 1)

Overall, the principle of 'fairness' has been clearly considered by the Hubs, and the evaluation finds that a key strength of the Hubs has been in developing equitable partnerships. The term 'equitable partnerships' relates to equity in relations between research partners. Fairness is a broader concept, encompassing other dimensions such as how the partnership interacts with research participants and other stakeholders.[54]

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51 A4 Annual report 2021, A3 Annual report 2021 (UKRI internal documents)
52 P11, P4, Hubs inception feedback (UKRI internal document)
53 A4 Annual report (UKRI internal document)
54 Izzi, V., Murray, B. and Sullivan, C. (2021). Final Report: Global Challenges Research Fund Evaluation, Research Fairness

> *"Research fairness can be thought of as having three concentric layers:*
> - *Fairness among those who are directly involved in conducting research (research partners)*
> - *Fairness among those who come into contact with the research process in other roles (e.g. research participants; 'knowledge brokers'; research users)*
> - *The legacy that research processes, in a cumulative way, have on the context where they take place. We refer to this layer as 'contextual fairness'". (Stage 1a GCRF Evaluation: Research Fairness Final Report)*

The first two aspects will be discussed in this section; the third, 'contextual fairness', will be discussed in Section 3.2.5. Three elements of fairness will be reflected on:

> *"**Fairness of opportunity:** Who has a say in designing, planning and implementing the research project? How are the various partners' priorities, incentives and practical constraints factored into this?*
> ***Fairness of process:** Are there clear and transparent procedures for accountability and for everyone to have a voice?*
> ***Fairness of benefits:** Is there agreement on how the expected benefits of the partnership will be distributed?" (Fairness Framework, Stage 1a GCRF Evaluation: Research Fairness Final Report)*

UKRI played a key role in supporting fairness of opportunity for research partners, which has been largely achieved. The funding call highlighted that partners were expected to play a "leading role"[55] in the design of the project. 95.7% of survey respondents indicated that they either led or contributed to project design, and 64.1% indicated that they felt GCRF supported fairness of opportunity (the opportunity to have a say in the design, planning and implementation of the project. As outlined above in Section 3.1.2, UKRI provided a lengthy proposal development stage and small travel grants to bring research partners together to co-develop partnerships and proposals.[56] Documentary evidence indicates that UKRI also awarded the Hubs an additional £180,000 to support inception activities, including hosting regional meetings in DAC countries to bring partners together to continue co-developing research plans and Hub policies.[57]

The evaluation finds several examples of good practice in establishing structures to support fairness of process for research partners. As discussed in Section 3.1.3, governance structures were set up to ensure fair representation of all partners. The Executive body in particular had broad representation of research partners and was the main body for decision making, risk management and dispute resolution. Evidence from KIIs and award-level documentation highlights other examples of good practice, including: regular surveys or "health checks", intended to assess how well the Hubs were doing on partnerships;[58] confidential spaces for partners to share views or voice concerns;[59] setting up meetings at different times to accommodate different time zones; promoting joint ownership of publications (see Section 3.2.2); and supporting partners to adapt and continue to engage during Covid-19 (see Section 3.4.2). However, there were some aspects that did not work as well as intended. Some informants voiced concerns that the Executive body was not as effective and representative as

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55 Hubs Funding call (UKRI internal document)
56 A3 cover letter inception report (UKRI internal document)
57 Hubs overview presentation (UKRI internal document)
58 A1.1, A3.1
59 A3.1

it should be.[60] For others, the time zones and the differences in southern and northern hemisphere academic term times caused issues, with key decisions needing to be made when Southern partners were on holiday.[61]

In general, the evaluation finds that processes to ensure fairness of benefits for research partners are in progress. The Hubs are still ongoing, with equitable and fair distribution of benefits yet to be fully seen. However, processes are in place to support this. A particular strength of the Hubs has been in supporting ECRs; for example, many ECRs have been involved in co-authoring publications (see Section 3.2.2).

However, informants noted issues related to data transfer and data sharing. Documentary evidence indicates that the Hubs were required by UKRI to outline data management plans in their collaboration agreements, inception reports and annual reports. Despite this, KIIs highlight that some Hubs faced challenges due to country-specific regulations and restrictions for data transfer and use. The evaluation finds that potential issues had been insufficiently identified and addressed in collaboration agreements, leading – in some cases – to mismatched expectations on data transfer and data sharing, which was the cause of significant concern for some Southern partners.[62] On the whole, however, 89% of survey respondents felt that ownership, use and access of project data are fairly distributed among partners, and 83% of survey respondents stated that they felt that any intellectual property rights arising from the project are shared equally by the project's partners.

The voices of other stakeholders involved in the research process have been incorporated well in research planning and project design. There is a good range of evidence indicating that the Hubs have engaged with other stakeholders in the research process, including local communities, research participants, project partners and other research users. In particular the Hubs have engaged well with communities and research participants in project planning (see Box 3), with consideration of fairness of process:

> *"I've been speaking a lot recently about community peer review […] taking the research […] reporting it back to the community […] going through that peer review process before you go to the academic peer review process as well. So we've been talking a lot about that recently, and embedding that into the plans". (Co-I)*

> *"[O]ne of the biggest lessons that I've learned from the Hub is partnering with communities because I've previously worked with communities to produce research and then feeding it back to them […] But what the Hub has done is basically provided a platform for us to continually work with partners in their communities. So, for instance, I'm planning on writing a paper with one partner from one of the communities that are affected". (Global South partner)*

Section 3.4.3 (Boxes 10 and 11) provides evidence of how the Hubs have engaged communities and how this has resulted in benefits to them.

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60 A3.3 A.1.11, A1.16, A1.14
61 A3.16
62 P4, A1.16, A1.11, A1.14

> **Box 3. Teen Advisory Group**
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> The **Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate)** Hub, led by the University of Oxford, has conducted a series of engagement events, "Teen Advisory Groups" (TAGs), with adolescents in multiple African countries. The events are inclusive, composed of young people from diverse backgrounds, including vulnerable adolescents living with HIV or in poverty. The TAGs are opportunities to hear from young people themselves, to learn about the issues that matter to them and how they want to participate in research. The TAGs were expanded during the pandemic, and remote arts-based participatory research continued with adolescents. For example, through phone calls and social media the adolescents advised the team on the topics, methods and platforms for remote research. "Engaging adolescents as knowledge holders is a powerful way to inform context-specific social justice research during Covid-19. Adolescent advisors are well placed to co-develop research questions, tools and methods that are responsive to their own contexts, interests and needs."[63] **(Award Reference: ES/S008101/1)**

3.1.6 Award design and delivery: gender equality and social inclusion

> **Key Finding 3.1.6**
>
> The Hubs represent a strong example of learning by doing in the absence of a clear strategic UKRI framework for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion. On the whole, the Hubs are undertaking gender responsive research. Inclusiveness has been addressed in a less systematic way. (EQ 1)

A Gender Equality and Social Inclusion policy was not mandated by UKRI. Gender policy was at an embryonic stage at the strategic level in UKRI when the Hubs were operationalising their approaches. It was in April 2019, when the Hubs had already started, that UKRI instituted policy requiring a Gender and Equality statement for all new GCRF applications. Consequently, gender was not explicitly mentioned in the Hubs funding call, though some UKRI guidance for gender reporting was supplied at the inception phase.[64] Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that there was no explicit requirement from UKRI for a gender policy. In fact, only 36% of survey respondents felt that they received gender and inclusion expert advice from the funding organisation. Despite the lack of guidance, some Hubs did develop a gender policy. 67% of survey respondents stated that their project had a gender and inclusion plan.

> *"The Gender, Justice and Security Hub's Ethics Code is a set of seven core principles which all partners are expected to adhere to, uphold and apply in their Hub activities. The first principle is the commitment to a feminist ethic". (UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub Ethics Code)*

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63 Teen Advisory Group: Remote, participatory and arts-based COVID-19 research with adolescents and young people in South Africa and Kenya (n.d.). The UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub https://www.accelerateHub.org/research/teen-advisory-remote-participatory-arts-based-covid-19-research-young-people-south-africa-kenya/
64 UKRI reporting guidance (UKRI internal document)

Despite the lack of a UKRI-mandated policy or specific guidance, the Hubs are, on the whole, undertaking gender responsive research. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that gender has been well considered by the Hubs. Approaches to gender mainstreaming vary. Examples include the creation of gender committees, gender working groups, gender champions and gender training. Evidence from KIIs strongly indicated that a gender dimension was also considered in the sampled Hubs' research, reflected in research questions, methods, processes and analysis.[65] The Hubs have also made proactive efforts to ensure gender balance in the teams. In a number of the Hubs, there are more women than men.

> *"[T]he biggest take away for me, it's been the female-led [Hub]. It's still very male orientated [in research]. Especially thinking about the type of research that's needed in the low and middle-income countries […] and what's needed for women and having a demand by women and having more women researchers […] That's been a big, big impact for myself". (Female Global South partner)*

The evaluation finds that the sampled Hubs have considered inclusivity in broad terms in their research design and implementation. This relates particularly with regard to women, youth, children, indigenous communities and other more specific vulnerable groups, such as mothers and young people living with HIV. There are limited examples in KIIs of inclusion of those with disabilities. On the whole, the evaluation finds that inclusiveness has not been consistently and systematically addressed in research design across the Hubs. Poverty is also not an explicit focus of the Hubs, although informants felt it was a cross-cutting theme whereby Hub research intersected with issues such as poverty, access to resources and livelihoods through its focus on improving the lives of vulnerable and socially excluded groups.[66]

3.1.7 Award design and delivery: relevance, originality, and positioning for impact

> **Key Finding 3.1.7**
>
> The Hubs are relevant, challenge-led and well positioned for impact. However, funding eligibility restrictions for local non-academic partners limit potential for impacts that rely on pathways of change at the local level. (EQ 1)

The evaluation finds the Hubs are well aligned to local, national and international strategic priorities. Survey data indicates that 95.7% of respondents actively co-developed, contributed to or led the design of the project. There has also been good involvement of non-academic partners during the design phase, including NGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), national governments, local community representatives, and multilaterals (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Survey data also shows that 99% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the project was relevant to their target country. A review of the sampled awards' proposals highlights that they are well aligned to a cross-section of UN SDGs. In addition, in reporting provided for the stage gate, the Hubs produced additional evidence which clearly showed the continued alignment and relevance of their work to UK global priorities, including the HMG Strategic Framework for ODA (2020).[67]

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65 A4.4, A2.1
66 A4 stage gate report, A3 Advisory board report 2021 (UKRI internal documents), A2.1, A2.2, A2.5
67 Hub stage gate reports (UKRI internal documents)

Figure 3: Percentage of Hubs survey respondents who reported consulting external stakeholders at design stage
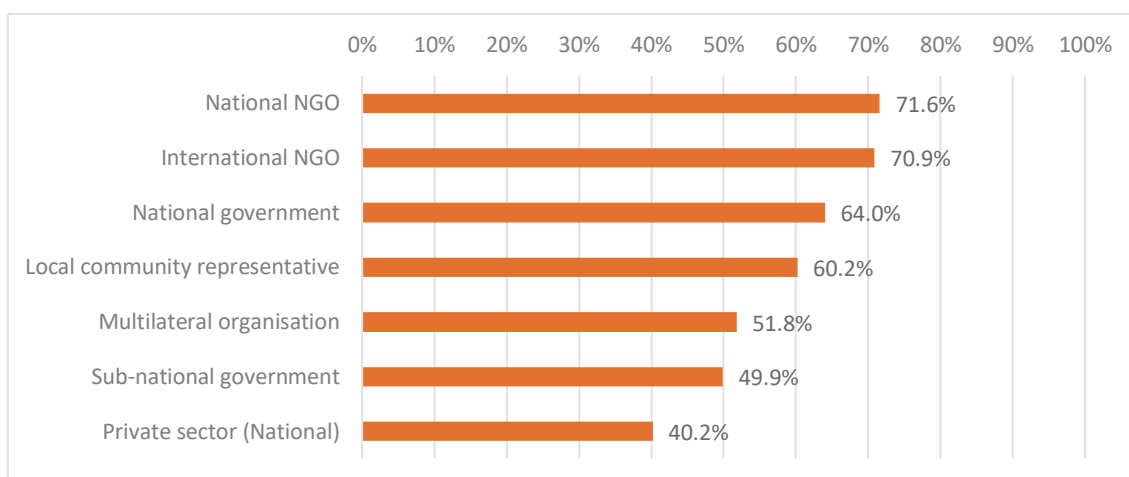
The evaluation finds that the "original" research being produced by the Hubs emerges from their interdisciplinary focus and approaches. A review of the documentary evidence of the sampled awards shows that they have a strong interdisciplinary focus in their subject matter, research approaches and ways of working. This is supporting a holistic understanding of challenges and is a key aspect of where we see the 'originality' of the Hubs. Evidence from KIIs indicates that Hubs are working in a cross-disciplinary way, integrating methods and inputs from different disciplines into research instruments and approaches. They are also integrating local knowledge and synthesising evidence to create interdisciplinary outputs.

In addition to producing relevant and novel research, the evaluation finds that the Hubs have put sufficient attention on understanding pathways to impact. The Hubs have developed project-level ToCs – as required by UKRI – that reflect participatory engagement. KIIs highlight that during the design phase, efforts were made by lead ROs to engage project partners in developing ToCs. Informants involved in this process indicated that they considered it useful in framing project outcomes. The Hub ToCs, however, have evolved over time, with many Hubs developing ToCs for each individual workstream. There is insufficient evidence to draw conclusions on the extent to which these additional 'sub-level' ToCs were developed in a participatory way. 13% of survey respondents stated that their project did not even have a ToC, which may reflect lack of participation or a lack of active use of ToCs during the project period.

The lack of involvement of local non-academic partners in project implementation has been highlighted by informants as hindering positioning for impact. A distinction was made between research partners and project partners in the funding call. Project partners included local third sector organisations such as NGOs, charities and other non-profit civil society organisations (CSOs), which received a modest contribution to their costs equivalent to one year full-time equivalent (FTE). Total costs associated with third sector project partners were also not to exceed 10% of the total Hub award. Additionally, indirect costs and overheads were not allowed and government departments and businesses were not eligible for funding.[68] As will be reflected on in Section 3.4.3, evidence from KIIs shows that the lack of involvement of third sector organisations was seen to hamper progress towards development outcomes.

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68 Hubs Funding call (UKRI internal documents)

3.2   EQ 2: To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?

> **Box 4. Summary of findings (EQ 2)**
>
> **Capacity strengthening is central to the Hubs programme and is identified as a key pathway to addressing development challenges. The Hubs illustrate the complex dimensions of capacity strengthening as it relates to development outcomes.** The Hubs are going beyond structured approaches to support the capacity of researchers and are enhancing and strengthening interactions in their networks, resulting in emergent benefits of strengthened capacity across the UK and Global South R&I ecosystem. **(3.2)**
>
> - **The complex mechanisms by which capacity strengthening occurs and its interaction with development outcomes are not sufficiently reflected in the UKRI and Hub ToCs.** In practice, the Hubs have shown that there are complex, non-linear processes by which capacity strengthening occurs, and these processes support development outcomes. **(3.2.1)**
>
> - **Structured approaches to capacity strengthening are focused on ECRs.** However, capacity strengthening that has emerged informally through interactions in the Hub network has been extremely valuable, particularly in building capacity around interdisciplinary ways of working and research for development. **(3.2.2)**
>
> - **Capacity strengthening at the organisational level has been an iterative, adaptive and learning process as co-created solutions have emerged.** This will enhance the ability of respective institutions in the Global North and Global South to conduct research for development in the future. **(3.2.3)**
>
> - **The Hubs have supported the capacity of the wider R&D ecosystem by creating networks beyond their immediate research partners.** These networks will be carried forward beyond the lifetime of the fund, continuing to support and enhance capacity. **(3.2.4)**
>
> - **The ODA cuts have brought issues related to contextual fairness to the fore.** Cutting partnerships in low-income countries risks emphasising institutional inequalities in the Global South. **(3.2.5)**

EQ 2 assesses capacity strengthening in the Hubs programme. We first assess the degree to which capacity strengthening has been informed by a clear ToC (3.2.1).

We then assess capacity strengthening in the Hubs at three levels. (1) **Individual level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen the capacities of individual researchers – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.2) (2) **Organisational level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen the capacities of research institutions – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.3) (3) **Systemic level:** To what extent are structures and systems in place to strengthen research ecosystems – in the UK and in the Global South? (3.2.4) Finally, we investigate issues related to contextual fairness (3.2.5).

3.2.1   Framing capacity development in the Hubs programme

> **Key Finding 3.2.1**
>
> The complex mechanisms by which capacity strengthening occurs and its interaction with development outcomes are not sufficiently reflected in the UKRI and Hub ToCs. In practice, the Hubs have shown that there are complex, non-linear processes by which capacity strengthening occurs, and these processes support development outcomes. (EQ 2)

Capacity strengthening as framed in programme documents does not adequately reflect the complex mechanisms by which capacity strengthening occurs and interacts with development outcomes. The UKRI-level Hubs ToC and the funding call focus on technical aspects of capacity transfer, with an emphasis on DAC countries. The ToC emphasises enhancing interdisciplinary research capacity, project management, leadership and technical capacity at the individual, organisational and institutional level, especially in DAC countries. The funding call outlined capacity building activities, including: bespoke training; development of professional and transferable skills; development of tools, methodologies and guidelines; and/or staff exchange.

The evaluation finds that this linear framing is reflected in project-level ToCs of the sampled Hubs. Capacity strengthening is rarely unpacked and is generally included as a siloed singular outcome. The Accelerate Hub is a notable exception, where the pathways in which "capacity strengthening" interrelates with development outcomes is unpacked, and is central to the Hub's overarching Theory of Change. On the whole, the evaluation finds the Hubs' ToCs do not reflect the complex dimensions of capacity strengthening and the multi-pronged approach that many of the Hubs have, in reality, taken to address this.

In practice, the Hubs provide real-world examples of the complex dimensions of capacity strengthening and how it interrelates with development outcomes. As discussed in Section 3.2.2, capacity strengthening has not been limited to training. The Hubs have supported 'softer' aspects of capacity strengthening. They have provided spaces for the exchange of knowledge and learning, improving understanding and ways of working in interdisciplinary research, development, and policy among *both* Global North and Global South partners. As discussed in Section 3.2.3, much of the capacity strengthening that occurred at the organisational level has been a two-way iterative and adaptive process as co-created solutions emerged. The Hubs (as discussed in Section 3.2.4) have also supported the capacity of the wider R&D system by interacting with a wide range of stakeholders beyond their immediate research partners, including communities, national and international policymakers and other researchers. Overall, the evaluation finds, as discussed in Section 3.2.4, that the lasting legacy of the Hubs in terms of enhanced capacity is in the networks they have created.

