

Global Challenges Research Fund: Stage 1b Fund-wide Survey Report

Executive Summary

This summary presents findings from the 2021 fund-wide survey report of the Global Challenges Research Fund.

How can management structures and implementation processes promote research impact?

In scientific research and innovation (R&I), management structures, implementation processes and pre-research context analysis can sometimes be portrayed as additional bureaucracy that impedes the research endeavour. However, the findings from a large-scale survey of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) award holders highlight how certain key

Implemented between October 2021 and February 2022, the fund-wide survey aimed to capture how GCRF investments have been working (process) and what has been achieved (effectiveness), by collecting award holder and PO views on procedures, methods, activities and project results across the fund as a whole.

management structures and implementation processes are associated with greater probabilities of reporting outputs and outcomes, precursors of impact. This annex presents key results and analysis from a survey of all the award holders in GCRF, carried out in 2021-22, with supporting evidence from a survey of GCRF partner organisations (POs).

Spotlight on methodology

Survey purpose: To capture how GCRF investments have been working (process), and what has been achieved (effectiveness).

Survey development: In consultation with BEIS, the team selected core assumptions about how GCRF works, and hypotheses about its processes and results. Questionnaires were then developed for the award holder and partner organisation surveys.

Survey analysis: The analysis first generated descriptive statistics from both surveys (who, what, how many). A regression analysis was then used on the award holder data set to test the strength of the hypotheses. This allowed us to identify possible explanations and causal pathways for the findings identified in the descriptive statistics.

Award holder survey

Sample: Whole population of GCRF award holders
Response rate: 35% (3,612 complete responses)
Final data set: 3,456 cleaned responses matched to an award

Partner organisation survey

Sample: One PO respondent from each of GCRF's 143 programmes
Response rate: 87% (124 complete responses)
Final data set: 124 cleaned responses

GCRF evaluation: 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. The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. This report focuses on Stage 1b (2021-22), involving six process evaluations

of GCRF's signature investments. It seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question: *How are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?*

Key findings

Awards are making good progress towards desired outcomes and impacts. The survey findings highlighted good reports of awards making early progress towards desired outcomes and impacts, as framed by the results areas set out in the GCRF ToC. New insights and knowledge, and sustainable global R&I partnerships, emerged as areas where most respondents reported progress. Other results included new or improved management practice, knowledge, research findings, technology, methods and tools. The only area showing less progress was knowledge translation into commercial or business products or services, perhaps reflecting the lower proportion of

commercially facing awards in the fund portfolio.

In terms of uses of R&I outputs, academic and research users were the most commonly reported. Policymakers at international, national and sub-national levels and multilateral organisations were also reported. GCRF awards from its 'signature programmes' -- large-scale programmes that most closely aligned with the fund strategy of challenge-oriented, interdisciplinary R&I, representing about 50% of the fund's spend -- were more likely to report usage by policymakers than non-signature award holders.

From the regression analysis, we can see that signature programmes produced a more comprehensive range of outputs -- on average, one more than non-signature programmes. They also reached on average around 0.5 more users of programme information than non-signature programmes.

Key structures and processes within awards increased the probability of reporting outputs. The analysis identified key characteristics which increased the probability of reporting positive outputs, including a strategic framework, a Theory of

Change (ToC), a dissemination plan, and a gender and inclusion plan.

Key processes which increased the likelihood of reporting positive outcomes included undergoing an evaluation, programmatic support to disseminate research products, and programmatic support to obtain additional funding.

What we see from the regression analysis is that having specific structures in the award helps to promote outcomes, rather than adding bureaucracy. This may be because structures and processes are required to effectively mobilise multi-partner collaborations, especially strategic frameworks, evaluation processes, and support for next stage funding. The investment in these seems worthwhile as collaboration with multiple partners, particularly with non-academic partners, is strongly associated with impact.

GCRF's large-scale, 'signature programmes' were more likely to report outcomes.

Signature programmes had an increased likelihood of reporting positive outcomes, and of research outputs being taken up by policymakers and other stakeholders, compared to other programmes. GCRF's signature programmes were designed as large-scale, multi-partner, multidisciplinary initiatives, designed around the principles of equitable partnerships and stakeholder engagement to promote use. Therefore, it is not surprising that the awards from signature programmes reported higher levels of structures and processes than non-signature awards. Signature programmes also tended to offer more programmatic support than other GCRF calls to help promote impact.

However, there are clearly limits to the enabling nature of structures and processes. The complexity of the signature awards may have curtailed the opportunities for partners to contribute to the design, which was perceived as a negative aspect of this type of grant.

Collaboration in award design and implementation is a key enabler of positive results. Collaborative awards including three or more non-academic partners were more likely to report a range of positive

results, even when controlled for other factors. These results included positive research outputs and outcomes, effective capacity building, improved partnerships and networks, and success in obtaining additional funding.

Although collaboration with non-academic partners and inclusion in signature programmes are both associated with increased reporting of positive outputs and outcomes, the signature programmes themselves were less likely to be collaborative in design than other GCRF programmes.

Programme level support has positive effects on enhancing R&I capacities.

Strengthening capacities for ODA research has been a key objective of GCRF, and is likely to be an important legacy of the fund in both low and middle income countries (LMICs) and the UK. The regression analysis found that programme level support received by award holders has had positive effects on key R&I capacities. These include improved capacity to write research proposals, successful mobilisation of follow-on funding and improved knowledge of the research landscape.

LMIC-based survey respondents agreed that involvement in GCRF awards had contributed to new or improved skills – a key GCRF objective. The effect of this was strongest for the following dimensions:

- new or improved management practices, knowledge, or research findings;
- new or improved sustainable R&I partnerships;
- new or improved skills and infrastructure in targeted LMICs;
- new or improved stakeholder networks in LMICs.

Collaboration in design with three or more non-academic partners is again positively

associated with increased probabilities of all the dimensions of capacity building surveyed, for both LMIC and UK respondents.

LMIC respondents reported between 4.8 and 7.4 percentage point increase in achieving improved connections to UK and global networks and improved R&I skills and infrastructure in their countries. For UK respondents, the data suggest an increase of 8.8 pp in achieving improved R&I partnerships.

These findings highlight the importance of programmatic support for new types of capacity needed for partnered ODA R&I. Again, the signature investments were highlighted as providing more programmatic support than other types by design, but the PO survey confirmed that many other programmes also provided support. These findings highlight how programmatic support adds significant impact value to the grant investment, justifying the deployment of programme management resources.

Fairness in partnerships was also a factor linked to positive outputs and outcomes.

The survey explored dimensions of fairness – fairness of opportunity (before research), fairness of process (during research implementation); fairness of benefit sharing (after the award). Awards that respondents perceived as fair in terms of equitable partnerships were strongly associated with reporting three or more positive outputs and outcomes. Including three or more non-academic collaborators was strongly correlated with improved perceptions of fairness. In addition, all measures of fairness significantly increased the likelihood of reporting three or more positive outputs and outcomes. Measures of fairness likewise increased the likelihood of reporting three or more positive outputs, with fairness of benefit sharing showing the largest impact. These findings highlight how ensuring fairness in all three dimensions is a driver of impact.



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