

RCUK Delivery Plan 2011/12-2014/15

Excellence, Impact and Efficiency



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1. Introduction

In order to foster economic growth and ensure the prosperity and wellbeing of the UK the delivery of both innovative fundamental research and strategic, focussed research programmes is vital. Public investment in research is an investment in the nation. It ensures that the UK has a productive economy, healthy society and contributes to a sustainable world.

The contributions of individual Councils to delivering this objective are set out in their individual delivery plans. Here we set out the collective activities that we will undertake in partnership as Research Councils UK¹. Working in partnership is central to maximising the value that is derived from the Nation's investment in research and allows us to:

- Exercise national leadership of the research base, through the development and implementation of collective policies
- Form effective partnerships with other organisations for delivery against national priorities
- Support the delivery of the research base as a whole

As well as working together, it is essential that we also work closely with BIS, HEFCE and the other HE Funding Councils, the Technology Strategy Board, and the research-led HE sector.

This delivery plan sets out the programme of collective activities for the period 2011-15, building on the strategic objectives set out in the RCUK Strategic Vision. Our integrated programme of work is directed in two broad areas:

Delivering excellence with impact. Our collective activities are synergistic with those detailed in the Delivery Plans of individual Councils, and contribute to the overall missions of the Research Councils. Our collective programme contributes to:

- Co-ordinating multidisciplinary research to address societal challenges
- Maximising the impact of the research we fund
- Supporting research in the international context
- Ensuring a continued pipeline of highly skilled researchers for the continued health of the research base, and for wider economic and societal benefit
- Engaging the public with the research.

Enhancing efficiency. We work collectively to both improve the efficiency of our own operations and drive enhanced efficiency in the wider research base.

¹ In this document 'Research Councils UK' and 'RCUK' mean the seven Councils working together. Some activities are delivered by specific Councils on behalf of RCUK, whereas others are delivered by cross-Council Units. The responsibility for delivery will be specified in the scorecard that will be published shortly.

2. Delivering excellence with impact

2.1 Co-ordinated cross-Council research

In order to ensure the research base is well placed to address tomorrow's societal and economic challenges, it is vital that we work in partnership as RCUK to foster cross-disciplinary approaches and nurture national capability. RCUK funding also complements and builds upon the support for HEI-based research delivered through the Funding Councils, so it is additionally important that strategic engagement with HEIs, other Research Organisations and the Funding Councils is strengthened through cross-Council approaches.

We will support the delivery of excellent research by individual Councils as follows:

AIM 1: Working across discipline boundaries to fund excellent research. Our aim is to fund excellent research to address the societal and economic challenges facing society. Research which both addresses these challenges and maintains national capability is often in areas of complexity that require a variety of approaches and cross-disciplinary working.

We will:

- 1.1 Collaborate through the six major cross-Council research themes - Digital Economy; Energy; Global Food Security; Global Uncertainties; Lifelong Health and Wellbeing; Living with Environmental Change
- 1.2 Work together across a range of other initiatives where there is shared interest, such as in Regenerative Medicine, Connected Communities, or Data Driven Science, to address additional prominent contemporary challenges such as Big Society, the wellbeing of society, and economic recovery, as well as global challenges
- 1.3 Strengthen the interfaces between disciplines and research areas to deliver high added-value knowledge and research – this includes identifying perceived and real barriers to cross-disciplinary working, as well as developing networks to bridge discipline boundaries, and working within the global context
- 1.4 Maximise opportunities for breakthrough research that crosses discipline and domain boundaries through development of practice, such as the cross-council funding agreement, new back-office systems, or methods to simplify approaches and share best practice
- 1.5 Look ahead for opportunities and new challenges for the research base, working with others such as the Government Foresight programme

AIM 2: Co-ordinating RCUK investment in facilities and infrastructure. RCUK makes a considerable investment in research facilities, institutes, innovation campuses and data resources, to ensure that the UK has the best available resources to support the growth and wellbeing of the nation. This requires a long-term vision across work in the range of institutes, facilities and large investments that RCUK supports.