3.2.2 Capacity development at the individual level

> **Key Finding 3.2.2**
>
> Structured approaches to capacity strengthening are focused on ECRs. However, capacity strengthening that has emerged informally through interactions in the Hub network has been extremely valuable, particularly in building capacity around interdisciplinary ways of working and research for development. (EQ 2)

The evaluation finds structured approaches to capacity strengthening are focused on ECRs. Generally, capacity strengthening for ECRs has been integrated across the work packages through the provision of training and guidance. For one Hub, capacity strengthening for ECRs constituted a specific work package, including needs assessments, training and a mentorship programme. Informants across the sampled Hubs spoke of ECRs forming networks and being

encouraged to proactively request training, webinars, etc., and to support each other and advocate for their needs.[69] Meetings were described as being inclusive. ECRs were invited to policy and impact meetings and were given opportunities to engage in a variety of opportunities, including international conferences.[70]

> *"In the Hub, you don't necessarily feel like an ECR always. And I do think that is what's really great. For all the country meetings or if it's even the impact meetings or [others], they're really inclusive. And you'll always be invited to all of those, even if you're an ECR". (Global South ECR)*

Beyond ECRs, evidence from award-level documentation and KIIs shows that the Hubs also provided ad hoc training sessions to team members around ethics, safeguarding, project management, MEL and financial management, as well as research-related training on data collection, scientific protocols and techniques, etc.[71] Administrative functions were also decentralised across the Hubs, and some Global South informants noted aspects of administrative processes that challenged them, such as managing budgets,[72] timesheets[73] and reporting,[74] that have contributed to capacity.

A number of informants in the Global South expressed regret over the lack of funding for doctoral research.[75] Some partners indicated that they still included PhDs in the Hub but provided them with 'top-up funds' from their own institutions' budget. Evidence from documentation shows one Hub obtained co-funding for partners to undertake PhDs while also receiving Hub mentorship.[76] One informant from a low-income country also noted that a capacity strengthening system that focused on ECRs, although highly appropriate to South Africa, was not appropriate for them, where there was greater demand for support at the Masters and Doctoral level.[77]

> *"I think maybe one of the shortcomings [...] is that it doesn't fund PhD students. PhD researchers play a fundamental role for us. [...] Ultimately, the research is what drives understanding about what's going on and what needs to happen. So I think that level of funding for students is a bit of a struggle for us [...] we have to pay for their scholarships with other funds to support them". (Global South partner)*

Substantial attention has been placed on providing ECRs with opportunities to co-author publications. Co-authorship with Southern researchers had been identified as an area that was lacking across the GCRF programme as whole.[78] Evidence from KIIs indicates that the Hubs have done very well in this respect. ECRs appreciated opportunities to co-author journal articles with senior researchers as a key avenue for capacity strengthening and career advancement. One Global South researcher noted that it was their first opportunity to co-author a publication.[79]

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69 A3.1
70 A3.15
71 A1 inception report (UKRI internal document)
72 A3.16
73 A4.7
74 A4.15
75 A3.9
76 A4 case for support (UKRI internal document
77 A3.7
78 Izzi, V., Murray, B. and Sullivan, C. (2021). Final Report: Global Challenges Research Fund Evaluation, Research Fairness
79 A4.8

> *"Whoever writes the paper is the leader, whoever contributes more to the paper is the leader. And that's also where the early career researchers were being pushed forward. Because most of the publications, ECRs are first authors and the professors are last. In the few papers that I have contributed, I know that I have been first author in some and second in some, based on my contributions". (Global South ECR)*

The evaluation finds that capacity strengthening that has emerged informally through researchers' interactions in the Hub network has been extremely valuable. A review of documentation and KIIs indicates that the Hubs provide many informal opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration and skills transfer through meetings, workshops and conferences, as well as through the creation of learning spaces[80] or mini-networks.[81] One informant reflected that the route to capacity strengthening based on formal courses and training envisaged at the start was in some ways less effective than the more collaborative capacity sharing that emerged naturally through working in a Hub.[82]

> *"Some of the routes of capacity sharing and support were not the routes that had been initially envisaged. A lot of it was developing new methods of doing things – someone who worked on that paper would then go and work with this group and share the methods of the paper – more collaborative capacity sharing work as opposed to doing a course, which we also did – but the collaborative approach worked better but wasn't planned". (Global South partner)*

Many informants noted with regret that much of the structured capacity strengthening work (particularly for ECRs) would be discontinued due to funding cuts, but acknowledged that researchers would continue to engage in informal spaces and exchange capacity.

Through collaborative approaches, the Hubs are strengthening capacity in interdisciplinary ways of working. A number of informants from the Global South confirmed that this was the first opportunity they had had to work in an interdisciplinary way and recognised its transformative potential, particularly in that it did not fit the typical paradigm by which research projects were funded in their country.[83] One Global South researcher noted that the Hub had helped in bringing together colleagues from different disciplines that would not normally work together.[84]

> *"[It has been a] new and enriching experience for me. First time doing transdisciplinary research in this way. Challenging, but we've been able to overcome the challenges, and have learnt new ways of doing research". (Global South partner)*

> *"But also this ability to design research across transdisciplinary lines, one of the successes as well. Often we have been working in research silos […] But*

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80 A3.6, A3.15
81 A3.13, A4.15
82 A4.3
83 A3.3 , A3.8, A3.16
84 A3.9

we don't do that now, we're working across scales of disciplines". (Global South partner)

"What's happening from a transdisciplinary research perspective is very exciting. The ways in which research questions are co-designed, in which budgets are now being shared. It's a very unique thing. I've never seen it before, where not only are we co-developing research questions, and co-developing research practices, and even helping each other's students and field workers [...]. going into the field together across disciplines and across universities". (Global South partner)

Learning spaces and cross-disciplinary mini-networks, fostered through the Hubs, promoted interdisciplinary exchange.[85]

"I think that's one of the things that I would say that what we've managed to achieve with regards to interdisciplinarity is that there have been little networks that have risen up in the Hub sort of organically just with people who are working on similar issues and want to speak to each other more". (Co-I)

Covid-19 was cited as potentially impacting the nature of these collaborations, due to the inability to hold in-person meetings and the value of these in fostering spin-off conversations and creative exchanges.[86]

Other informants highlighted continued challenges around interdisciplinarity in the Hubs. For example, some described clear disciplinary groupings working independently of each other in the Hubs.[87] Others described challenges in finding a shared language and common ground.[88] On the whole, the evaluation finds that while challenges and disagreements remain, evidence strongly suggests that the Hubs are making excellent progress in supporting interdisciplinarity and in producing interdisciplinary research.

In addition, through the interactions of Global North and Global South researchers, the Hubs are building capacity around R4D. Informants indicated that the Hub had strengthened their capacity with respect to engaging with national and international policymakers.[89] One PI reflected that the Hub had given many UK and Global South researchers their first opportunity to engage in UN processes.[90] The evaluation finds that the PIs' experience and work in international policy engagement is significant in this regard, not only in acting as role models but also in creating opportunities for young researchers to get involved in high-level international political fora.[91] There was also a sense among informants interviewed that for many researchers, particularly in the Global North, conducting research in a development context was a steep learning curve.

"[There was capacity building happening] all around. The biggest from my perspective was for UK researchers. Working in research for development

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85 A.13
86 A4.3
87 A3.16
88 A1.9 A4.3
89 A4.10, A4.11, A3.1, A4.8
90 A3.1
91 A3.1, A4.10

> *was new for almost everybody, with that sense that they have a commitment and responsibility towards development". (PI)*

> *"It's really broadened my own horizons for research […] I've worked on interdisciplinary before, but never from that research for development perspective. And never with those specific issues in mind. I'm still getting to grips with it, to be honest, three years on, still learning. I think it's been really beneficial". (Global North Co-I)*

Global South informants noted that the Hub had provided greater opportunities for them to do impact-focused work, since they were able to tap into a larger network and partner up with individuals and organisations involved in similar work across different scales.[92]

> *"So the Hub has played a huge role, because we had been doing the activism work but not to the extent that we would like. But there are people in the Hub that are completely focused on that […] So the Hub has sort of created a network of people that is quite helpful. So I think that's been the biggest benefit of the Hub, in my view". (Global South partner)*

Capacity building supporting researchers on impact and impact-focused research will enhance the ability of Global North and Global South institutions to conduct R4D in the future.

The role of activism in research emerged in interviews as a point of difference between researchers in the Global North and the Global South. A number of Global South informants reflected on conversations that were ongoing in their Hubs on the topic of "what research for development is". They described tensions arising between differing understandings.[93] Many described themselves as "scholar activists" but described views of experienced Global North researchers as opposed to this.[94] One informant sensed a shifting tide in the Hub, with a move towards more activism in research, and attributed this to researchers starting to change their views, but also to the prioritisation of ECRs during the ODA cuts, after which many senior academics reduced their FTE to preserve the jobs of younger researchers, particularly in the Global South.[95]

3.2.3 Capacity development at the organisational level

Key Finding 3.2.3

Capacity strengthening at the organisational level has been an iterative, adaptive and learning process as co-created solutions have emerged. This will enhance the ability of respective institutions in the Global North and Global South to conduct R4D in the future. (EQ 2)

Much of the capacity strengthening that occurred at the organisational level has been a two-way iterative and adaptive process as co-created solutions emerged. As seen in Section 3.1.3, UKRI's requirements for multiple frameworks and policies with which both Northern and

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92 A3.8
93 A3.2, A3.3, A3.8, A3.9, A3.7
94 A3.3
95 A3.3

Southern institutions were unfamiliar has meant that there has been a steep learning curve for all partners. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that many of these frameworks, for example MEL plans, ToCs, safeguarding policies and codes of conduct have been co-developed by Southern and Northern partners, contributing to a step change in how they will engage in international partnerships in the future.[96] One PI reflected that though the Hubs may not have created all the 'right' systems and structures from the start, there had been a process of learning, reflection and improvement, and their partners now at least had a different perspective on how to negotiate grants going forward.[97] An informant from the Global South remarked that their experiences with the Hub had helped them in developing structures in their university, from complex structures connecting researchers across disciplines to simple things such as creating Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with stakeholders. The informant noted that these 'tools' would last beyond the lifetime of the project. Some informants, however, mentioned their disappointment in the lack of support for hardware and software infrastructure to facilitate in-country data analysis.[98]

The evaluation finds there has been significant learning in Northern academic institutions around finance mechanisms suited to LMICs. Evidence from KIIs and documentation strongly points to lead ROs seeking to adapt their financial mechanisms to ensure that funds were disbursed in ways that could accommodate the particular needs and challenges of Global South institutions (discussed in detail in Section 3.3.3). Equally, Southern organisations have had to adapt and align their systems and processes to the lead RO, also contributing to their capacity strengthening.

Overall, 89% of survey respondents believed that the project had contributed to new or significantly improved capabilities (skills and infrastructure) in the project's target country/countries, and 71% of believed this to be the case in the UK, as seen in Figure 4: below. Additionally, 90% of survey respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that their project had contributed to new or significantly improved management practice, knowledge, research findings, technology, methods and tools.

Figure 4:   Extent to which respondents agreed that the project contributed to improved skills and infrastructure in target countries

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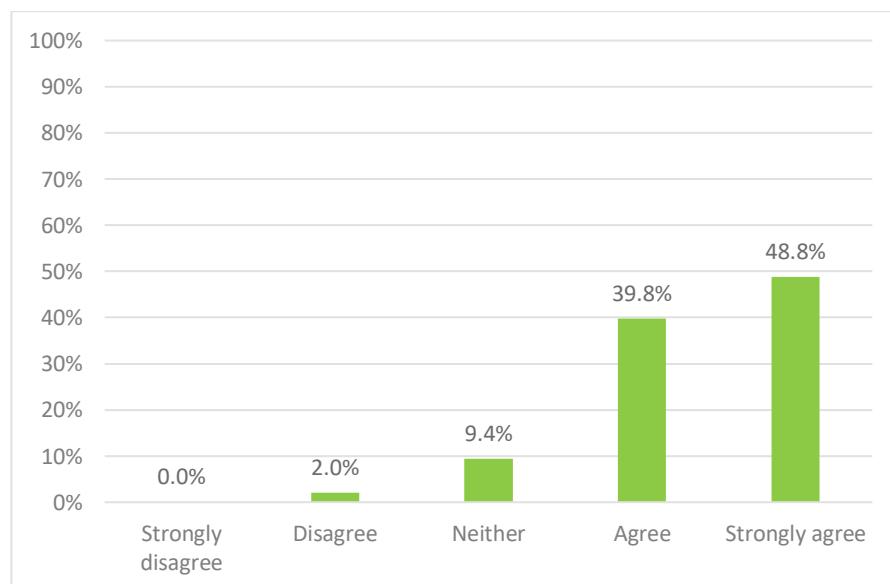
96 Additional evidence – stage gate – A3 (UKRI internal document)
97 A1
98 A1.16, A1.14

3.2.4 Capacity development at the systemic level

> **Key Finding 3.2.4**
>
> The Hubs have supported the capacity of the wider R&D ecosystem by creating networks beyond their immediate research partners. These networks will be carried forward beyond the lifetime of the fund, continuing to support and enhance capacity. (EQ 2)

Capacity strengthening is occurring beyond the Hubs' core network of research partners. Evidence from KIIs and documentation shows that the Hubs have created extensive networks beyond their immediate research partners to the wider local, national and international R&I ecosystem, policy and community environment. Through these networks the Hubs are supporting capacity strengthening of different stakeholder groups.

The evaluation finds that the Hubs are working with local communities in ways that strengthen their capacity to amplify their voices. Evidence from KIIs and documentation highlights that the Hubs are working with vulnerable groups in communities to determine their views and values and to amplify their voices in local, national and international debates (see Section 3.4.3). Several informants referred to the capacity of communities being strengthened through the Hubs, with increased access to knowledge, tools and advocacy support.[99]

> *"[A] lot of the capacity building has been directed at the communities […] that's the part of the work of the Hub that […] is very important to me".*
> *(Global South partner)*

Evidence from KIIs indicates that additional efforts were made during Covid-19, with the use of social media and online apps to continue engaging with local groups. This was critical not only to maintaining data collection but also to supporting digital inclusion and access to information during a difficult period (see Section 3.4.2 for details).[100]

The Hubs have extended their reach and influence to wider policy and research audiences. The Hubs opened up their webinars and training sessions to researchers and policymakers that were not formal partners.[101] In a Covid-19 context these were online, enabling a wider reach in the Global South. For example, one Hub organised a methods training event that attracted researchers as well as individuals from national governments and NGOs across the Global South.[102] Another Hub connected with a multilateral's international capacity building programme for researchers in the Global South, resulting in a two-way exchange. Hub researchers also provided formal training sessions, sharing and exchanging their knowledge and expertise with fellow researchers in the Global South.[103]

The Covid-19 pandemic has also been an unexpected driver of capacity strengthening in local contexts in the Global South. Evidence from KIIs highlights that Hubs were strongly incentivised by Covid-19 restrictions to move away from old paradigms that involve flying in experienced researchers from more developed countries to lead research in less developed countries. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that in order to continue with data collection and fieldwork in the context of global travel bans, Hubs trained up partners and even community

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99 A3.9
100 A3/A4 Annual report 2021 (UKRI internal document), A4.15
101 A1 advisory board 2021 (UKRI internal document), A4.1 , A3.19
102 A4.1, A4.10
103 A3.19

members to conduct research and data collection (see Section 3.4.2).[104] This was not just a North–South flow of capacity but also a South–South exchange.[105]

Overall, the evaluation finds that the lasting legacy of the Hubs programme, in terms of enhanced capacity, is in the networks it has created. Many informants remarked that the unquantifiable value of the Hub was in the networks created that were expected to outlast the life of the fund and the Hub. Through the networks, researchers have been able to enhance the value of their own work, leverage the expertise of others, and identify opportunities for collaboration.[106] The value of the network has also been in building South – South connections. Global South informants mentioned building connections and supporting each other on a range of activities ranging from reporting[107] and budgets[108] to research methodologies and practices[109] and impact.[110]

Fairness considerations: contextual fairness

> **Key Finding 3.2.5**
>
> The ODA cuts have brought issues related to contextual fairness to the fore. Cutting partnerships in low-income countries risks emphasising institutional inequalities in the Global South. (EQ 2)

Considerations of capacity strengthening cannot be made without considering the context in which those capacities exist. ICAI, in its rapid review, highlighted that given the differential in capacities between institutions in low-income countries and upper-middle-income countries (UMICs), it may be difficult to achieve capacity strengthening in the former using the same strategy as for the latter.

> *"GCRF's focus on research excellence may continue to advantage developing countries that already have credible research institutions, rather than directing investment towards poorer countries where capacity building may be most needed. The GCRF should […] consider developing a more targeted approach". (ICAI, 2017)*

Despite this, the Hubs have shown their commitment to strengthening capacity in low-income countries by creating partnerships beyond the 'tried and tested' few. The spread of partnerships across the Global South is reflected in the following figures: at the point at which the awards were made,[111] 21% of all overseas funds went to least developed countries, and 39% to lower-middle income countries.[112]

The evaluation, however, finds the ODA budget reductions risk stalling progress and have brought issues related to contextual fairness to the fore. In FY2021/22 BEIS reduced its ODA allocation to UKRI resulting in the Hubs experiencing up to 70% cuts as well as the removal of

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104 A4.15, A3 and A4 Annual report 2021 (UKRI internal documents)
105 A4.15
106 A3.4, A3.9, A3.7, A4.10
107 A4.15
108 A3.16
109 A3.6, A3.1, A1.14
110 A3.3
111 Note: this may have changed significantly as a result of the cuts.
112 UKRI Hubs Overseas costs (UKRI internal document)

their underspend.[113] As discussed in Section 3.3.3, the Hubs, in applying the cuts, sought to protect DAC partner budgets. However, some DAC country partnerships, including least developed and lower-middle-income country partners, were cut while more established partnerships were maintained, bringing up issues related to contextual fairness. These partners had been slower to progress in their research, due to additional capacity needs.

> *"Individuals or institutions that require support in building capacity may not initially be in a position to achieve research excellence. A longer time frame may be necessary for capacity building partnerships to come to fruition and achieve sustainability". (ICAI, 2017)*

By cutting these partnerships, the obvious knock-on impacts (on local partners and communities) were contained. However, cutting these partnerships also risked emphasising institutional inequalities in the Global South – not only in literal terms of capacity strengthening going to more developed Southern research institutions but also in a perceived sense of being "left behind".[114]

> *"The concentration of a significant amount of funding, capacity development, networking opportunities and influence in a limited number of Southern institutions raises issues of contextual fairness – defined here as the legacy that research processes, in a cumulative way, have on the context where they take place". (Stage 1a GCRF Evaluation: Research Fairness Final Report)*

3.3 EQ 3: To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented, are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?

Box 5. Summary of findings (EQ 3)

The Hubs have taken time to develop innovative structures and processes to deliver excellent interdisciplinary research with development impact, while trying to overcome operational challenges and systemic barriers to working effectively in LMIC contexts. Though there were inefficiencies during the set-up of the Hubs programme that had implications for effectiveness and equity, the Hubs are now a rich source of learning for the design and set-up of other complex development programmes focused on impact and equity.

- **Many of the rules and regulations around finance management to ensure VfM, which are considered best practice in the UK, when applied to Global South institutions have negative implications** for efficiency and equity. **(3.3.1)**

- **The Hubs needed a longer set-up period to accommodate the complexity of setting up numerous new partnerships** with Southern institutions and developing co-created and equitable processes and structures necessary for R4D. **(3.3.2)**

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113 P1
114 A3.7

- **Financial and assurance systems and processes at the UKRI and RO level have been challenged by the particular needs of LMIC contexts.** Adaptation and learning have occurred at an RO level but there remains a lack of uniformity in approaches across the Hubs programme as a whole. This raises questions over transparency and fairness. **(3.3.3)**

- **Insufficient attention has been placed by UKRI on holistic risk management and mitigation strategies.** A balanced assessment of risk by UKRI, taking into consideration the ambitions of the call and contextual realities, is necessary to avoid implementation delays and lack of uniformity in the portfolio. **(3.3.4)**

EQ 3 addresses the efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of the processes that were put in place to support challenge-led research, their fairness to partners, and the VfM that these processes provided. In other words, while EQ 1 discusses the key *principles* of the processes that were put in place, EQ 3 discusses how these processes worked out *in practice*.

We start by framing how VfM has been considered in the Hub programme and the expectations that were set for the Hubs (3.3.1). Then we discuss findings around the efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of processes (3.3.2), fairness issues (3.3.3) and, finally, risk assessment (3.3.4).

3.3.1   Framing Value for Money in the Hubs programme

Key Finding 3.3.1

Many of the rules and regulations around finance management to ensure VfM, which are considered best practice in the UK, when applied to Global South institutions have negative implications for efficiency and equity. (EQ 3)

Demonstrating VfM has been a stringent requirement of the Hubs, though little bespoke guidance was provided. The Hubs included a financial management plan addressing VfM in their inception reports and reported on VfM annually. In terms of guidance, the Hubs were simply signposted to DFID's 3Es.[115] The Hubs were also formally assessed against VfM during the stage gate review.[116]

In the Hubs' financial management plans, VfM as it pertains to economy is well considered. It is presented mainly around mechanisms for financial regulation (see Box 6), adhering to university rules on procurement and to UKRI's Terms and Conditions for full economic cost grants, including additional terms and conditions (Ts&Cs) for the Hubs.

However, the evaluation finds that many of the rules and regulations around finance management have had negative implications on efficiency and equity. While the mechanisms for financial regulation are typical and well suited to 'business as usual' UK research programmes when applied to an international programme based on partnerships with Global South institutions, they have negative implications for efficiency and equity, consequently impacting VfM. These are described below in Sections 3.3.2 (efficiency) and 3.3.3 (equity).

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115 Hubs Reporting guidance (UKRI internal document)
116 The Hubs were assessed against the following assessment criteria: relevance, equitable partnerships, capacity strengthening, progress on activities and outputs, positioning for outcomes and likelihood of contributing to impact. (Stage gate report BEIS, internal document)

3.3.2 Efficiency, timeliness and proportionality of processes

> **Box 6. Examples of VfM approaches taken by the Hubs**
>
> - Monitoring of spend against budgets on a regular basis
>
> - Adherence to universities' policies on expense claims, including reclaiming for actual and evidenced costs
>
> - Mitigating financial risk by ensuring collaboration agreements were signed before payments are made and payments are made based on invoice
>
> - Maintaining oversight of timesheets for directly incurred staff
>
> - Following due diligence processes to mitigate financial risk
>
> - Pursuing a tendering process for the procurement of high-value goods and services
>
> - Use of videoconference facilities and online content management systems to limit the need for in-person meetings and travel
>
> - Adherence to travel policies, e.g. booking travel in advance, economy flights, standard train tickets, etc.[117]

> **Key Finding 3.3.2**
>
> The Hubs needed a longer set-up period to accommodate the complexity of setting up numerous new partnerships with Southern institutions and developing co-created and equitable processes and structures necessary for R4D.

Inception phase

Insufficient guidance and support from UKRI regarding policies and requirements has impacted efficiency. As described in Section 3.1.3, the Hubs were being asked to develop new policies, frameworks and structures, of which the host university typically had little previous experience.[118] Evidence discussed in Section 3.1.3 indicates that the Hubs needed extra help and time to develop these.[119] Due to insufficient guidance, many of the policies and frameworks underwent multiple iterations and rounds of feedback.[120]

> *"At the early stage, when setting it up, when universities were asked to do new things and develop new ways of working with partners [there were] a lot of constraints, while the basic functions of the grant were not quite there because we had to invent them". (PI)*

To meet the expectations of setting up unique structures, processes and partnerships, the Hubs would have benefited from a longer inception phase. Informants expressed that they felt there were combined pressures during the inception phase which pulled them in separate directions: the pressure to set up the basic administrative functions of the grant, and the

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117 Examples have been taken from the sampled Hubs Financial Management Plans (UKRI internal documents)
118 A3.1
119 P11 , A1.11, A3.3
120 Inception review documents (UKRI internal document)

pressure to strengthen partnerships and commence activities.[121] Some informants felt the three-month inception phase should have been longer.[122] The evaluation finds that while there were typical project management delays around the hiring of staff and the finalisation of policies and plans, more time was needed to accommodate the unique challenges and processes involved in setting up a challenge-led ODA R&I programme, for example relating to due diligence and financial disbursement, as discussed below.

Setting up partnerships

Negotiating agreements with multiple partners significantly contributed to delays. The Hubs set up numerous partnerships, varying widely between twenty and fifty.[123] KIIs indicate that there was no central guidance on how the collaboration agreements should be developed.[124] Many set up separate agreements for each institution. For one sampled Hub, getting all partners to agree on and sign one collaboration agreement caused substantial delays.[125] A number of informants felt that the work and time it took to finalise the collaboration agreements were underestimated by the Hubs and UKRI.[126] For some it took longer than a year.[127]

Due diligence took time, which also delayed the finalisation of collaboration agreements. Evidence from documentation indicates that collaboration agreements were set up with institutions in the Global South where there had been no previous established agreement in place. Lead ROs were expected to carry out robust and rigorous due diligence of their partners, and this contributed to delays.[128] As such, partners were asked to provide a variety of legal and financial details and documents.[129] Evidence from KIIs indicates that this process was burdensome for small institutions in low-income settings with little previous experience of collaborating with UK institutions. Some informants questioned its proportionality.[130] Delays occurred due to differing legal frameworks in each country, bureaucracy, problematic issues emerging from the due diligence process, and partners wishing to conduct their own due diligence process back.[131]

Negotiations over advance payments with Southern partners also caused delays. A recurrent topic in KIIs with Southern informants was the problematic issue of payments in arrears (payments made after a service has been given), which is standard practice for UKRI grants.[132] KIIs indicate that lead ROs and UKRI recognised that payments in arrears would put Southern institutions under severe constraint. However, advance payments opened up the risk of payments being used for ineligible costs. Ultimately, the risk was held by ROs; if they allowed advance payments, they carried the risk of being liable for ineligible costs. This was an issue for all Hubs, and the Hubs developed different approaches to respond to it (as discussed in Section 3.3.4). For some Southern partners, getting advance payments agreed was essential before work could begin.

> *"In our context, the university would not give us some funds to implement a*
> *project. So we had to wait until the money is paid to us, and only then could*

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121 A3.1, A3.3
122 A3.1, A3.3, P11, A1.1
123 P11
124 P11
125 A1 Annual report 19/20 (UKRI internal document)
126 P4, P11, P8
127 A1 Annual report 19/20 (UKRI internal document)
128 UKRI Hubs Audit Response (UKRI internal document)
129 A2 Annex Due diligence form (UKRI internal document)
130 P5
131 P4, P11, A3.4
132 P11

we start running the project. The university would not allow us to do anything if there's no funding available within the finances of the university". (Global South partner)

"In the first year there was a lot of work refiguring out financial systems in UK universities, to really be able to give the payments and allow for research to start in the Global South. That in itself was a whole inception piece of work". (PI)

Impact of Covid-19 and the reductions in ODA allocation

Covid-19 presented efficiency challenges for the Hubs, impacting administrative processes as well as project delivery. Evidence from documentation indicates that Hubs reported delays in funding requests being raised and expenditure reports being completed, due to the disruption caused by the pandemic and the transition to home working.[133] Additionally, the Hubs needed to adjust workplans, revise budgets and transition towards online engagement while fieldwork was delayed.[134] The Hubs, however, have mitigated the impact of Covid-19 by making significant adaptations (discussed in Section 3.4.2), easing the transition to working remotely, from providing IT and technical support to adapting research processes.

UKRI's ODA savings exercise in FY 2020/21 had significant consequences on the Hubs and their ability to make progress towards delivering outputs and outcomes. In early 2021, after an informal review revealing significant underspend, and in response to reductions in ODA allocation, UKRI undertook a formal finance review of the Hubs. This resulted in the removal of the Hubs' underspend as well as a reduction in the Hubs budget for FY 2021/22 (the Hubs, in line with other ODA investments, received four months of budget over the course of a year).[135] This action had a significant impact on the Hub's ability to continue research activities.

The removal of the Hubs' underspend has highlighted an issue with the adoption of a flat spend profile for a complex R4D programme. With a flat profile (the same amount of funds distributed annually over the whole term of the award), and given the delays in set up in the first year, the Hubs were very unlikely to spend to their profile. Programme-level KIIs indicate that this was, to some extent, anticipated by UKRI, and there was an expectation that there would be a slow ramp-up in terms of project delivery and that there would be an underspend in the first year.[136] Consequently, informants felt that a curved profile would be more suitable for a grant of this nature, to avoid losing underspend.

Proportionality of processes

In general, the evaluation finds that reporting requirements are proportionate, although reporting for the stage gate review was considered onerous. Evidence from KIIs indicates that the Hubs were, in general, well equipped to deal with reporting demands (annual reporting and Researchfish submissions), with many administrative roles in the Hubs also encompassing reporting and data collation tasks. However, as described in Section 1.3.1, the mid-term stage gate review that had been planned by UKRI at the start became a formal review process after the reductions in BEIS ODA allocations, to determine whether the Hubs would continue to receive funding. Given the change in approach, substantial additional reporting was required

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133 A3 Annual report 2021, A4 Advisory board report (UKRI internal documents)
134 A4 advisory board report 2021 (UKRI internal documents)
135 UKRI Hubs Audit Response (UKRI internal document)
136 P5, P1

from the Hubs. Coming just after the annual reporting process, many informants felt that the reporting demands were too high, diverting resources away from project delivery.[137]

3.3.3 Fairness

> **Key Finding 3.3.3**
>
> Financial and assurance systems and processes at the UKRI and RO level have been challenged by the particular needs of LMIC contexts. Adaptation and learning have occurred at an RO level but there remains a lack of uniformity in approaches across the Hubs programme as a whole. This raises questions over transparency and fairness. (EQ 3)

A number of issues relating to fairness have been raised.

Finance issues

Informants in the Global South consistently mentioned problems related to payments in arrears as well as per diems. There is considerable variability across the Hubs in how this was addressed. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that the responsibility for navigating issues related to financial disbursements, specifically payments in arrears and per diems, fell on lead ROs. Lead ROs reported developing ad hoc solutions in consultation with UKRI. Some Hubs dealt with the issue proactively, for example putting aside a budget for advance payments.[138] Others dealt with the issue on more of a case-by-case basis, with the default approach being payments in arrears.

> *"[P]er diems are used as a way to buffer the many costs, invisible costs of research for development in the Global South [...] so often researchers will use part of their per diem to pay to support childcare so they can actually free up to do the research, because there isn't that support in the Global South". (Global South partner)*

The lack of a standardised approach for addressing issues relating to financial disbursements raises questions over transparency and fairness. KIIs reveal that some partners were given advance payments and per diems, while others were not. Also, some partners strongly insisted on advance payments and per diems while others did not, even though it caused significant constraint.[139] The evaluation finds that in this lack of clarity there was the possibility for imbalances to arise among partners where some partners were on a stronger footing to negotiate. One informant noted that they felt the Hub was fair as long as the receiving end knew how to negotiate.[140]

Delays in finalising collaboration agreements also had implications on fairness. Evidence from KIIs indicates payments could not be made until the collaboration agreements were completed, considerably impacting some Southern staff, some of whom went without a salary for months, despite being heavily involved in the operational set-up of the Hub.[141]

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137 A4.4, A3.2, A4.15, A1.1, A2.1
138 A3 annual report, A1 annual report 2020 (UKRI internal documents)
139 A3.10
140 A4.7
141 A3.3, A3.10, A1 Annual report 2020 (UKRI internal document)

Informants raised concerns over the considerable variability in salary scales between partners. Evidence from KIIs highlights that benchmarking of salaries was left up to institutions. Consequently, there was huge variability in salaries across institutions and countries. One Southern informant spoke candidly about being shocked at the low salary they were offered, and noted that because country partners set their own budgets, there was lack of uniformity across the partners.[142] Informants also highlighted the notable differences in salary scales between Northern and Southern partners. Most Southern partners were paid significantly less than their Northern counterparts, because their salaries were based on salary scales of their home institutions.[143]

Impact of the reductions in BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI

A number of different approaches were developed by the Hubs to deal with the 2021 cuts in their budgets resulting from the reductions in BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI,[144] with significant efforts expended in protecting Southern partners. Evidence from KIIs strongly points to the Hubs attempting to deliver the cuts in ways that were considered equitable. For some Hubs, this meant focusing on preserving the livelihoods of those most dependent on the Hub (i.e. those who were full-time on the Hub). Others focused on preserving country partners, while others equitably applied the cuts across all workstreams. Many Southern informants mentioned that the cuts did not affect them, a testament to the significant efforts put in place to protect them.[145] It is also a testament to the strength of the network that many partners not only remained with the Hubs but also felt the Hubs had managed the cuts well.

> *"Even people that are leaving are leaving with a sense they were supported and enjoyed the experience". (Global South partner)*

> *"One thing I can commend is that the Hub dealt with the cuts very well, in many ways. So that cuts were very traumatic but the way they dealt with it" (Global South partner)*

However, the evaluation finds that the ODA cuts opened the door to unfairness. Some Southern informants reported that colleagues no longer receiving salaries from the Hub were still providing intellectual inputs.[146] Some senior Northern partners took pay cuts or gave up salaries to keep the Hub going.[147] Informants expressed a sense of doing more with less and struggling with the uncertainty around funding.[148]

> *"We had to do more with less. It doesn't feel very good in a way. We're having to do the interviews faster than we would have normally done them. We can't have more people on the team […] there's no money. But […] we don't want to let it go. We still want to complete it. So the cuts have affected us." (Global South partner)*

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142 A3.10
143 A2.1, A2.19
144 https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/ukri-oda-letter-11-march-2021/
145 A3.3, A4.7
146 A3.3, A4.5
147 A4.1, A4.4
148 A3.16

Additionally, some partners were disproportionately impacted by the cuts. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that some country-focused workstreams were cut almost entirely due to the fact that research had not yet started or was not very far along as a result of contractual or institutional delays. This often coincided with those partnerships that were less established or were in low-income countries (see Section 3.2.5). Additionally, some informants felt that the burden of dealing with the cuts was placed solely on the Hubs and that there should have been better communication at the fund management level.

> *"The shame of not honouring contracts, legal obligations, were handed to [UK universities] and to [partner institutions.] Transference of shame was a big burden. The way we tried to deal with it was by being as transparent, as clear as possible. Tried to do it in a decent way, but confusion and lack of clarity that dominated UKRI at the time did not help". (Global South partner)*

> *"Not great, the way it was communicated to partners. Hubs tried to keep us in the loop. It was handled poorly at fund management level […] It took a long time to know if we were going to get the fund back. We did not hear anything until end of last year so still working but very uncertain". (Global South partner)*

The evaluation also finds that the recovery of underspend by UKRI has brought up fairness concerns. As part of the 2021 ODA savings exercise discussed above (Section 3.3.2), UKRI cut the Hubs' budgets by their projected underspend. Evidence from KIIs shows that Hubs felt unfairly penalised, particularly in cases where actual underspend was less than projected underspend. Evidence from KIIs also highlights a concern that ROs may be incentivised to move funds away from those partners unable to spend money quickly to others who could, impacting Southern partners with less advanced systems and processes.[149]

On the whole, the evaluation finds informants generally considered partnerships to be fair. In the survey, as shown in Figure 5 below, the majority of respondents (of whom 49% were from DAC countries) agreed that GCRF supported fairness in all three dimensions – opportunity, process and benefit sharing – with fairness of process ranking the lowest, at 57.8%.