We will:

- 2.1 Ensure RCUK maintains robust and appropriate processes for strategically prioritising across the spectrum of research disciplines, ensuring national capability and that RCUK funded facilities and infrastructure (including e-infrastructure) are being used in the best way for the best research
- 2.2 Review and update the Large Facilities Roadmap at appropriate intervals and advise Ministers on the priorities for funding from the Large Facilities Capital Fund
- 2.3 Facilitate access for excellent UK researchers to international facilities
- 2.4 Implement the new RCUK funding model for large domestic facilities, such as Central Laser Facility, Diamond Light Source, and ISIS, to ensure their ongoing efficient and effective operation

AIM 3: Strengthening strategic engagement with HEIs, other ROs and the Funding Councils. RCUK already has productive links with key HEIs through University Mission groups and individual Councils' strategic interactions. Our interactions will be developed in the light of new circumstances and in dialogue with the funding councils. It will be crucial to engage fully on research concentration and in developing collaboration and sharing of facilities and opportunities.

We will:

- 3.1 Promote strategic partnerships with HEIs, other ROs and the Funding Councils, for the effective use of combined QR and RCUK investments, and to define particular roles in this context
- 3.2 With the Funding Councils and HEIs, ensure RCUK has formative influence on policy changes and remains responsive to emerging research initiatives and structural alterations
- 3.3 Jointly develop key areas of research policy and practice, for example, Research Integrity

AIM 4: Maintaining a key role in improving efficiency in Higher Education in collaboration with HEIs and Funding Councils. Current budgetary constraints throw into sharp relief the need to continue to improve efficiency in research. RCUK will examine options for driving efficiency either in terms of savings or sharing of facilities. The dividend will be reinvested in research.

We will:

- 4.1 Work together to use our knowledge of the HE sector and of the differing strategic issues in each Research Council area, to locate and encourage excellent capability and facilitate inter-institutional collaborations. This will help greater research concentration where appropriate, in centres of proven excellence with the critical mass and multi-disciplinary capacity to address national challenges and compete internationally
- 4.2 Develop collaborative approaches with HEIs to manage demand and encourage efficiency in processes of application, review and decision-making to select the best work
- 4.3 Implement the Wakeham review on full economic costing, taking forward its recommendations and developing its key principles, for example, on indirect costs and pooling of research facilities and equipment

2.2 Integrated impact plans

RCUK will focus on the strategic delivery of focused research programmes, alongside nurturing innovative basic research, as the key to stimulating growth and ultimately placing the UK in a position of leadership on the world stage of research and innovation. RCUK is committed to providing incentives which enhance the economic and social impact of research and we will continue to work with partners in the private and public sectors and with civil society groups, to focus on maximising the opportunities, and minimising barriers, for new collaborative ways of working or training. We will also develop incentives and rewards that support the movement of researchers at all levels between the different sectors, without detriment to career prospects.

A key priority for fostering effective and fruitful partnerships with the users of research will be to develop a 'whole-system' approach to maximising the impact of investments. This approach will build on RCUK requirements for grant applications to demonstrate Pathways to Impact. Individual Councils will also take steps to make research findings more accessible. RCUK will also work with partners, including the Funding Councils and TSB to deliver the overarching impact agenda, through the promotion of shared goals and coordination of approaches.

AIM 5: Engaging Key Stakeholders. Our aim is to advance the rate of innovation from our investments by developing forward-looking relationships that identify and address the needs of users of research.