Figure 5: **Percentage of survey respondents who agreed or strongly agreed that the Hubs support fairness throughout the research process**

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149 P11
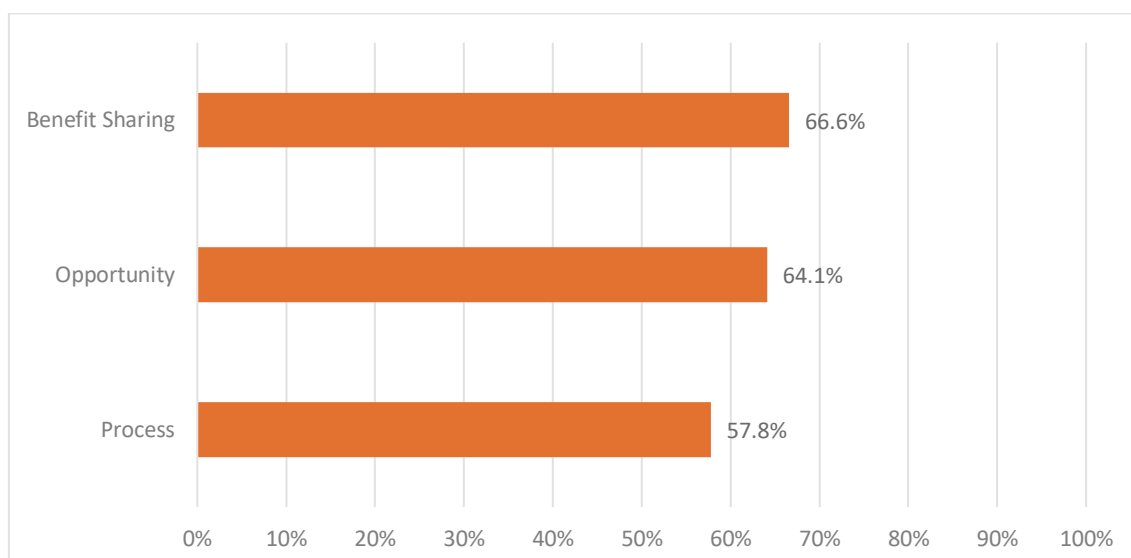
3.3.4 Risk assessment

> **Key Finding 3.3.4**
>
> Insufficient attention by UKRI has been placed on holistic risk management and mitigation strategies. A balanced assessment of risk by UKRI, taking into consideration the ambitions of the call and contextual realities, is necessary to avoid implementation delays and lack of uniformity in the portfolio. (EQ 3)

At the programme level, insufficient attention has been placed on holistic risk management. The burden of risk management is placed primarily on the award holder. UKRI's risk management and mitigation strategies are closely tied to that of the award holder. While the Hubs have well elaborated risk registers,[48] the evaluation finds that a holistic risk management approach at the UKRI level is lacking. Evidence from KIIs, for example, indicates that UKRI was ill-equipped to deal with the withdrawal of Allied forces from Afghanistan and the risks to local and UK researchers. Much of the responsibility for navigating the consequences of the withdrawal was placed on the Hub (see Box 7). A 2014 OECD report on development assistance and risk highlights that engaging in fragile and conflict affected states (FCAS) inevitably involves risk. It goes on to emphasise that funders need to "address risks in programming and take steps to mitigate them, instead of developing programmes that are based on risk avoidance"[150] – or, in UKRI's case, placing the burden of risk mitigation on the award holder.

> **Box 7. Managing risk in Afghanistan: The Gender, Security and Justice Hub**
>
> The Allied forces withdrew from Afghanistan during the implementation period of the **Gender, Security and Justice Hub**. Given the risk to local researchers and their families due to their association with a UK government research project, the Hub initiated a process to support their evacuation from the country. The Hub formed a coalition called the Afghan Solidarity Coalition (ASC), a grouping of organisations that had been working

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150 Development Assistance and Approaches to Risk in Fragile and Conflict Affected States, OECD, p.33

with local partners in Afghanistan on research, peacebuilding and women's rights.[151] In addition to submitting written evidence to the UK Parliament,[152] the group also helped evacuate at-risk colleagues and coordinated activities, including fundraising and resettlement assistance, to Afghan human rights activists, women peacebuilders, artists, filmmakers, researchers, doctors and LGBQTI+ activists.[153] **(Award Reference: AH/S004025/1)**

UKRI's 'requirement for rigorous due diligence of partnerships often ran counter to the efforts of the Hubs to develop partnerships in LMIC and FCAS which has impacted the ability of the Hubs to be efficient, effective and equitable. This has played out most clearly in the Hubs with respect to fiduciary risk. The Hubs were put in a conflicting position: walking the tightrope between UKRI's demands for rigorous due diligence of partnerships to mitigate fiduciary risk on the one hand, and the strong expectation on them to go beyond established partnerships to partnering with institutions in LMICs and FCAS (where there is inherently more risk) on the other.[154] The evaluation finds that a balanced assessment of risk by UKRI, taking into consideration the ambitions and demands of the call and contextual realities, is necessary to avoid implementation delays and lack of uniformity in the portfolio.

3.4 EQ 4: To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes/impacts, and what evidence exists of these?

> **Box 8. Summary of findings (EQ 4)**
>
> **The Hubs have made good progress towards their desired outcomes, and have been able to successfully respond and adapt to the unexpected and unprecedented challenges of Covid-19 and the ODA budget reductions.** The Hubs are building multifaceted and integrated understandings of complex development challenges. They are demonstrating that by working in a dynamic way with different stakeholders – including policymakers, local groups and communities – they are capable of developing a shared understanding of the challenge and influencing change at a local, national and international level.
>
> - **The Hubs are demonstrating good progress along their ToCs towards their outcomes.** They are contributing new knowledge, approaches and solutions to address complex development challenges. **(3.4.1)**
>
> - **The Hubs led an adaptive and agile response to Covid-19.** They developed innovative ways of working to maintain research progress and supported the digital inclusion of research partners and community members in the Global South. They also demonstrated their relevance by launching policy and research responses to Covid-19 related issues. **(3.4.2)**
>
> - **The Hubs have engaged a wide array of stakeholders as a key approach to influencing change and making progress towards outcomes**. There are strong examples of the Hubs amplifying the voices of communities, influencing change at a national level, and

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151 They include colleagues from the following organisations and institutions: UKRI GCRF Gender, Justice and Security Hub; LSE Centre for Women Peace and Security; Middlesex University; International Civil Society Action Network; MOSAIC Lebanon; Open Asia Foundation; FUUSE, Norway; Women for Peace and Participation, Afghanistan.
152 For the full written evidence see: https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/40773/pdf/
153 Ibid.
154 Development Assistance and Approaches to Risk in Fragile and Conflict Affected States, OECD, p.33

engaging internationally. The Hubs, however, have been limited in engaging third sector organisations, critical to local impact pathways, due to UKRI funding restrictions. **(3.4.3)**

- **There are early indications that the outputs are being taken up by key stakeholders including national policymakers and local communities.** The next phase of the Hub programme will be significant in promoting the use and uptake of project outputs. **(3.4.4)**

- **The ODA funding reductions have had a significant impact on the Hubs and their ability to make progress towards their outcomes.** However, the Hubs have demonstrated resilience. They have maintained their networks and refocused activities to continue to work towards their outcomes and impacts. **(3.4.5)**

- **The Hubs, by working in a collaborative way through their networks, have the potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts.** However, there is a need for greater support and guidance from UKRI on impact. **(3.4.6)**

Under EQ 4, we investigate to what extent the Hub awards have progressed against their envisaged impact. We start with an overview of the Hubs pathways to impact (3.4.1), followed by assessing research progress during Covid-19 (3.4.2), stakeholder engagement (3.4.3), and use and uptake of project information (3.4.4). Finally, we assess the impact of the reductions in ODA funding on the Hubs (3.4.5) and the value of the network (3.4.6).

3.4.1 Overview of pathways to impact

Key Finding 3.4.1

The Hubs are demonstrating good progress along their ToCs towards their outcomes. They are contributing new knowledge, approaches and solutions to address complex development challenges. (EQ 4)

The Hubs contribute new knowledge, approaches, and solutions to address complex development challenges. A review of programme and award-level ToCs indicates that the Hubs seek to influence change by sharing knowledge and capacity with different stakeholder groups, including national and local government, regional and international organisations, civil society and communities. This section will therefore assess research progress and stakeholder engagement by the Hubs to evaluate progress against outcomes.

Overall, the evaluation finds that the Hubs have demonstrated good progress towards their outcomes. The Hubs programme is halfway through its term and the Hubs are making steady progress towards achieving their outcomes, notwithstanding the barriers created by Covid-19 and the BEIS ODA budget reductions which resulted in significant cuts to the Hubs' budgets (see Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.5). They are successfully engaging and influencing stakeholders, including at the community, local, national and international level (see Section 3.4.3), and are making steps towards impact by influencing the use and uptake of research (see Sections 3.4.3 and 3.4.4).

While the Hubs are at an early stage in synthesising findings, they are also demonstrating that _how_ they work – in addition to _what_ they produce – matters. They are demonstrating that by working in a dynamic and agile way with different stakeholders across their networks – including researchers, policymakers, local NGOs and CSOs, and communities – they are capable of developing a shared understanding of the challenge and contributing to change at local, national and international levels (3.4.3). However, there is a need for greater support on impact going forward to maximise the benefits of their networks (3.4.6).

3.4.2 Research progress during Covid-19

> **Key Finding 3.4.2**
>
> The Hubs led an adaptive and agile response to Covid-19. They developed innovative ways of working to maintain research progress and supported the digital inclusion of research partners and community members in the Global South. They also demonstrated their relevance by launching policy and research responses to Covid-19-related issues. (EQ 4)

Hub activities were significantly impacted by Covid-19. However, the evaluation finds that the Hubs were able to effectively adapt, and research progress remains largely on track. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that fieldwork was significantly disrupted. However, the Hubs adapted and reprofiled their work plans such that research continued to remain largely on track. Adaptations include Hubs focusing more on desk-based research and prioritising secondary analysis studies, resulting in a significant output of publications (76% of survey respondents said they authored a peer-reviewed journal as part of the project). Other Hubs focused on capacity building and training researchers in preparation for fieldwork.[155] Additionally, with restrictions varying from country to country, evidence from KIIs shows that some country fieldwork was able to pick up sooner and country partners were quick to seize opportunities when rates were down.[156] The evaluation finds that those Hubs where results were significantly dependent on longitudinal studies were more impacted by delays caused by Covid-19.[157]

The Hubs adapted well to conducting research remotely. Evidence from KIIs and documentation highlights innovative methodologies adopted by the Hubs to support this. For example, local researchers, project partners and in some cases community representatives were trained to collect data (see Section 3.2.4).[158] With respect to this, evidence from KIIs highlights that it was essential for the Hubs to have strong in-country partnerships to facilitate the process. One South African informant reflected:

> *"Luckily we had infrastructure […] because a lot of these were lower-middle-income countries, so it means we would need to provide some support and assistance. [And] luckily we had very good partners in those places. So it meant that we had an established relationship. But I can imagine if you didn't have an established relationship it would have made it a lot harder, especially during Covid, to get where we needed to go with this". (Global South partner)*

Some Hubs also used unused travel budgets to buy data packages for research participants and community groups to engage with the Hub and prevent digital exclusion.[159]

> *"The Hub has had a lot of innovation […] WhatsApp groups to communicate, for instance, with [communities]. We've used these groups quite a lot to collect data during Covid, which I never thought would be possible. But I've just been amazed at how people in the communities that we work with have felt that the WhatsApp groups have brought them closer*

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155 A1.13
156 A1.11
157 A1.1
158 A4.15, A1.3, A3 Annual report 20/21 (UKRI internal document)
159 A3.3, A4.15

together and also brought them closer to us [...] Funnily enough, because of Covid I feel that we have more access to [communities] than we've ever had before because we realised that these online platforms and social media can actually be very powerful tools". (Global South partner)

KIIs reveal other innovative ways in which Hubs adapted, including conducting telephone interviews or using social media to engage research participants (see Box 9).[160] Informants also mentioned plans to publish papers on the methodology of virtual data collection.[161] Overall, the evaluation finds that the Hubs' adaptive response to Covid-19 was critical in enabling research to progress.

The evaluation finds that the Hubs were well positioned to provide a response or insights into the multidimensional impacts of Covid-19. A number of Hubs adapted the scope of their research, adding new workstreams to address Covid-19-related issues. For example, the Gender, Justice and Security Hub is exploring the impacts of Covid-19 on redefining gender norms in Uganda.

"There were massive media reports about men entering into roles, spaces and relations previously perceived as feminine – men in kitchens, in child nurturing, in domestic care work [...] We argue that these conversations, emerging out of the global pandemic of Covid-19, offer great learnings and facilitate a creative and intentional focus on men and boys as change agents and key beneficiaries of violence-free communities". (Gender Justice and Security Hub)[162]

Others responded by leveraging their networks to launch a policy response to Covid-19-related issues (see Box 9).[165]

Box 9. Providing an agile response during the Covid-19 emergency

The **Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate)** Hub launched a response to counteract increased violence against children during the pandemic. The Hub formed a coalition with the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children, the United States Agency for International Development, the Center for Disease Control, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and other key agencies, to develop a set of "Playful Parenting" resources – tips for parents during the lockdown.[163] The resources were translated into over a hundred languages and shared by global agencies, and have been used by national governments in their official Covid-19 response, reaching millions of people across the world.[164] The messages have been disseminated to the public using radio, community loudspeakers, and via faith leaders as well as using digital methods. **(Award Reference: ES/S008101/1)**

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160 A2.2, A1.15, A1.1, A1 stagegate additional evidence (UKRI internal documents)

161 A4.4

162 https://thegenderHub.com/blog/covid-19-nested-newness-and-changing-masculinities-in-uganda/

163 https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/COVID-19_Playful_Parenting_Emergency_Response%20%28002%29.pdf

164 https://www.covid19parenting.com/#/home

165 A1 annual report 2021 (UKRI internal document), A2.5, A4.1

3.4.3 Stakeholder engagement

> **Key Finding 3.4.3**
>
> The Hubs have engaged a wide array of stakeholders as a key approach to influencing change and making progress towards outcomes. There are strong examples of the Hubs amplifying the voices of communities, influencing change at a national level, and engaging internationally. The Hubs, however, have been limited in engaging third sector organisations, critical to local impact pathways, due to UKRI funding restrictions. (EQ 4)

The evaluation finds that community engagement in research has been strong, which has built important foundations for the Hubs to contribute to development impact. The evaluation finds that, facilitated by country partners, the Hubs have had strong engagement with communities (See Box 9 in Section 3.1.5 and Boxes 10 and 11 below).

> *"I think one of the biggest lessons that I've learned from the Hub is partnering with communities and research […] What the Hub has done is basically provided a platform for us to continually work with partners in their communities". (Global South partner)*
>
> *"[W]e've also been able to build partnerships […] most importantly, with the community. We have now got groups of community women, both their leaders, but also everyday women who we are collaborating with […] helping them to project their voice. They're telling us what their challenges are. But we're also hopefully adding value back to them through our research". (Global South partner)*

This has been maintained during Covid-19 in novel ways. For example, one Hub sent 'Covid-safe caravans' to communities, mosques, schools and healthcare centres to raise awareness of Hub work (see also Box 9 above).[199] Additionally, evidence from KIIs and documentation shows that communities have been able to connect with advocacy groups and decision makers at the national and international level and amplify their voices (see Box 10 and Box 11). The evaluation finds that the Hubs have recognised that bolstering community voices with research and evidence, and connecting them with audiences at the local, national and international level, is an important pathway for driving change from the 'bottom up'.

> **Box 10. Fishers speak up to UN officials and national policymakers**
>
> In June 2021, the **One Ocean Hub** co-designed with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) a regional virtual workshop for government officers, fishers and researchers from South Africa, Namibia and Ghana to identify legal barriers to the protection of Small-Scale Fisheries (SSF) human rights. The workshop was in line with the FAO's existing programme to support national implementation of the FAO Guidelines on Sustainable SSF. The Hub facilitated SSF representatives' direct participation in the workshop in varied ways, including voice or video messages. Through these messages they were able to communicate their needs and priorities.
>
> In Namibia, the regional workshop led to concrete actions to support the development of Namibia's National Action Plan on SSF. Hub researchers also supported this process by co-designing a national virtual workshop with the FAO, bringing together FAO national consultants and the Namibian Ministry of Fisheries.
>
> By amplifying the voices of fishers and allowing them to be heard in an FAO-led regional workshop bringing together African government officers with FAO and international researchers, the GCRF One Ocean Hub supported changes in national policy while strengthening the capacity of FAO. **(Award Reference: NE/S008950/1)**

> **Box 11. The Coastal Justice Network: Justice for small-scale fishers**
>
> The Coastal Justice Network (CJN) was formed by the **One Ocean Hub** in March 2020, bringing SSF leaders from 13 cooperatives, other fisher organisations, local CSOs, legal professionals and researchers to build and mobilise the capacity of SSFs to engage in ocean governance processes. The Network supports members with training, access to knowledge and practical resources to collaboratively respond to ongoing developments, policy changes and issues of exclusion.
>
> CJN recently supported small-scale fishers in winning a legal challenge stopping a seismic survey planned on the West Coast, preventing devastating impacts on ocean life and, by extension, the lives, livelihoods and culture of the fishers and communities.[166] (**Award Reference: NE/S008950/1**)

The Hubs' engagement at the national level has been varied. However, the evaluation finds that there are some significant examples of early successes in engaging policymakers as a key pathway to development impact. To varying degrees, the Hubs have engaged with national governments. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that this has ranged from closely co-designing research with national governments and being responsive to their needs and requests (see Box 12)[167] to ad hoc consultation and engagement with decision makers at the ministerial level.[168] Some Hubs have successfully used international policy processes as key channels to reach national stakeholders (see Box 10). The Hubs have also demonstrated the importance of a research project in facilitating pathways to impact by providing a platform to connect community groups with national stakeholders and policymakers who would not

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166 https://coastaljusticenetwork.co.za/coastal-communities-victory-over-shell/
167 A4 stagegate additional evidence (UKRI internal document)
168 A1 and A4 annual report 21 (UKRI internal documents)

normally meet. One informant, for example, mentioned being thanked by a director of a community organisation for connecting them with a Minister.

> *"Our support, and the support of the broader [Hub], managed to bring them closer to the Minister. So we had a meeting where the director said, "Thank you so much. We never had this chance and so now at least we can speak to the ministry" [...] So it has been somehow unique". (Global South partner)*

Box 12. Responding to governments: providing evidence on the role of social assistance programmes in reducing poverty during Covid-19

The **Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate)** Hub has been responsive to governments' requests for evidence-based solutions to the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on extreme poverty. Drawing on evidence from the Hubs' research,[169] a team of UK and South African researchers from the Hub developed policy briefs for the Presidency of South Africa on the design of relief measures (cash transfers and food parcels) to protect households from the economic impacts of lockdown.

In April 2020, the South African Government shifted its approach from food parcels to cash grants. The government temporarily increased the cash grants paid to 13 million people, including grants paid to caregivers of children, and created a new temporary grant for 5 million unemployed adults for six months. Analysis commissioned by the Presidency suggested that by July 2020 the additional grants reduced the number of people with earnings below the food poverty line from 9.5 million to 4.3 million.[170]
(Award Reference: ES/S008101/1)

Overall, the evaluation finds that the political economy context has influenced the degree and manner in which Hubs have engaged at the national level. One informant spoke of their Hub working in a challenging political context. The Hub therefore aimed to work with 'early allies' within international organisations until the Hub could synthesise findings and present something 'different' to governments.[171] Evidence from KIIs also indicates that some Hubs have been able to work in other less challenging contexts in a more 'politically smart'[172] way, working directly with policymakers (see Box 12), or through local 'change champions' to provide support and advice to national stakeholders in a needs-based way.[173] An example of a Hub influencing national policy is included in Box 13 below. A key informant noted that the ability of the Hubs to influence policy in this way was a combination of working with local partners that have strong 'ins' with government (creating the opportunity) and bringing the huge breadth of expertise in the Hub together (meeting the need).[174] A key enabler of Hubs being able to work in a 'politically smart' and 'locally led' way is strong, already established partnerships.

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169 Gerard, F., Imbert, C. and Orkin,C. (2020). Social Protection Response to the COVID19 Crisis: Options for Developing Countries. Oxford Review of Economic Policy, 36(S1): S281–S296.
170 *Year 2 Highlights: Responding to New Global Challenges. Achieving Impact at Scale.* (2021). The UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub https://www.readkong.com/page/the-ukri-gcrf-accelerating-achievement-for-africa-s-7953697
171 A3.1
172 https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/9204.pdf
173 A4.11
174 A3.7

> ### Box 13. One Ocean Hub supports Fiji's National Ocean Policy
>
> The **One Ocean Hub** conducted an analysis of sector-based policies relating to the National Development Plan of Fiji and identified gaps that a new national ocean policy could fill. The analysis found that Fiji's National Development Plan 2017–2036 was weakly connected to Fiji's National Adaptation Plan and the Fisheries Strategic Plan. These findings were directly included into the final draft of Fiji's National Ocean Policy (p.19), to show progress in integration through the National Ocean Policy and the need for further policy integration with the fisheries sector. Stakeholders emphasised, moving forward, the need to scrutinise the extent to which national policy development includes communities. Fiji's National Ocean Policy will be enshrined into law in the upcoming Climate Change Bill.[175]
>
> Fiji's Minister of Economy wrote: "*The Fijian Government thanks the One Ocean Hub for the support provided towards the development and finalisation of Fiji's National Ocean Policy [which] is a significant milestone for Fiji towards sustainable development measures of its ocean space*". **(Award Reference: NE/S008950/1)**

The evaluation finds that the Hubs' leverage of international policy pathways has been uneven. Evidence from KIIs indicate that some Hubs pivoted during Covid-19 to increase engagement at an international level, influencing and co-designing policies and processes of multilateral organisations.[176] Informants noted that Covid-19 created opportunities by increasing access to international processes as they moved online.[177] The evaluation finds that strong determinants of the Hubs' ability to pivot to engaging internationally were the Hubs' pre-existing connections and the influence of their project partners. Hubs that were well positioned in this way were able to feed into high-level policy discussions or contribute to international frameworks and global policy documents, with some of these global strategies influencing national-level policies and plans (see Box 10 and Box 14).[178]

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175 https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/parliament/national-ocean-policy-to-be-enshrined-into-law/#:~:text=February%2011%2C%202021%2012%3A55,economy%2C%20Fijian%20livelihoods%20and%20culture
176 A3.1, A4.1
177 A3.1
178 A3 stagegate development impact case studies, A4 stagegate development case studies (UKRI internal documents)

> **Box 14. Hub research influencing global policy to prevent violence against children**
>
> The **Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents (Accelerate)** Hub's research has shown that for vulnerable adolescents living with HIV in South Africa, development accelerators can have positive benefits across multiple SDGs. Their research showed that governments and donors can maximise positive effects of policies, and increase cost-effectiveness by identifying services (or combinations of services) that hit multiple SDG targets at the same, improving outcomes for vulnerable adolescents in Africa.[179] For example, the study identified three development accelerators – parenting support, government case transfers and safe schools – which had positive associations across three SDGs. It also showed that specific combinations of accelerators had synergistic effects and worked better together.
>
> The Hub is continuing to produce evidence of development accelerators which is being integrated into a number of multilateral agency reports – including the WHO Global Status Report on Preventing Violence Against Children 2020 – targeted at government decision makers and programme planners and with the potential to influence further research and policies at the national and international level.[180] The Hubs is also supporting the Global Partnership to End Violence Against Children with evidence on sets of accelerators that can prevent violence.[181] **(Award Reference: ES/S008101/1)**

The evaluation finds that the Hubs have been limited in strategically engaging local or regional NGOs and other non-research partners, including community and advocacy groups, due to UKRI funding restrictions. As discussed in Section 3.1.7, there were restrictions around the funding eligibility criteria of third sector organisations. Evidence from KIIs indicates that these restrictions meant that engagement of local and regional project partners in Hub work was often on an ad hoc basis rather than at a strategic level, and was therefore dependent on how well connected Hub researchers were.[182]

> *"We wanted more project partners […] we want NGOs and civil society, grassroots organisations and community-based organisations on the Executive Team". (Global South partner)*

Evidence discussed above and in KIIs indicates that partners are working together in ways that yield collaborative advantage (see Box 2): they are working in a complementary way, developing innovative solutions to complex problems, and seeing the problem through a systems lens. Though the Hubs are still at an early stage of synthesising their findings, there are early signs that through their networks they have potential to develop holistic solutions and adopt synergistic approaches to transform complex systems. The evaluation finds that the Hubs may benefit from greater support and guidance from UKRI on impact, particularly as it relates to maximising the intrinsic advantages of the networks. As the Hubs enter the final stage of

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179 Cluver, L. D. *et al.* (2019). Improving lives by accelerating progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals for adolescents living with HIV: a prospective cohort study. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 3(4), 245–254.
180 WHO (2020). Global status report on preventing violence against children 2020. *World Health Organisation* https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/violence-prevention/global-status-report-on-violence-against-children-2020
181 *Year 2 Highlights: Responding to New Global Challenges. Achieving Impact at Scale.* (2021). The UKRI GCRF Accelerating Achievement for Africa's Adolescents Hub https://www.readkong.com/page/the-ukri-gcrf-accelerating-achievement-for-africa-s-7953697
182 A3.8, A4.15, A3.3, A3.9

delivery, working in a synergistic way across their networks will be essential to contributing to transformative change by taking innovative solutions to scale and bringing together a critical mass of support. Given the size of the task, a more hands-on guidance and support is warranted.

3.4.4 Use and uptake of project outputs

Key Finding 3.4.4

The Hubs have produced a significant number of outputs, and there are early indications that they are being taken up by key stakeholders, including national policymakers and local communities. The next phase of the Hub programme will be significant in promoting the use and uptake of project outputs. (EQ 4)

An in-depth qualitative assessment of the use and uptake of project outputs will form the focus of the next phase of the GCRF evaluation.

The Hubs have produced a significant number of outputs. Figure 6: shows the outputs produced by the Hubs as reported by survey respondents, with the majority (76%) shown as peer-reviewed journal articles. In terms of outputs that translate research findings into an accessible format, 36% of survey respondents said their project had generated a policy statement/issues paper, and a good proportion of respondents (45%) – given the challenging context of Covid-19 – said they had held a dissemination workshop or policy forum with decision makers. Overall, in the survey 13.6% of respondents said that the project had led to a *policy change/societal impact.*

Figure 6: **Percentage of survey respondents reporting different types of project outputs**

Output type	Percentage
Peer-reviewed journal article	76.3%
Dissemination workshop or policy forum	44.8%
Other media or creative content	44.5%
New protocol, technique, or way of doing things	44.0%
Editorials / op-eds	36.3%
Policy statement or issues paper	35.6%
New research group or network	35.1%
Technical report	33.2%
Chapter in a peer-reviewed book or edited volume	27.2%
Policy change/societal impact	26.4%
Peer-reviewed book or edited volume	14.9%
New software or technical product	13.2%
New research centre	4.6%
Joint venture agreement	4.5%
Licencing arrangement	1.4%
Intellectual property rights protection	1.4%
Spin-out enterprise	0.3%
New flora or fauna breed/variety	0.3%

The survey also provides some indication of the use of the Hubs' outputs as an indicator of progress towards outcomes. In terms of research uptake and use of project outputs, according to survey respondents research uptake was predominantly by academics and researchers (73% of respondents), followed by national policymakers (56%) and local communities (45%). Less commonly reported areas for uptake included the private sector in LMICs (13%), the UK private sector (6%) and UK non-governmental institutions/civil society (15%). These responses are reflected in Figure 7: below.

Figure 7: **Use and uptake of project information from Hubs survey respondents**

Academics and researchers	73.3%
National policymakers	56.1%
Local communities	44.6%
Sub-national policymakers	39.8%
NGOs/ civil society in LMICs	38.9%
International policymakers	34.5%
Multilaterals (e.g. United Nations, World Bank)	28.6%
UK NGOs/ civil society	15.1%
Private sector in LMICs	13.0%
UK private sector	5.6%
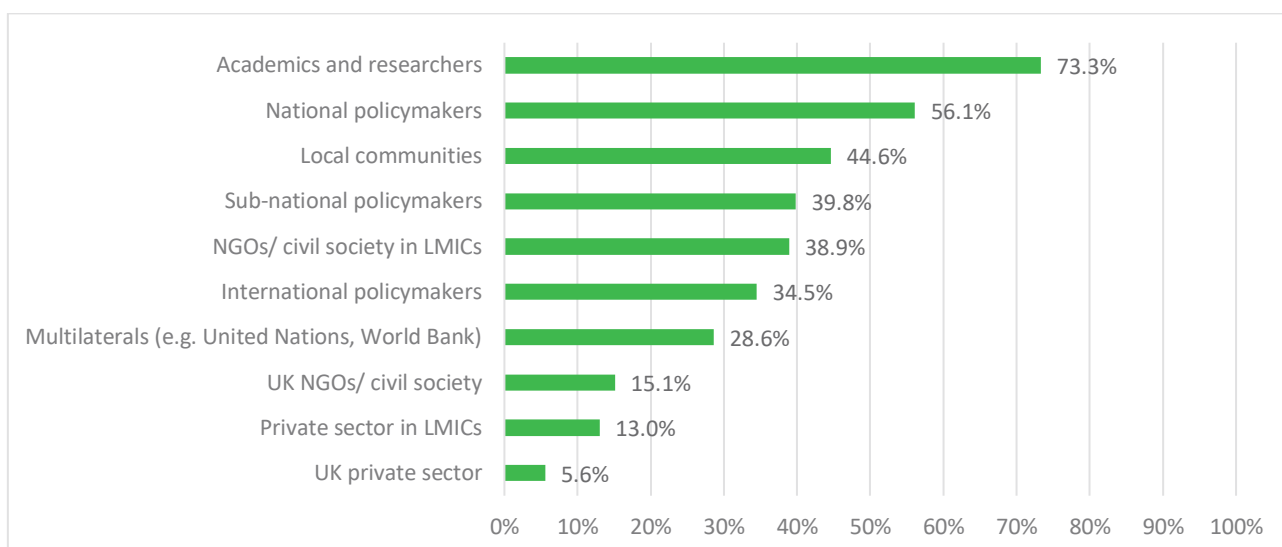
The next phase of Hub activity is key for achieving impact. Across the board, the evaluation finds that most informants saw the next phase of the Hubs' work as being the key time to drive forward impact activities, research uptake and policy engagement, which have been, to some extent, affected by the ODA funding reductions in the last year.[183]

3.4.5 The effects of reductions of BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI on the impact potential of the Hubs

Key Finding 3.4.5

The ODA funding reductions have had a significant impact on the Hubs and their ability to make progress towards their outcomes. However, the Hubs have demonstrated resilience. They have maintained their networks and refocused activities to continue to work towards their outcomes and impacts. (EQ 4)

The cuts to Hub budgets as a result of overall reductions in BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI were often cited by award holders as more difficult to navigate than Covid-19. Many informants felt that the impact of the ODA cuts outweighed the impacts of Covid-19 on their research progress and ability to achieve their desired outcomes.

"[W]e've had to reduce the scope of research, which has meant that we've had to cut out some significant components. The whole point of our Hub was that we're going to deal with an intractable challenge from all of these lenses. And so if those lenses are reduced, then of course the picture we would paint at the end is also a limited picture". (Global South partner)

"We had reduced funds, we couldn't do as much stakeholder engagements in terms of workshops, etc., we could only prioritise one or two here and there". (Global South partner)

"For research for development to work, it's a lot of trust building and a lot of relationship building, and that takes time. So, the first two years of the Hub

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183 A3.17

really have been building relationships and building trust. And the cuts came right at a moment when we had set up so many things the cuts made that impossible [to continue]. And we had to go back and apologise to so many groups". (Global South partner)

Informants reflected that the cuts were "disastrous", "catastrophic", "traumatic", "stressful", "exhausting". Informants spoke of the additional "emotional" and "physical" labour of reprofiling budgets and finding ways to manage the cuts equitably. They also spoke of the loss of trust and partnerships, the loss of staff who couldn't be retained due to uncertainty over funding, and the burden placed on fragile infrastructure in the Global South.[184] On a more positive front, others reflected on the strength of the networks that had been created that had managed to weather the storm, the resilience of the Hubs, and their adaptability and ability to refocus and replan to continue to work towards their outcomes and impacts in the next period.

Some of the Hubs have been successful in gaining additional financing for their projects in response to the funding cuts. Evidence from documentation and KIIs indicates that some Hubs were very successful in obtaining further funding to support and backfill their activities after the ODA cuts. Informants felt that this demonstrated proof of concept.[185] Some informants alluded to potential future challenges in reporting and attributing impact with the diversification of funding, as activities become 'projectised' and as new funders come onstream supporting impact activities that build on the Hubs' research.

3.4.6 The value of the network

Key Finding 3.4.6

The Hubs, by working in a collaborative way through their networks, have the potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts. However, there is a need for greater support and guidance from UKRI on impact. (EQ 4)

While the Hubs are at an early stage in synthesising findings, they are demonstrating that *how* they work – in addition to *what* they produce – matters. There are good examples showing how the Hubs, through their extensive networks, can support a dynamic and agile approach. Success has been seen in Hubs that have been 'politically smart', involving policymakers in the design and delivery of research. In some cases, this has meant not necessarily sharing innovative findings but being 'visible' and proactive in putting relevant issues on their agenda or responding to ad hoc information and decision-making needs.[186] Some Hubs have taken advantage of the 'ins' their partners have with governments to create opportunities to influence.[187] They have also worked with other stakeholders, including local communities and multilaterals, to influence national and regional audiences.

However, there is insufficient evidence to indicate that the Hubs have a strategic approach to influencing change. There is some evidence from documentation indicating that UKRI's 'Flexible fund' for the Hubs could be used to identify strategic impact opportunities and obtain resources to take advantage of them. However, there is lack of clarity on its purpose, and some of the Hubs have used the Fund for research as opposed to impact purposes. In any case, with Covid-19 and the reduction in budget, it receded in importance last year. The evaluation finds that without a strategic approach to impact, there is a risk that the instability and difficulties of the

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184 A4.1, A3.1, A3.3, A4.15
185 A4.4 A4.10
186 A4.10, A4.11
187 A1.3, A3.7

last two years may have the consequence of subduing appetite for dynamic and potentially 'riskier' approaches and lead to more cautious ways of working.

In sum, the evaluation finds that the Hubs' networks have potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts. However, greater support is needed. Evidence discussed above and in KIIs indicates that partners are working together in ways that yield collaborative advantage, defined as "the alchemy that allows a group of actors to collectively deliver more than the sum of their input parts".[188] The next step of transforming systems relies on the Hubs being strategic, working in a synergistic way across their networks, taking innovative solutions to scale, and bringing together a critical mass of support.[189] However, the evaluation finds that there is limited support and guidance from UKRI on impact. This is particularly the case as it relates to maximising the intrinsic advantages of working in networks. Given the size of the task as the Hubs enter the final stage of delivery, more hands-on guidance and support are warranted.

3.5 EQ 5: What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)

> **Box 15. Summary of Findings (EQ 5)**
>
> **The Hubs have been successful in overcoming significant barriers, in large part due to the networks the Hubs have been able to create.** These have afforded them flexibility, the means to adapt, and the right people to take advantage of opportunities at the right time.
>
> - **Outside of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts, the Hubs have also confronted operational challenges and systemic barriers to working effectively in LMIC contexts.** UK institutions' financial systems and due diligence processes, a flat spend profile and insufficient funding for project partners were cited as key barriers. **(3.5.1)**
>
> - **The size, scale and scope of the awards, UKRI's support for RO adaptations, equitable in-country and international partnerships, and the Hubs' networks were cited as key enablers** in positioning the Hubs to overcoming barriers and making progress towards outcomes and impacts. **(3.5.2)**

We address EQ 5 by highlighting the main barriers encountered by Hub awards (3.5.1), outside of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts (which have been discussed in Sections 3.4.2 and 3.4.5). We then examine the main factors that have allowed Hub awards to overcome these challenges (3.5.2).

3.5.1 Barriers

> **Key Finding 3.5.1**
>
> Outside of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts, the Hubs have also confronted operational challenges and systemic barriers to working effectively in LMIC contexts. UK institutions' financial

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188 TPI, UNDESA (2019). Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership value creation https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2564Partnerships_for_the_SDGs_Maximising_Value_Guidebook_Final.pdf
189 Ibid.

> systems and due diligence processes, a flat spend profile and insufficient funding for project partners were cited as key barriers. (EQ 5)

The Hubs have faced operational challenges and systemic barriers. As discussed in 3.1.1 the Hubs lacked precedents in setting up processes and structures for challenge-led R&I with impact, resulting in delays. Additionally, as discussed in Section 3.3.2, due diligence and assurance processes, which were not adapted to working in LMICs and FCAS, also contributed to delays in the set-up of the Hubs. Also as seen in Section 3.3.4, the lack of a centralised approach to risk by UKRI, particularly the approach to mitigate fiduciary risks in LMIC settings, has meant that the onus of risk was placed on the Hubs. .

A flat spend profile for the programme resulted in a loss of underspend, impacting the ability of the Hubs to deliver. As discussed in Section 3.3.2, evidence from KIIs highlights the consequence of the flat profile, namely that the loss of this underspend, compounded by reductions in ODA funding, had a significant impact on the Hubs on their ability to effectively work towards their outcomes and impact.

Virements potentially create a barrier to working effectively in LMIC settings. Virement restrictions were lifted by UKRI at the beginning of FY 2021/22 in response to Covid-19 and the reduction in ODA allocations. UKRI noted in its guidance that the intention of lifting virement restrictions was to "allow grants the additional flexibility needed to, as far as possible, effectively engage their partners and deliver meaningful and valuable outcomes".[190] Evidence from KIIs indicates that some informants believed that the flexibility afforded by being able to move funds between headings should have been embedded in the Hubs' grants from the start – or, at least, earlier. This is to mitigate the impact (on underspend) of partners in LMICs who are unable to disburse funds, due to institutional or contextual reasons, within specific timescales. There is now a significant opportunity to draw lessons on virement policies from the Hubs programme (see Section 4.1).