We will:

- 5.1 Develop and deliver harmonised policies on important emerging issues in Knowledge Exchange (KE). A significant area of work includes alignment on issues of common interest with HEFCE to deliver the overall impact agenda, for example, aligning impact data requirements for the Research Council end of grant reporting and the REF; strategic alignment with HEIF and industrial QR; and the Wakeham Review of full economic costing
- 5.2 Provide oversight of coordinated strategic relationships with key sectors and departments. We are initially introducing this approach to four agreed sectors: pharmaceuticals; creative industries; energy; and water; and also to a number of government departments
- 5.3 Work in partnership and share best practice with the Technology Strategy Board in the following areas:
 - Societal/sector challenges
 - Underpinning National Capabilities
 - Influence/Leadership

AIM 6: Maximising Research Impact. Our aim is to increase impact from our investments by improving support mechanisms, as well as through evaluation, sharing best practice and communicating the benefits of our continued support of research, training and the provision of facilities.

We will:

- 6.1 Converge on common systems to capture basic level information on the impact of our research by Summer 2011, leading to exploration of the wider sharing of those data
- 6.2 Carry out a third user satisfaction survey by 2013. The next survey will explore sectoral and thematic impact in greater depth
- 6.3 Ensure knowledge exchange strategies are refreshed for all cross-Council themes
- 6.4 Further the development of valid international benchmarks and methodologies for demonstrating performance in delivering impact
- 6.5 Further develop knowledge exchange and impact strategies so that KE is more fully embedded across RCUK activities as part of an integrated system

AIM 7: Delivering Highly Skilled People. Our aim is to drive innovation in knowledge exchange through enhancement of knowledge exchange skills in the research base and encourage movement of highly skilled people between the research base and user communities at all career stages.

We will:

- 7.1 Ensure mechanisms are in place which encourage people exchange between the research base and user partners at all career stages

Further deliverables to deliver highly skilled people are outlined in section 2.4: Developing Researchers for the future.

The budget for programme costs related to delivery of these activities is provided in the table in section 4 below.

2.3 International engagement

Excellence with impact in an international context requires commitment to: addressing key global challenges; enabling excellent UK researchers to work easily and successfully with the best international partners, including the top quality researchers of other countries, international research users and funders; creation and access to the highest quality international facilities and data sources; and ensuring UK researchers can benefit from international opportunities for development of their skills.

We will deliver the objectives of the RCUK International Strategy as follows:

AIM 8: Increase RCUK influence in international research strategy and policy development.

We will:

- 8.1 Strengthen strategic partnerships with key countries including China, India and the USA where we have overseas RCUK staff presence. Identify and consider how to progress relationships with other countries where we have a significant RCUK interest, for example, Brazil, Japan and South Africa. In taking forward these partnerships, RCUK will work closely with the SIN, UKTI and the British Council
- 8.2 Re-locate the RCUK China team alongside other partners across government in the UK Embassy in Beijing, helping to present a more coherent approach to UK overseas working. This is a complex project but we hope to complete in the first quarter of 2012
- 8.3 Work with other UK stakeholders and through BIS to ensure that European Union investments, activities and initiatives are aligned with, and add value to, national investments. We will both influence the development of the Innovation Union and Framework Programme 8, and continue to engage with and help to shape topics and initiatives within the lifetime of FP7
- 8.4 Continue to strengthen relationships with important partners in Europe, directly with the European Commission and also by developing influential RCUK level relationships with key funding organisations. In particular we will play a leading role in successor arrangements to the current ESF and EuroHORCs

AIM 9: Provide opportunities for excellent UK researchers to flourish in global research collaborations.

We will:

- 9.1 Continue to remove barriers to researcher-led, best-to-best collaborations. In particular we will build on and help develop mechanisms that do not involve top-slicing of funds or double jeopardy for researchers, and we will extend successful models across Research Councils and to other target countries and areas of research
- 9.2 Review and develop as appropriate current RCUK multilateral initiatives including Science Bridges, the RCUK-FAPESP agreement and the G8 HORCs initiative. We will focus on a restricted number of countries and priority themes, aligning with individual and cross-Council priorities

AIM 10: Enhance the value and impact of research through international collaboration.

We will:

- 10.1 Recognising the increase in interest in innovation and impact globally, work with RCUK Impact Group to ensure that the RCUK vision for the contribution of research to innovation and impact is taken forward in Europe and internationally. Ensure there is RCUK input into the growing international innovation agenda, and scope opportunities for business engagement
- 10.2 Commit to securing improved value for money from international activity. In some cases this will be realised through levering in international resources to strengthen UK research, in others more joined up approaches across RCUK will reduce the administrative cost of collaborative activities
- 10.3 RCUK will convene a working group with all interested UK funders of fellowships and other relevant stakeholders, such as the British Council, to reconsider the requirement for a UK Fellowship Association taking account of existing knowledge and including the role of a well publicised portal of UK funding opportunities and research careers advice. The working group will make initial recommendations on the way forward by September 2011

AIM 11: Ensure the UK research base fully contributes to key global responsibilities in a world where challenges cross national boundaries.

We will:

- 11.1 Enable UK researchers to play their full part in tackling the pressing key challenges facing humanity. In particular, we will continue to facilitate cross disciplinary approaches to global research challenges. Challenges will require not just cross-Council but also cross-Government interactions, for example, large cross-Council programmes in energy and climate change, and partnerships with DFID in the area of development research

The budget for programme costs related to delivery of these activities is provided in the table in section 4 below.

2.4 Developing researchers for the future

The RCUK research careers programme will promote the development of UK leaders for science and research, support the implementation of the Concordat for Researcher Development and manage the transition of the Vitae programme to be self-sustaining. We promote the development of the skills of early-career researchers for the wider economy and ensure the continuing pipeline of excellent researchers. We will work with Council-specific schemes to enhance impact and spread good practice.

We will also work with institutions to ensure that our researchers have the skills to be effective in knowledge exchange, public engagement, global research collaborations and multi-disciplinary environments.

We will deliver the RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Strategy as follows

AIM 12: Attracting the best. Our aim is to ensure that the best potential researchers are attracted into research careers.

We will:

- 12.1 Develop awareness of widening participation at post-graduate level to attract the best researchers from all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds
- 12.2 Work with HEIs to promote the quality of transferable and generic skills as a feature of UK research training and career development
- 12.3 Encourage universities to use career information effectively to attract the best researchers, drawing on the 'What do Researchers do?' publications and career studies developed by Vitae

AIM 13: World-class research training. Our aim is to enhance the quality of research training and the employability of early stage researchers.

We will:

- 13.1 Maintain the longitudinal study of the careers of postdoctoral researchers to understand patterns and provide evidence for the impact of researchers across the economy, including publication of the 'What do Researchers do?' series
- 13.2 Work with the HEIs and HEFCE to improve their reporting of indicators of training quality and outcomes, and of the value of such data to the Research Councils
- 13.3 Ensure that institutions take responsibility for delivering and resourcing transferable skills and career development post 'Roberts': to be informed by the 'Independent Review Panel' report, statements of expectations from RCUK, and the development of Doctoral Training centres
- 13.4 Work with HEIs to maintain the international attractiveness of UK research training and career development

AIM 14: Developing excellent researchers. Our aim is to enhance the impact of UK researchers by promoting improved career development and management of research staff.

We will:

- 14.1 Ensure that the sector builds evidence of effective implementation of the Concordat - including launching the PIRLS survey of Principal Investigators and maintaining the CROS survey
- 14.2 Jointly, with the Funding Councils, support benchmarking reports on Concordat implementation leading to review in 2012
- 14.3 Ensure the sector fully supports the skills development of RCUK-funded Research Fellows as future Research Leaders

The budget for programme costs related to delivery of these activities is provided in the table in section 4 below.