The restrictions on funding for local non-academic project partners were identified as a significant barrier to achieving local impact. As discussed in Section 3.4.3, third sector organisations, such as NGOs, charities and other non-profit CSOs, received a modest contribution to their costs. Informants reported this as presenting a major barrier to achieving development impact. Engaging CSOs and NGOs was seen as critical to representing community groups' interests, advocating for their rights and influencing change at the national level.[191]

Other factors that were considered a barrier can be seen in Figure 8:. These include: political, governance and security challenges (18.3% of survey respondents reporting this as a significant or extreme barrier); lack of financial and technical capacity (13.2% of survey respondents reporting as a significant or extreme barrier); lack of physical equipment and/or local professional capacity for data collection (10.7% of survey respondents reporting as a significant or extreme barrier); and lack of a supportive organisational environment (8.8% of survey respondents reporting as a significant or extreme barrier).

Figure 8: Barriers to carrying out project reported by Hubs survey respondents

190 UKRI (2021). Guidance on virement for ODA award holders https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UKRI-080421-GuidanceOnVirementForODAAwardHolders.pdf
191 A3.3, A3.2, A3.8
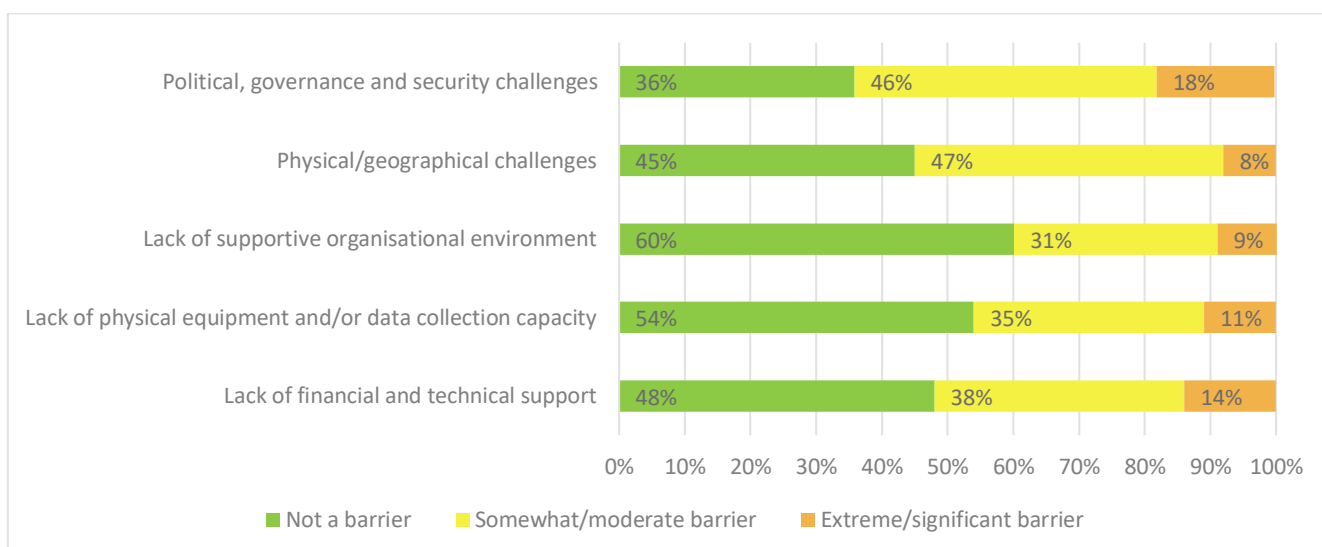
Contextual factors

Contextual factors are critical variables in assessing the projects' relative progress towards impact. Evidence from documentation and KIIs indicates that some projects were more challenged by political, governance and security issues than others. The Allied forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, for example, presented specific challenges for the Gender, Justice and Security Hub (see Box 7). As indicated in Section 3.4.3, some Hubs' research was more politically contentious than others. On the other hand, the evaluation finds that some Hubs were well positioned and quick to capitalise on opportunities emerging during Covid-19, due to the high degree of political and international attention that emerged on Covid-related issues that were relevant to the Hubs' challenge area.

3.5.2 Enabling factors

> **Key Finding 3.5.2**
>
> The size, scale and scope of the awards, UKRI's support for RO adaptations, equitable in-country and international partnerships, and the Hubs' networks were cited as key enablers in positioning the Hubs to overcome barriers and make progress towards outcomes and impacts. (EQ 5)

The scale and scope of the awards have enabled the Hubs to adopt a whole-system approach to impact. Informants mentioned that the scope of the award allowed the project to embed impact activities in planning from the beginning.[192] Furthermore, it allowed the project to build networks and draw in a variety of partners from researchers, communities, local NGOs and CSOs to multilateral organisations and national policymakers to support the Hub in achieving its objectives.[193]

> *"It allowed scope to plan across, and the scope to bring those people in [...]*
> *It means at the point when you only had the idea, you can already be having*
> *discussions with the policymaker. If you were doing a proof-of-concept*
> *project and tried to discuss with a policymaker, you might get the response*

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192 A4.3
193 A4.3

of why are you talking to us now, this is a bit too early. But if you come to them late, they may be why are you coming to us now […] This allowed us to be able to say we are coming to you early because this is part of a process which we will take all the way through to policy, so they can see why they belong in that early discussion, and at the same time it allows them to contribute to that discussion and shape what has been done. Allowing you to plan the whole course from concept through to implementation was a big strength of the [Hub idea]". (Global South partner)

As seen in Section 3.4 the Hubs, by working in a dynamic way across academia and non-academia, policy and practice, local, regional, national and international scales, have been able to identify multiple entry points to influence change.

Country partners have been instrumental to driving forward progress and adapting during Covid-19. Evidence from KIIs and documentation strongly suggests that country partners' understanding of the local context and their connections with communities, governments, third sector organisations and the media have been central to driving forward progress during Covid-19.[194] Evidence discussed in Section 3.4.2 shows that partners were instrumental in enabling fieldwork to continue during the pandemic. Country partners have also driven the engagement of communities in research processes and have helped to amplify their voices and connect them with audiences at the local, national and international level.[195] The evaluation finds that underpinning this is the flexibility and principle of equity embedded in the Hub structure. Research partners have been empowered to manage their projects, make adjustments and pursue impact opportunities.[196]

Strong international partnerships also enabled the Hubs to pivot during Covid-19 and to continue to make progress towards outcomes and impact. As discussed in Section 3.4.2, given the limitations placed on fieldwork during Covid-19, some Hubs pivoted towards engaging more internationally to drive forward progress. Evidence from KIIs highlights that the PI's previous connections, the facilitatory role played by the Hub's international project partners and the degree of political interest within the international community were important in determining the extent to which the Hubs were able to tap into relevant conversations occurring at the international level.[197]

In general, the scale and the breadth of the Hubs' networks were critical to successfully adapting and responding to Covid-19. Evidence from KIIs and documentation shows that the Hubs were able to take advantage of having the portfolio and the wide-ranging expertise in their networks to redistribute resources and integrate additional components into workplans to ensure that projects could adapt to and assess the impacts of Covid-19. As discussed in Section 3.4.2, some Hubs were able to effectively channel the network's resources, leverage connections and pool expertise across the Hub to launch a policy response to Covid-19 impacts.

UKRI's flexibility at the operational level has been important in supporting Hubs to respond and adapt to Covid-19 and the ODA cuts. Evidence from KIIs and documentation indicates that many of the adaptations made by the Hubs in response to Covid-19 relied on the flexibility of UKRI in terms of supporting adjustments in work plans and changes in budgetary allocations, although limited in the first instance (see Section 3.4.2). Full flexibility in terms of lifting virement

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194 A1.3, A1.4, A1.10, A1.1, A3.3, A3.8, A3.9, A3.4, A4.15
195 A1.1, A1.4
196 A3.7, A4.11, A1.1, A2.5
197 A3.1, A4.1, A4.10

restrictions occurred in April 2021, which gave the Hubs added flexibility.[198] Evidence from KIIs shows that this gave Hubs added scope to preserve partnerships. In the reprofiling of budgets after the cuts, some award holders reported that concerted efforts were made to adjust budgets to increase the percentage of funds to Southern partners.[199] While this change in distribution does not reflect the loss of partnerships that were cut, it does reflect the continued commitment towards equitable partnerships with the Global South.[200]

3.6 EQ 6: What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:

- o **how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19**
- o **the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?**

Box 16. Summary of Findings (EQ 6)

GCRF is an innovative 'research for development' funding mechanism in its holistic approach, its focus on interdisciplinarity, and its emphasis on equitable partnerships and impact. While challenging for the Hubs, both Covid-19 and the ODA cuts have been real-world tests of the value of the research, the networks created and, fundamentally, the culture of equity in the Hubs.

- **The size, scale and scope of the Hubs was cited as a key differentiator of the programme** and fundamental for enabling research with development impact. **(3.6.1)**

- **The added value of the Hubs' networks was cited as a key factor in the ability of the Hubs to withstand the impacts of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts.** The survival of many partnerships during the cuts is a confirmation of the value of the network. **(3.6.2)**

In this section we assess the additionality of GCRF as a funding mechanism in relation to the Hubs programme. Two questions are addressed: firstly, whether GCRF is substitutable (3.6.1); and secondly, what can be learned about the added value of GCRF from the way the Hubs were able to respond to Covid-19 and the funding cuts (3.6.2).

3.6.1 Is GCRF substitutable?

Key Finding 3.6.1

The size, scale and scope of the Hubs was cited as a key differentiator of the programme and fundamental for enabling research with development impact. (EQ 6)

The evaluation finds that there is broad consensus among Global South and Global North partners that GCRF is an innovative funding mechanism for research for development. Informants specifically pointed to GCRF's holistic approach, its emphasis on interdisciplinarity to

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198 UKRI (2021). Guidance on virement for ODA award holders https://www.ukri.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/UKRI-080421-GuidanceOnVirementForODAAwardHolders.pdf

199 A3.1, A4.1, A3.16

200 At the point of award, 47% of all funds went to UK-based organisations and 50% to DAC-based organisations (3% to international organisations) (Source: UK vs DAC overseas funds, UKRI internal document). No data has been supplied for fund distribution after the cuts.

view the world's greatest challenges, and its focus on impact as distinctive elements.[201] Irrespective of frustrations, challenges and limitations expressed with respect to its implementation, evidence from KIIs with both Global South and Global North informants highlights a consistently positive view of the Fund in terms of its principles and aims.

The evaluation finds that the Hub programme has been additional, providing value over and above what is already available. Informants in the Global South noted that funding and other incentives for interdisciplinary research in their home countries were limited, particularly of similar scale whereby collaborations cross geographical boundaries.[202] Other Global South informants described funding sources of similar size and scale but where the scope was more limited, either being more research-focused or more development-focused.

> *"The 'Hub' idea in the call allowed for a very different approach – it allowed the project to be conceptualised from idea through to action. How does one unpack the idea, test the idea, evaluate the results and translate that to policy […] you'd normally anticipate applying for several rounds of funding".* *(Global South partner)*

The evaluation finds that the value of the Hubs exceeds the sum of their parts. Evidence from KIIs strongly indicates that the value of the Hubs was seen in the broad and diverse networks they created due to their scale and scope. Consistently informants noted that while they felt individual strands of research could have been funded in some way elsewhere, the difference was in the advantage brought by the size, scale and scope of GCRF. Outside of GCRF, informants felt that funded research would have been "projectised", less impactful, and without the added benefit of strengthening the capacities of young researchers.

> *"The Hub's scale allowed quite a lot of scope to bring in new people across disciplines, across contexts, sectors (UN and policy) – it allowed a broader group, which was not common".* *(Global South partner)*

Informants also cited the value of being able to access expertise and resources from across the globe to enhance the impact of their research.

> *So, for me, as a researcher, I'm very much invested in the activism part. But sometimes it's a lot for me [but] there are people in the Hub that can pick up on that. I don't think that would ever been achieved in any other funding instruments because we didn't have anything like that before".* *(Global South partner)*

In some instances, partners were also able to access further funding as a result of working on the Hub. 23% of survey respondents stated that they had been successful in securing further funding.

3.6.2 What can be learned about the added value of GCRF from the way the Hubs were able to respond to Covid-19 and the funding cuts?

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201 A3.7, A3.2, A3.1, A4.1
202 A3.16, A1.10, A1.3

> **Key Finding 3.6.2**
>
> The added value of the Hubs' networks was cited as a key factor in the ability of the Hubs to withstand the impacts of Covid-19 and the ODA cuts. The survival of many partnerships during the cuts is a confirmation of the value of the network. (EQ 6)

The added value of the Hubs' networks was consistently reported by informants, and was identified as a key factor in the ability of the Hubs to withstand the impacts of Covid-19. Evidence outlined in Section 3.4.2 indicates that the Hubs were able to effectively readjust and rebalance their portfolios through their networks to reduce insecurity and risk during Covid-19. They were able to channel resources into some areas more than others and leverage connections and expertise to adapt and respond to Covid-19.

Additionally, during the cuts resulting from BEIS reductions in ODA allocation to UKRI, the survival of many partnerships, despite the constrained circumstances, was a confirmation of the value of the network. As described in Section 3.3.3, the structures and processes put in place by the Hubs, and the principles of fairness and mutual respect that underpinned them, have been effective in ensuring that the cuts were applied in an equitable and transparent way.[203] Many informants spoke of the value gained from the networks, not just in the present but also in terms of legacy: for future R4D work, other collaborative opportunities, and careers.

> *"It's not that we rely on those networks on a daily basis but the fact that we know they are there and you can just tap into them. And it's a future investment in our own careers and in making a difference as well". (Global South partner)*

Many informants believed that the networks would most certainly last beyond the lifetime of the fund;[204] this was highlighted as a key impact, in the programme-level ToC, of GCRF as a whole.[205]

> *"But I think the main difference that wouldn't be achieved by any other funding instruments is the access that we have to other people and other institutions […] I think that's probably worth more than the money itself". (Global South partner)*

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203 A3.1, A4.4
204 A3.8, A3.9
205 Barr, J. et al. (2018). GCRF Foundation Stage Report. Retrieved from https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation

4 Conclusions

The interdisciplinary research Hubs embody the spirit of GCRF. With a focus on generating innovative solutions to complex development issues through challenge-led interdisciplinary research, the Hubs have sought to achieve the "gold standard" in international development research: excellent research that has real-world impact. To fulfil that ambition, the Hubs have needed to innovate and to disrupt existing delivery systems and processes. This process of developing new systems underpinned by the principle of truly equitable partnerships with the Global South has taken time. The products of that investment of time are networks that have demonstrated resilience in the face of Covid-19 and reductions in ODA, networks that have the capacity to outlast funding cycles and networks that are showing potential to push boundaries and go beyond the norm in R4D.

The Hubs programme is a large and ambitious GCRF investment focusing on delivering innovative solutions to complex development issues through challenge-led, interdisciplinary research. It is based on the fundamental principle of equitability between partners in the Global South and Global North. Managed by UKRI, with an overall investment of £200 million, distributed over twelve interdisciplinary Hubs, the programme is an ambitious investment in research for development. The Hubs needed to break new ground, developing new structures and processes to effectively deliver on the promise of challenge-led, impact-driven, equitable research. Despite these considerable challenges, heightened in the context of a global pandemic and reductions in ODA funding, our analysis shows that the Hubs programme is largely delivering on this promise. Drawing on the findings from the process evaluation, the following section sets out key conclusions in relation to how the Hubs programme, as a GCRF signature investment, is working, and what it has achieved.

The Hubs programme is an innovative R4D programme which embodies the spirit of GCRF in seeking to generate solutions to complex development problems through challenge-led interdisciplinary research and equitable partnerships.

- **The Hubs' funding call set the standard, calling for transformative solutions for complex problems.** The funding call has stood out as the guiding and strategic framework for the conceptual design of the Hubs. It has been seen by informants as a cutting-edge document framing the ambitions of the programme to achieve impact-focused research through truly equitable partnerships.

- **The combination of the size, scale and scope of the Hubs has also been described by informants as key to the effectiveness of the programme.** Key elements of this included: the focus on research excellence as well as development outcomes; recognition of the need for equitable partnerships across the Global South and the Global North; and substantial funding to support the structures, partnerships, networks and research needed to achieve research with development impact.

The Hubs are producing relevant, challenge-led and impact-focused research and are making good progress along their ToCs towards outcomes and impact despite challenges presented by institutional set-up delays, Covid-19, and the reductions in ODA funding.

- **The Hubs are producing research that is well aligned to local, national and international strategic priorities.** They are also contributing novel and integrated understandings of complex development challenges. Underpinning this is the principle of equitability, which has seen partners involved in the Hubs from the start, co-designing and delivering research that is responsive and relevant to the needs of key stakeholders.

- **The Hubs have the potential to adopt a whole-system approach to impact.** The Hubs are influencing change in many different dimensions concurrently. They have engaged with multiple stakeholders from researchers and local communities to national decision makers and international actors. They have pursued a range of research projects, including longitudinal research studies. They have adopted a variety of ways of influencing change: working from the 'bottom up'; leveraging the convening power of international organisations; working with local and national change champions; and being politically smart.

- **Halfway through their term the Hubs are making steady progress towards achieving their outcomes, despite significant challenges.** The evaluation has provided sight of the ability of the Hubs to influence global debates, contribute to policy issues, build capacity, and advocate for local communities.

- **However, the Hubs are lacking a strategic approach to impact**. As the Hubs enter the final two years of delivery, synthesising findings and identifying roles, responsibilities and resources for partners to influence impact are essential. Going forward, the Hubs have considerable potential to leverage their networks further to amplify impact.

The Hubs' networks have been key enablers in positioning the Hubs for overcoming barriers and achieving progress towards their desired outcomes and impacts.

- **The Hubs have built networks composed of a variety of partners, which have been critical to enabling the Hubs to adapt, pivot and respond to Covid-19.** The Hubs were able to take advantage of having a portfolio and the wide-ranging expertise in their networks to redistribute resources and integrate additional components into work plans to ensure projects could adapt, respond to and assess the impacts of Covid-19.

- **The Hubs have been able to leverage their networks and partnerships and work in a dynamic way.** By working across academia and non-academia, policy and practice, local, regional, national and international scales, they have been able to identify multiple entry points to influence change. They now have the potential to contribute to greater impacts going forward.

- **Many informants spoke of the lasting legacy of the Hubs programme in terms of the networks it has created.** The benefits of the networks were expected to outlast the life of the fund and the Hubs themselves.

To fulfil the ambition of the call for equitable partnerships and the delivery of excellent research with impact, the Hubs have set up novel structures and processes, which have taken time and have led to set-up delays but have carried significant value.

- **The Hubs' funding call was in essence asking for a completely new framework for delivering challenge-led research with development impact.** While the funding call was almost universally admired by the people we spoke to, it is clear that the framework to

deliver it did not yet exist in its entirety in the key organisations responsible for the programme. Both UKRI and the lead universities were faced with a steep learning curve and were almost immediately trying to play catch-up.