2.5 Public engagement with research

Building on its successes RCUK will continue to work towards creating a culture where the research sector and researchers themselves value public engagement as an important activity, and where an awareness of social and ethical issues informs priority-setting. Alongside our work with the HE sector, RCUK will continue to implement actions to embed public engagement across all disciplines within the Research Councils' and within the cross-Council research programme themes. We also want to encourage researchers to interact with schools to enrich students' learning experiences to inspire the next generation of researchers and encourage more to act as informed citizens.

We will deliver the RCUK Public Engagement with Research Strategy as follows

AIM 15: Recognising and responding to public views. Our aim is to identify public attitudes and values to be considered through the lifecycle of research, and foster debate that will enable public aspirations and concerns to influence Councils' policies and research strategies.

We will:

- 15.1 Enhance public engagement within the cross-Council research programme themes
- 15.2 Drive development of better practice, through sharing/learning, in individual Councils

AIM 16: Inspiring young people. Our aim is to help secure and sustain a supply of future researchers to support the research base that is critical to the UK economy by encouraging engagement between young people and researchers.

We will:

- 16.1 Provide collective strategic input into schools policy to increase the role of contemporary research in the school curriculum
- 16.2 Support, with partners, successful RCUK schools programme focussing on supporting our researchers to interact with schools and teachers, currently *Researchers in Residence* and *Bringing Cutting Edge Science into the Classroom Teacher Continuing Professional Development Programme*
- 16.3 Consider schemes which would benefit from extension across all councils, for example, EPSRC NOISEmakers scheme

AIM 17: Supporting researchers. Our aim is to achieve culture change in the HE and research sectors so that public engagement is embedded in research and valued as an important activity through encouraging researchers to engage with the public and supporting and rewarding those who do so.

We will:

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| <p>17.1 Lead on embedding public engagement within the higher education and research sectors, through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implementing the Public Engagement Concordat, with appropriate evaluation• Building on foundations laid by the Beacons for Public Engagement (contract ends 2012). This would consist of a lump sum grant, over 3 years, to competitively selected HEIs to support a culture change element at a high level in the organisation• Supporting, with co-funding, the National Co-ordinating Centre <p>17.2 Link national public engagement initiatives to contemporary research, for example, Olympics 2012 and cultural festivals</p> |
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The budget for programme costs related to delivery of these activities is provided in the table in section 4 below.

3 Enhancing efficiency

3.1 Driving efficiency in the research base

We will work with the HE Funding Councils and the HE Sector to implement the recommendations of the Wakeham Review on full economic costing in line with the implementation plan published in March 2011².

3.2 Increasing co-ordination and integration of operational functions

We will continue to use the services of RCUK Shared Services Centre Ltd and work to achieve greater efficiencies through standardisation of process. Recognising the cost challenges imposed by the spending review settlement, SSC Ltd will work with the Councils to improve efficiency and deliver a 5% real-terms cost reduction in 2011/12, and to achieve significant procurement savings. Beyond 2011/12 SSC Ltd will achieve at least a total 20% reduction in administrative costs over the SR period. We will also work closely with BIS in the development and implementation of the BIS Commercial Strategy.

We will also develop a programme for further integration of retained operational activities. The objective of this programme will be to:

- contribute towards reducing administration costs by 14% over the period;
- maximising the effectiveness of our operations through integrated working wherever appropriate.

We will explore opportunities, and exploit those supported by attractive business cases, to:

- Further integrate the retained Human Resources functions through examination of:
 - Development of a single set of terms and conditions;
 - Sharing resources in the areas of equality and diversity and other areas of common business;
 - Benefits of establishing a single HR policy unit.
- Establish a single centre of expertise on Health and Safety policy.
- Further integrate the retained Information Services functions through:
 - Encouraging greater joint working across RC institutes especially in procurement;
 - Adopting a phased approach to consolidating IS functions;
- Continue to enhance the co-ordination of communications activities.
- Further integrate the retained finance functions through:
 - Evaluating the potential of combining finance functions where appropriate;
 - Further harmonising policies and procedures.
- Review Estates functions in the light of the outcome of the BIS Commercial Strategy.

² The Wakeham Review implementation plan is available at <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/documents/documents/EfficiencyEnsuringExcellencewithImpact.pdf>

3.3 Improving organisational structure for RCUK

We will modify the RCUK organisational structure with three principal aims:

- Increasing the clarity of accountability within the RCUK partnership.
- Further enhancing the effectiveness of strategic decision-making within the RCUK partnership.
- Radically decreasing the number of RCUK groups and boards to reduce the administrative cost of operating the RCUK partnership.

The key features of the new structure are:

- Focus attention on the Executive Group³ and its current three main delivery areas: Research, Impact, and Efficiency and Reform⁴. There will be, in addition, a number of self-organising networks, for example on communications strategy, international etc., to ensure continued sharing of best-practice across the Councils and to provide advice as needed to the Executive Group and its subgroups.
- The terms of reference for the sub-groups will be reviewed, and, in particular, the importance of covering communications issues within their remits emphasised.
- Delivery through project-based working with the establishment of time-limited task teams to deal with specific issues.

The new structure will be implemented by the start of the Spending Review period on 1 April 2011.

3.4 Reforming the RCUK Strategy Unit

In addition to delivering a significant proportion of the programme described in section 2 above, the RCUK Strategy Unit also adds value to the RCUK partnership through:

- Providing the secretariat to the core RCUK groups: Executive Group, Research and Development Group, the Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact Group, and the Operational Strategy Group.
- Providing co-ordination of cross-Council communications activities
- Providing co-ordination of and a single point of contact for cross-Council contributions to Parliamentary and Government consultations and inquiries.

Through the period 2011/12-2014/15, the Strategy Unit will reduce its administrative costs by 14%, in line with overall reductions to Council administration budgets. Costs are provided in the table in Section 4 below. Reform of the Strategy Unit will involve a structure built around specialist staff in key areas: careers; communications; international and public engagement; together with a flexibly deployed pool of generalist policy and administrative staff.

³ The Executive Group is made up of the 7 Chief Executives of the Research Councils.

⁴ As part of the review the Research and Development Group, Knowledge Transfer and Economic Impact and Operational Strategy Groups have been renamed Research Group, Impact Group and Efficiency and Reform Group, respectively.

4 Budget for the RCUK Strategy Unit and integrated activities delivered by the Strategy Unit

A significant proportion of the collective activities set out in Sections 2 and 3 above will be delivered by the RCUK Strategy Unit working on behalf of the partnership. The following table summarises the budget for the Strategy Unit for the period 2011-15.

	Budget (£'000)					Final year to baseline
	2010/11 [baseline]	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	
Staff costs	1,853	1,788	1,723	1,658	1,593	-14%
Programme						
Careers and diversity	3,759	3,883	3,000	1,800	1,000	-73%
Communications	158	154	150	146	142	-10%
International	1,868	1,300	1,332	1,367	1,400	-25%
KT and Impact	638	110	160	110	160	-75%
Public engagement	2,118	2,000	1,969	1,938	1,906	-10%
Total programme	8,541	7,447	6,611	5,361	4,608	-46%
Total	10,394	9,235	8,334	7,019	6,201	-40%

The programme costs cover the following activities:

- Careers and diversity: the Vitae programme, supporting the current contract (ends December 2012) and managing the transition of Vitae to a self-sustaining status.
- Communications: central activities to support collective corporate communications, and communications related to programme activities.
- International: the RCUK overseas presence in Beijing, New Delhi and Washington.
- KT and Impact: central evaluation and communication activities concerning the impact agenda.
- Public engagement: primarily the Beacons for Public Engagement (current contract and follow on activities) and the RCUK Schools Programme.

In order to further enhance the efficiency of our collective operations we will move to a simplified recharging scheme for RCUK activities based on a single annual charging process.