- **The Hubs also lacked basic precedents within the UK R&I community.** Some of the required policies and frameworks – for example safeguarding and gender policies - were being developed by UKRI at the same time as the Hubs. The Hubs were challenged with the task of not only establishing the basic principles of the policies but also ensuring that they reflected equitability with their partners.

- **While challenging for the Hubs, both Covid-19 and the ODA cuts have been real-world tests of the structures, processes, networks created and – fundamentally – the culture of equity in the Hubs.** The Hubs, through their networks, have been able to adapt and respond to Covid-19; and the cuts have shown that the processes and structures put in place at the Hub level to ensure equitable partnerships have been, to a large extent, robust, providing justification for the effort and time put into setting them up.

There is tension in the attempt to develop novel, transformative structures and processes within old operating systems. Fundamental challenges at a systems level are constraining the effective implementation of the equitable and impact-focused structures and processes developed by the Hubs.

- **The inbuilt financial and assurance systems at the UKRI and RO level were challenged by the particular needs of LMIC contexts.** UK assurance and financial processes, by design, are robust and rigorous, but the evaluation finds they put significant burden on less developed systems in the South, and questions with regard to their proportionality and fairness were raised in informant interviews. The Hubs, in consultation with UKRI, did develop various bespoke solutions (e.g. advance payments) to lessen the burden on their Southern partners, but the approaches have often been ad hoc and irregularly applied.

- **The dual challenge of creating new ways of working, and disrupting and changing old ways of doing things, has challenged the Hubs and has taken time.** While UKRI has demonstrated flexibility and adaptability in supporting the Hubs to devise their own solutions, the lack of a strategic and uniform approach at the UKRI level has contributed to slowness and irregularities.

- **Additionally, there is a need for a systematic and holistic assessment of risk by UKRI that is based on an improved understanding of risks in LMIC and FCAS contexts** The evaluation finds the onus was placed on the lead ROs to manage risks. In this context, the Hubs have had to walk the tightrope between UKRI's demands for rigorous due diligence on partnerships to mitigate fiduciary risk and the expectations on them to create new partnerships in low-income countries and FCAS (which carry inherently more risk). Additionally, it was left to lead ROs to carry the risk of creating bespoke systems for payments in advance for partners in LMIC. The challenges of completing due diligence and finalising partnerships in this context led to significant delays and varying degrees of risk averseness adopted by award holders. Some have stuck to mainly tried and tested partnerships, and others have built far bigger (and riskier) networks of partnerships. An approach for shared risk between UKRI and the implementing organisation is needed to avoid programmatic risks.

The Hubs programme is a rich repository of learning to be mined for the design and set-up of other complex development programmes. This learning is not being captured effectively at the programme level.

- **The Hubs programme has been an exercise in learning by doing driving forward novel and forward-looking structures and processes for challenge-led ODA R&I.** The Hubs have developed many complex policies, frameworks, reporting and institutional structures that support and promote equitable partnerships. They have shown they are integrating learning into their programme processes and encouraging reflection and continuous improvement.

- **However, structured approaches to integrate learning at the programmatic level are lacking.** Though there has been some degree of sharing and exchange at the programme level, both formally and informally between the Hubs, this has not been sustained in a structured way to integrate lessons at the UKRI level and to capture lessons for future programming.

- **The failure to capture programmatic learning as well as synthesise findings from across the Hubs programme is a significant risk and would be a considerable loss for the legacy of the programme.** The Hubs programme's aim of delivering transformative approaches for complex development problems through the vehicle of equitable partnerships is upheld as an ideal across the international development and R&I community. Learning from the Hubs programme would support the design of future R4D programmes.

4.1 Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF (EQ 7)

This section presents lessons and recommendations building on the conclusions. Practical recommendations are provided for the Hubs programme going forward and for future programmes of similar size, complexity and ambition.

Box 17. Summary of findings (EQ 7)

Lessons for the Hubs programme:

- Lesson 1: Impact depends on relationships with partners and stakeholders.

- Lesson 2: Networks have the potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts.

- Lesson 3: Learning needs to be systematically integrated at all levels.

Lessons for the design of GCRF's successor fund:

- Lesson 4: Size, scale and scope of funding matters for delivering excellent research with development impact, supported by the kinds of systems that the evaluation has found to be effective.

- Lesson 5: Delivering transformative change requires not only the right policies and processes but also an enabling environment at the funder level to establish bespoke and flexible approaches for working in LMIC settings.

- Lesson 6: Fair and equitable partnerships are key routes to delivering development impact, but require specific structures and processes to embed equity in operations and implementation.

- Lesson 7: A hands-on approach to management, particularly in the inception phase, is needed by the delivery partner to ensure that core processes and structures, such as a gender and

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inclusion strategy, are prioritised and implemented within awards, supported by ongoing review and learning to promote consistency.

- Lesson 8: The time frame for the set-up of a programme of such complexity and scale needs to be extended, with an explicit recognition of the trade-offs, and a flat spend profile should be avoided.

- Lesson 9: Implementing programmes of such scale and ambition in LMIC settings means there is greater exposure to risk and this requires a strategy to risk that is based on an improved understanding of risks in LMIC and FCAS.

4.1.1 Lessons for the delivery of the Hubs programme

Lesson 1: Impact depends on relationships with partners and stakeholders.

The Hubs' in-country and international partnerships have been critical to driving progress towards Hub outcomes and impacts. Through their partnerships the Hubs have connected with communities, local change champions and national and international policymakers, and are influencing use and uptake of research. However, a strategic approach has been lacking thus far. Going forward, it is essential the Hubs make progress towards synthesising findings and identifying roles, responsibilities and resources for partners to influence change.

- **Recommendation 1.1:** Hubs need to develop an impact strategy guiding the final two years of delivery, clearly identifying key stakeholders and outlining roles, responsibilities and resources for partners in influencing change. Hubs should draw on good practice from development literature.

- **Recommendation 1.2:** Hubs need to reassess their use of the 'Flexible Fund', ring-fencing it to support impact activities at a local, national or regional level.

- **Recommendation 1.3:** The Hubs could empower local partners to proactively identify leverage points for impact, including providing resources to pursue locally led initiatives that might diverge from the overarching Hub 'blueprint' or work plan.

Lesson 2: Networks have the potential to deliver significant value beyond the sum of their parts.

The Hubs have created complex networks (multi-country, interdisciplinary, research, policy and practice). They are showing through their networks they have the potential to develop holistic solutions and synergistic approaches to complex problems. Their networks have also been critical in enabling the Hubs to navigate the challenges of Covid-19 and the cuts by redistributing resources across the portfolio. The next step of transforming systems relies on the Hubs strongly leveraging their networks to "catalyse collaborative action",[206] creating a critical mass of support and bringing innovative solutions to scale. Given the size of the task, as the Hubs enter the final stage of delivery more hands-on guidance and support with respect to impact is warranted.

- **Recommendation 2.1:** UKRI needs to provide clear and consistent guidance on impact activities for the final phase of the programme.

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206 TPI, UNDESA (2019). Maximising the impact of partnerships for the SDGs: A practical guide to partnership value creation https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/2564Partnerships_for_the_SDGs_Maximising_Value_Guidebook_Fin al.pdf

- **Recommendation 2.2:** UKRI should consider using its convening power to bring researchers, in-country decision makers and global players together in forums to discuss key strategic challenges and findings from the Hubs programme.

- **Recommendation 2.3:** UKRI could consider creating an 'impact fund' or 'regional opportunities fund' (or redesign the 'flexible fund' for impact), with clearly defined guidance for its usage.

- **Recommendation 2.4:** UKRI should consider enhanced eligibility criteria for third sector organisations in a new impact-focused fund.

Lesson 3: Learning needs to be systematically integrated at all levels.

A significant amount of learning is occurring in the Hubs, but this is not being systematically captured at the programme level. This carries the dual risk of lessons not being effectively shared across the cohort and not being embedded at the UKRI level.

The Hubs programme, as an innovative and ambitious programme for R4D, offers significant learning for other research for development programmes. The failure to capture programmatic learning as well as synthesise findings from across the Hubs programme is a significant risk and would represent a considerable loss for the legacy of the programme.

- **Recommendation 3.1:** UKRI needs to create opportunities to convene awards to enable strong cross-award collaboration and knowledge sharing (inclusion and funding for non-UK partners should be encouraged).

- **Recommendation 3.2:** UKRI could consider commissioning a learning review of the Hubs, including management processes, design and delivery mechanisms, and approaches to impact.

- **Recommendation 3.3:** UKRI needs to develop a legacy framework for the Hubs programme, including approaches to synthesise findings across the awards.

4.1.2 Lessons and recommendations for the design of GCRF's successor fund

Lesson 4: Size, scale and scope of funding matters for delivering excellent research with development impact, supported by the kinds of systems that the evaluation has found to be effective.

Learning from the Hubs programme has shown that the size, scale and scope of funding is a critical enabler for programmes of this nature to go beyond excellent development research to achieving development impact. The size, scale and scope allow for projects to embed impact activities from the beginning, from concept through to implementation, and to draw in a variety of partners from researchers, communities, local NGOs and CSOs to multilateral organisations and national policymakers throughout programme implementation. This is essential for successfully making progress towards development impact. The experience and learning from the Hubs has identified effective systems to support working in multi-country, multi-partner projects in LMICs at scale.

- **Recommendation 4.1:** BEIS should consider including a fund for large awards of the size, scale and scope of the Hubs in future research for development investments, with investment in effective systems to match the scale of ambition.

- **Recommendation 4.2:** DPs should develop proposals for programmes which clearly place emphasis on challenge-led and impact-focused research and on equitable partnerships as was the case for the Hubs programme.

Lesson 5: Delivering transformative change requires not only the right policies and processes but also an enabling environment at the funder level to establish bespoke and flexible approaches for working in LMIC settings.[207]

The Hubs programme has shown there has been a conflict in the call for ambition and transformative approaches in programme design and the ability to deliver it within current systems. This primarily relates to the financial and assurance systems at the UKRI and RO level and the management of related risks. Bespoke solutions have been developed and learning has occurred at an RO level, but there remains a lack of uniformity in approaches across the Hubs programme as a whole.

- **Recommendation 5.1:** DPs need to establish clear policies and guidance for ROs at the outset of the programme with respect to advance payments and assurance processes and the associated risk management approaches.

- **Recommendation 5.2:** DPs need to take proactive steps to capture lessons from the Hubs programme.

Lesson 6: Fair and equitable partnerships are key routes to delivering development impact, but require specific structures and processes to embed equity in operations and implementation.

In the Hubs programme an early focus on structures and processes was essential for equitable partnerships to emerge, and informants are in general agreement that the Hubs have been equitable. Equitability has been key to ensuring the Hubs have been relevant, challenge-led and impact-focused. However, the Hubs could have benefited from greater guidance at the outset to limit delays.

- **Recommendation 6.1:** DPs need to emphasise impact-focused research and equitable partnerships in the funding call and the ToC, a key factor for success in the Hubs programme.

- **Recommendation 6.2:** DPs need to ensure sufficient timescales and provide travel grants to allow for genuine co-design with partners during the proposal phase as in the Hubs programme.

- **Recommendation 6.3:** DPs need to provide clear guidance for implementing partners on structures and processes for equitable partnerships (e.g. governance structures, codes of conduct, gender strategies, etc.).

Lesson 7: A hands-on approach to management, particularly in the inception phase, is needed by the delivery partner. This is to ensure core processes and structures, such as a gender and inclusion strategy, are prioritised and implemented within awards and supported by ongoing review and learning to promote consistency.

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207 ODI (2021). LearnAdapt: a synthesis of our work on adaptive programming with DFID/FCDO (2017–2020) https://cdn.odi.org/media/documents/learnadapt_summary_note_2021.pdf

In the Hubs programme, UKRI guidance was at times slow to emerge, and many Hubs needed more detail and support. Also, given the scale and innovative aspects of the programme, UKRI was also learning with and from the Hubs. For future programmes of similar complexity, scale and ambition, there should be a recognition that the delivery partner will need to provide significant upfront support and guidance. Therefore, learning should be captured from the Hubs programme.

- **Recommendation 7.1:** DPs need to provide clear and detailed guidance at the inception phase on policies, frameworks and structures required (e.g. safeguarding and gender policies, MEL frameworks, risk registers, codes of conduct and equitable governance structures).

- **Recommendation 7.2:** DPs need to mandate the requirement for a code of conduct and a safeguarding and gender and social inclusion strategy during the inception phase.

Lesson 8: The time frame for the set-up of a programme of such complexity and scale needs to be extended, with an explicit recognition of the trade-offs, and a flat spend profile should be avoided.

In general, a complex programme of this nature, combined with its size, scale and ambition for equitable partnerships across multiple institutions in the Global South, means the set-up takes longer. Trade-offs must be explicitly recognised: a longer set-up time may delay research and impact activities. Delays in impact activities may also have knock-on effects on partnerships, particularly at a policy level, and affect how much development impact can be achieved within set timescales.

- **Recommendation 8.1:** DPs should consider agreeing longer inception periods to reflect the complexity of the programme, range of stakeholders and level of ambition.

- **Recommendation 8.2:** DPs should consider establishing a longer funding cycle to accommodate partnership development in the early stage and dissemination, impact activities and synthesis in latter stages.

- **Recommendation 8.3:** DPs should consider adopting a curved spend profile to recognise the time needed in the first year for institutional set-up and to avoid large underspends.

- **Recommendation 8.4:** DPs should consider allowing flexibility in virement procedures to accommodate the challenges among some LMIC partners in disbursing funds.

- **Recommendation 8.5:** DPs need to provide flexibility in the programme for iterative planning and staggered collaboration agreements to increase agility and avoid set-up delays.

Lesson 9: Implementing programmes of such scale and ambition in LMIC settings means there is greater exposure to risk. This requires a strategy to risk that is based on an improved understanding of risks in LMIC and FCAS.

In the Hubs programme, the award holders carried the burden of risk and were solely liable for funds not being used for intended purposes. As a result, there is lack of uniformity in the way fiduciary risk is managed across the programme. Consequently, award holders have adopted varying degrees of risk averseness. For complex programmes operating in risky settings, a balanced process for managing and assessing risk is needed at the funder level. This should take into consideration the ambitions and demands of the call, along with contextual realities of

working in LMIC and FCAS, in order to avoid implementation delays and lack of uniformity in the portfolio.

- **Recommendation 9.1:** DPs should consider following good practice in developing flexible and shared risk frameworks with partners <u>to ensure the onus of managing risk is not placed on implementing partners alone</u> [208]

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[208] OECD (2014). Development Assistance and Approaches to Risk in Fragile and Conflict Affected States. Retrieved from https://www.oecd.org/dac/conflict-fragility-resilience/docs/2014-10-30%20Approaches%20to%20Risk%20FINAL.pdf

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Annexes

Annex 1: Evaluation matrix

Adjusted EQ	Sub-EQs for each PE (max 3)	Criteria	Data sources	Methods
EQ 1. To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?		ODA R&I management (at programme and award level): • Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence • ToC and shared vision • Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge • Capacity needs assessed and identified • Risk factors identified and mitigated • Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building; aggregate level R&I into use) • Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g Covid-19 • Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working • Promoting coherence between awards • Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy • M&E and regular reporting • ODA R&I excellence in design and implementation: • Relevance + coherence in design and delivery • Strategic/holistic/system lens, inlcuding interdisciplinarity • Negative consequences mitigated and a 'do no harm' approach • Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes	Programme and award documents key informant interviews KIIs and/or focus group discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders at BEIS, DPs, awards and partners, as well as informed externals Survey data with PIs and Co-Is	Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals e.g. panel experts; others Survey analysis

		- Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes - Capacity needs identified and assessed - Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement - Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)		
EQ 2. To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?		Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs Capacity support that aligns with good practive provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure Fairness considerations integrated	Programme and award documents KIIs and/or FGDs with stakeholders at BEIS, DPs, awards and partners, as well as informed externals Survey data with PIs and Co-Is	Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals, e.g. panel experts; others Survey analysis
EQ 3. To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented: are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?		Efficiency and timeliness of processes Proportionality for size of investment Fairness for partners VfM rubrics	Programme and award documents KIIs with stakeholders at BEIS, DPs, awards and partners, as well as informed externals Survey data with PIs and Co-Is	Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals, e.g. panel experts; others Survey analysis

				VfM analysis using rubrics
EQ 4. To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes /impacts, and what evidence exists of these?		▪ Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples ▪ Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress ▪ Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)	Programme and award documents KIIs with stakeholders at BEIS, DPs, awards and partners, as well as informed externals Survey data with PIs and Co-Is	Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals, e.g. panel experts; others Survey analysis
EQ 5. What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)		Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes: o Maturity of the field o Research capacity strengthening o Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research) o Risks in political environment (i.e. under-developed policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves) o Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures) o Examples of success factors e.g. the necessary factors proposed in the GCRF ToC for navigating barriers/facilitators: o Networks, credible evidence / innovation and new capabilities mobilised to amplify change o Iterative engagement by GCRF programmes and projects, responding to opportunities to amplify change	Programme and award documents KIIs with stakeholders at BEIS, DPs, awards and partners, as well as informed externals Survey data with PIs and Co-Is	Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals e.g.; panel experts; others Survey analysis

		o Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model		
EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from: • how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to covid-19 • the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?		• Extent to which GCRF funding can be substituted • Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (as defined in the VfM rubric) • Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding		Document reviews KIIs with BEIS Fund managers KIIs with DP programme managers KIIs with award managers KIIs with award partners in LMICs KII with externals, e.g. panel experts; others Survey analysis
EQ 7. What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF?				

Annex 2: Interview guide

Main interviewee's code	
Additional interviewees' code	
Interviewer name	
Date of interview	
Notes	

Introduction
Background:
➢	We are evaluators from Itad, RAND Europe and NIRAS-LTS – a UK-based consortium of research organisations with specialisms in evaluation.
➢	We have been commissioned by BEIS to carry out an evaluation of GCRF.
•	The purpose of this interview is to understand more about your project, your achievements to date, the challenges you faced and lessons you learned. This is not an evaluation of individual awards.
•	The interview will last around 45 minutes.

Consent
•	As this is an independent evaluation, all interviews are confidential, anonymised and non- attributable. Everything you tell us will be confidential, and your name will not be used in any of our reports. We may use quotes from the interview in our reporting, but all quotes will be non-attributable, and we will not include any identifiable feature of the award.
•	You can decline to answer any question that you are not comfortable with, and you can decide to stop the interview at any time.
•	Do you have any questions about the research, or concerns you would like to raise before we start?
•	Do you consent to be interviewed on this basis? [Y/N]

Recording consent [only if you choose to record]:
•	We would also like to record the interview to facilitate note-taking and later analysis. The recording would not be accessed by anyone beyond our team and would be deleted following analysis.
•	Do you consent to being recorded on this basis? [Y/N]

I have reviewed the relevant documentation [and website] for your award so I are familiar with its basic elements. To start, could you just briefly tell me about the key idea and intended impact of the project?
Note: use this question as an ice-breaker to get the conversation going (no follow-up, probing questions for this)
[response here]

Please tell me a bit about the design stage. How did the idea come about? Who was involved in the design?
Note: use this question to probe about the partnership, the extent to which the idea was 'owned' by partners, and the extent to which there was an opportunity for different views to be reflected in the design. Probing questions may include: *- Did the partners know each other before?* *- Which process did you use in the design? Did you use Theory of Change?* *- Did you feel that the application process gave you enough time for different views to be reflected? Did it feel rushed? Did you have enough time in the inception phase?*

How did the project go so far? Can you tell me about the main achievements and challenges you faced?
Note: the issue of Covid-19 will probably come up naturally here. Follow-up questions here include: *- How has Covid-19 impacted on your research?* *- How has Covid-19 impacted on your dissemination/ impact activities?* *- How has Covid-19 impacted differently on the various partners? What steps, if any, have you taken to mitigate the impact on partners?* *- Has your project adapted to Covid-19 circumstances? If so, how?* *Also use this question to probe on other challenges apart from Covid-19.*

How did you ensure that your partnership was fair?
Note: encourage respondents to speak about specific steps they took, before and during the research process, as well as how they envisage the research benefitting the various partners. This can also be an opportunity to reflect on the costs related to ensuring fairness in partnership (as part of Value for Money considerations).
How was capacity development part of your project? Which/ whose capacities did you focus on strengthening?
Note: this question is particularly important for the Hubs, given the explicit focus of the programme on capacity development. Probe on whose capacities, which capacities, at which level, and how. Also use this opportunity to enquire about how this particular programme supported capacity development, and whether there was something else that would have been needed to strengthen capacities.
How does your project consider gender?
Note: this is a very broad question and it is interesting to see what dimensions respondents focus on (e.g. gender in the team, gender in the research questions, gender in selection of partners/participants). Probe on dimensions that do not come up naturally.
Can you talk about other equality and inclusion issues that were relevant for your project?

Note: this may include issues related to poverty, disability, or others. This may already have come up in previous discussions depending on the topic/scope of the project so please adapt this question as relevant.
Was your project interdisciplinary? *(if so, ask about challenges and benefits of interdisciplinarity)*
What specific steps have you taken to ensure use of research findings beyond academia?
Note: only ask this question if not sufficiently covered in previous answers
VFM question: how were outputs from the project 'picked up' by local actors? *e.g. local investors financing follow-up of research)*
VFM question: what were the main risks that you identified in your research? How did you manage those risks?
VfM question: what was the distribution of funds between Northern and Southern partners? *How was this decided? How did it work?*
Note: we are required to ask this question as part of the VfM assessment. PIs/CoIs may not know the exact split of funds - that's fine. Try to ask follow-up questions about what the process was to arrive to a 'fair' split of funds, how this worked out, etc.
What are your reflections on GCRF?
Probing / follow-up questions: *How significant/ unique compared to other funding opportunities?* **VFM question: if you had not received GCRF funding, how would have you funded this research? What do you see as the value added of GCRF compared with other sources of funding?** *Did the GCRF funding enable you to get further opportunities/ funding?* *What improvements could be made for future ODA programmes? Reflections/ lessons to share with funders?* *Are you aware of other Hubs/ GCRF projects? Have you collaborated with other Hubs/ GCRF projects? If so, what form has this collaboration taken?*

Who else should we be talking to about your project?
In particular, try to get contacts of Southern researchers/partners – non-academic partners
Do you have any other questions for me or anything else you would like to add before we close?

Annex 3: Coding framework

PARENT CODE	SUB-CODE	DEFINITION / DESCRIPTION	SUB-SUB-CODES
• **Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes**	1.1 Selection and set up processes	Presence of, and description of the TOC/vision for the programme; information on how the call was defined and who was involved, and on how projects were selected and the review process (and who was part of that)	1.1.1 Theory of Change 1.1.2 Information about commissioning process
	1.2 Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)	The ways in which, and the extent to which, development considerations are built in to calls and proposals (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs)	1.2.1 Gender responsiveness 1.2.2 Poverty & social inclusion 1.2.3 Equitable partnerships 1.2.4 Relevance to local context 1.2.5 Interdisciplinarity 1.2.6 Global Networks
	1.3 Management of the programme and awards	Any synergies or approaches to identifying synergies across the programme, or GCRF portfolio (~coherence); management processes to ensure that development needs are met, reviewed and integrated (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs); approach and flexibility of management processes in changing circumstances or with	1.3.1 Synergies with other parts of the programme/ GCRF portfolio 1.3.2. Management process to ensure that development needs are met, reviewed and integrated 1.3.3 Flexibility in management 1.3.4 Consideration of negative impact 1.3.5 Monitoring and Evaluation

		changing research/stakeholder priorities; any considerations of negative impacts of the research/process; monitoring and evaluation processes	
	1.4 Capacity development	Approach to capacity strengthening - understanding capacity strengthening needs (and for who), and the extent to which, and how, capacity is being considered or approached; and what considerations are driving capacity strengthening (needs of LMIC/UK researchers)	
	1.5 Engagement for delivering research	Approach to engagement with local researchers, or other projects/programmes operating in the context, and with non-research stakeholders (~coherence).	
	1.6 Engagement with users	Any engagement with intended users of the research; stakeholder identification; targeting to user needs; dissemination strategies (for uptake)	
• **Efficiency, proportionality and VFM of processes [to support challenge-led research**	2.1 Efficiency, proportionality of processes	Whether processes are efficient and whether they are (dis)proportionate to the scale/scope of funding or ambitions. Any reflections on whether the processes are cost effective (or not)	
	2.2 Fairness for partners	Processes that support (or not) LMIC partners	

	2.3 Value for Money	Whether the programme is achieving value for money	
• **Early progress towards desired outcomes /impacts**	3.1 Key outcomes and achievements	Intended (TOC) and unintended results and outcomes	
	3.2 Impact of Covid-19	Effects of the pandemic on delivery and results from the programme	
	3.3 Impact of funding cuts	Effects of the spending review funding cuts on delivery and results from the programme	
	3.4 Barriers within the context	Risks: in internal/institutional support for research; data availability; political environment and awareness of the challenge/issues; the need for research capacity strengthening	
	3.5 Enabling factors	Factors helping to overcome barriers and deliver outcomes e.g. Research capacity; programme support; wider networks	
• **Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding**	4.1 Alternative sources of funding	Other funding bodies, or programmes, supporting similar research	
	4.2 Aspects unique to GCRF funding	What can't be replaced, e.g. in terms of funding scope or scale	
	4.3 Changes to funding strategy	Reflections on where funding may come from in the future, to progress the research, or support new research (if not GCRF)	
• **Lessons to inform**	5.1 Lessons for award-holders	Capturing any key lessons learnt and	

improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF		improvements for future awards	109
	5.2 Lessons for funders	Capturing any key lessons learnt and improvements for future programmes	

Annex 4: Assessment rubrics for EQs 1-4

Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
Beginning: There are some indications that the programme is meeting a few of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to effectively support challenge-led R&I	Developing: There are some indications that the programme is meeting several of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&I.	Good: There are several indications that the programme is meeting most of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&I	Exemplary: There are several indications that the programme is meeting almost all of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting challenge-led R&I and puts the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&I for development impact.

Table 4:   Rubric for EQ1

Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award?			
Beginning: There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to support effective R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	**Developing:** There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to support effective R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	**Good:** There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	**Exemplary:** There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK, and puts the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.

Table 5:   Rubric for EQ2

Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
Beginning: There are some indications that award processes are efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but overall, structures and	**Developing:** There are some indications that award processes are meeting the criteria - efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but	**Good:** There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support efficiency,	**Exemplary:** There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners, and put

processes are nascent or under-developed to meet the criteria.	overall, structures and processes require further strengthening to meet the criteria effectively.	timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners.	the award at the leading edge of practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.

Table 6:   Rubric for EQ3

Beginning: There are some indications that the award has made some progress to its ToC but overall, progress is at an early stage (reflect on whether this is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	**Developing:** There are some indications that the award is progressing along its ToC and meeting early milestones, but further efforts are needed to build up progress to meet as anticipated in the ToC, and ensure that it is well-supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	**Good:** There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	**Exemplary:** There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC - is meeting milestones, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported - and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.

Table 7:   Rubric for EQ4

Annex 5: Award write-up template

Award analysis write-up template: General

Please save a copy of this template in the relevant <u>award folder</u> on Teams. Once it is completed, please indicate in the <u>award spreadsheet</u>, and send the link to your Technical Lead for review.

Completing the template

The template is laid out according to EQ and eval criteria in the Evaluation Matrix.

There is a rubric for assessing the strength of evidence for each segment of the evaluation matrix.

Combining evidence

The evidence that you will be considering when writing up the analysis of the award is:

* Documentary evidence that provides context or description for the award.
* Documents and data that form part of the evidence for the award, e.g. policies or process guidance.
* Interviews with award stakeholders

You should combine the evidence from all these sources in your analysis of the award, and note the strength of evidence.

Extract relevant quotes and details from the documents and interviews against the EQs and criteria. This can be in bullet point form but should be comprehensible to someone who is unfamiliar with the award. You should include both positive evidence (which suggests alignment with the evaluation criteria) and negative evidence (which suggests problems or limitations with the evaluation criteria).

Once you have extracted all the relevance evidence, highlight whether this evidence indicates 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary' practice, based on the rubric descriptions, and justify why you have selected this in the 'rationale' box underneath.

Making judgements about your confidence in the evidence

Once you've made a judgement on where the award fits against each EQ/eval criteria, please consider how confident you are in the strength of evidence underpinning your judgement. This is based on how strongly the evidence emerges from the individual sources, as well as the degree of triangulation possible between the sources.

Red = low confidence in the evidence (only one source - interview or document - or very low-detail / low quality evidence from multiple sources)
Amber = medium confidence in the evidence (two sources with a sufficient degree of detail)
Green = high confidence in the evidence (3+ sources with a good degree of detail, <u>including</u> clear alignment or misalignment with the contextual analysis)

Author:

AWARD INFORMATION

Award name
Unique BEIS ID (from <u>award spreadsheet</u>)

PI name

Lead institution

Primary research partners

Start - end dates

Focus country / region

Total budget

Delivery Partner

Funding call

Type of award *(e.g. research grant, training grant, fellowship, networking grant)*

Summary of award   *Brief (1 paragraph) summary of award and key objectives, including countries of focus and intended impacts*

CASE INFORMATION

List of documents reviewed for this case

Unique IDs of interviewees (from <u>central interview log</u> – column A)

Any data or methodological limitations? *(E.g. only one interview conducted; suspicion of bias in interviews; key document gaps)*

EQ 1: To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?

ODA R&I management (at programme and award level):	ODA R&I excellence in design and implementation:
- Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence - ToC and shared vision - Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge - Capacity needs assessed and identified - Risk factors identified and mitigated - Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building; aggregate level R&I into use) - Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g Covid-19 - Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working - Promoting coherence between awards - Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy - M&E and regular reporting	- Relevance + coherence in design and delivery - Strategic/holistic/system lens, inlcuding interdisciplinarity - Negative consequences mitigated and a 'do no harm' approach - Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes - Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes - Capacity needs identified and assessed - Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement - Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed) *Include both positive and negative evidence*
Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award	

Not enough evidence to make a judgement	Beginning: There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to effectively support challenge-led R&I	Developing: There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&I	Good: There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&I	Exemplary: There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting challenge-led R&I and puts the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&I for development impact.
Rationale for this judgement *(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):*				
Confidence in evidence: (red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)				
Reasons *why* the award structures and processes are in place to the extent observed (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)				

EQ 2: To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?

➢ Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes ➢ Analysis/understanding of local R&I ecosystems and capacity needs ➢ Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&I infrastructure ➢ Fairness considerations integrated	

Source (interview number / document name)	**Evidence** (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Evidence of alignment / misalignment with our contextual analysis?

| **Not enough evidence to make a judgement** | **Beginning:** There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to support effective R&I capacity | **Developing:** There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to support effective R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK | **Good:** There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK | **Exemplary:** There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK, and puts the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams. |

strengthening, in LMICs and the UK			

Rationale for this judgement *(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):*

Confidence in evidence: *(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)*

Reasons *why* **the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed** (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)

EQ 3: To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented, are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?

• Efficiency and timeliness of processes • Proportionality for size of investment • Fairness for partners • Read across to VfM rubrics	
Source (interview number / document name)	**Evidence** (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Not enough evidence to make a judgement	**Beginning:** There are some indications that award processes are efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money,

but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed to meet the criteria. | **Developing:** There are some indications that award processes are meeting the criteria - efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but overall, structures and processes require further strengthening to meet the criteria effectively. | **Good:** There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners. | **Exemplary:** There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners, and put the award at the leading edge of practice with LMIC partners and UK teams. |

Rationale for this judgement *(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):*

Confidence in evidence: *(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)*

Reasons *why* the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)

EQ 4: To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes /impacts, and what evidence exists of these?

• Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples of how these have been met
• Expected progress
• Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress
• Adaptation to unintended outcomes (positive and negative)

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Not enough evidence to make a judgement	Beginning: There are some indications that the award has made some progress to its ToC but overall, progress is at an early stage (reflect on whether this is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	Developing: There are some indications that the award is progressing along its ToC and meeting early milestones, but further efforts are needed to build up progress to meet as anticipated in the ToC, and ensure that it is well-supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	Good: There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)	Exemplary: There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC - is meeting milestones, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported - and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.
Rationale for this judgement *(please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above):*				
Confidence in evidence: *(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)*				
Reasons *why* progress is being made to the extent observed				

EQ 5: What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)

Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:
- o   Maturity of the field

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)
Overall assessment of the features that have made a difference and identification of success factors	
Reasons *why* progress is being made to the extent observed	

Confidence in evidence: *(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)*

EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:

- **how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to covid-19**

- **the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?**

• Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumenal for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted • Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (as defined in the VfM rubric) • Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding • Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for **PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO RUBRICS FOR THIS EQ.**	

Source (interview number / document name)	Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Overall assessment of how instrumental GCRF funding is for achieving the outcomes
Reasons *why this is so*
Confidence in evidence: *(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)*

EQ 7: What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF?

• Capture specific insights and lessons from the award that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from etc. success factors, reasons why • Capture also specific areas for improvement in the award, areas of under-performance and reasons why	
Source (interview number / document name)	**Evidence** (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)

Summary:	

Overall summary

Overall summary of the judgements for the award:
1. **Highlight areas of strength and good/exemplary performance; how overcome challenges, success factors**
2. **Areas for improvement , factors that have inhibited better performance**
(300-500 words max)

Annex 6: GCRF Theory of Change
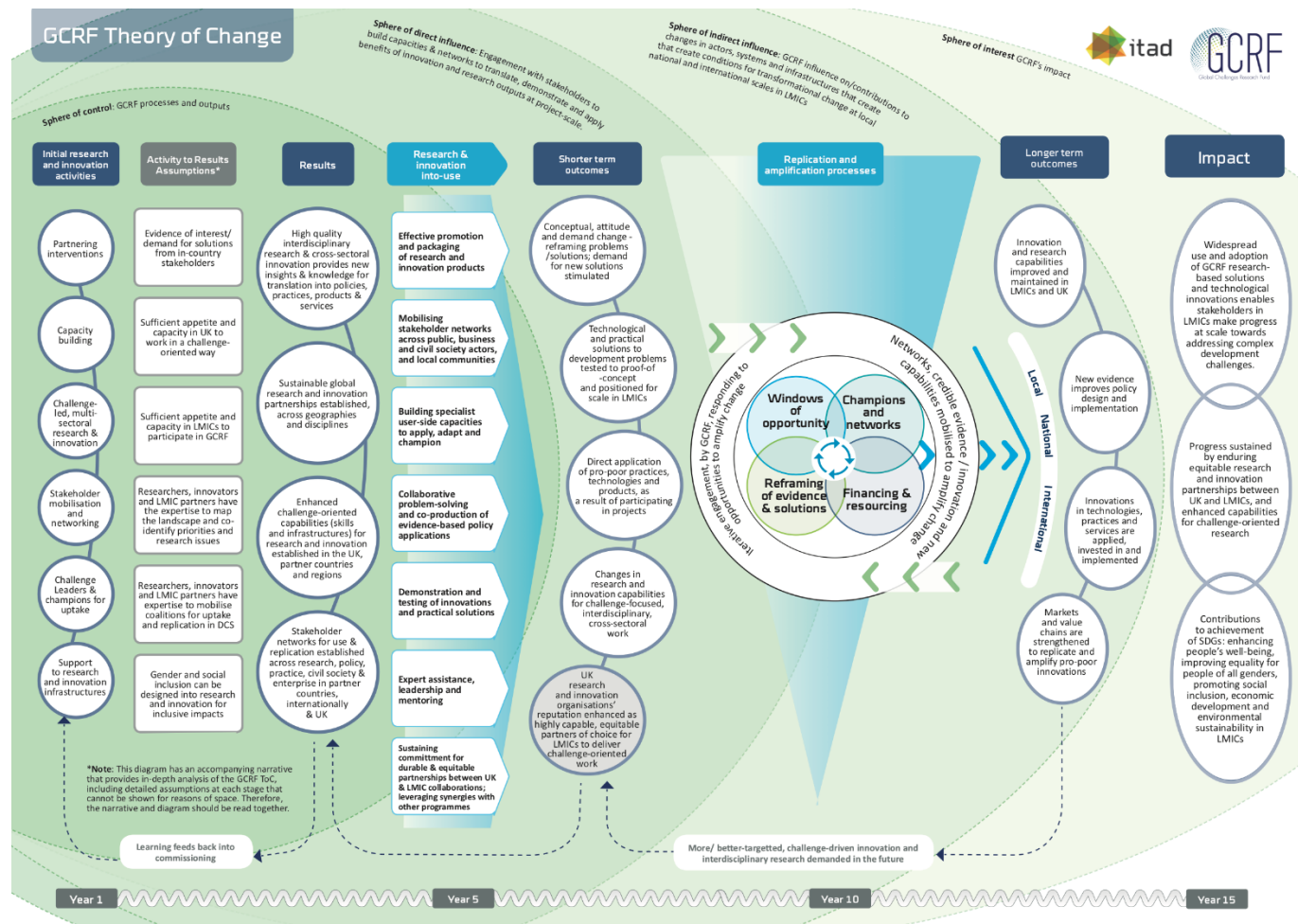
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