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A Review of Evidence Relating to Impact of ESRC's Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) Programme

Final Report



Perspective
Economics

Contents

Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Scope of the report	1
1.2. Methodology	1
1.3. Review Structure	2
2. Background to Impact Acceleration Account Funding	4
2.1. Scope and Scale of IAA Funding.....	4
3. Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture.....	6
3.1. Skills, awareness and capacity building	6
3.2. Changes to KEI approaches and practices	8
3.3. Most significant IAA-driven culture changes	9
3.4. Key Findings	12
4. Sustainability of Support	13
4.1. Sustained Support for KEI	13
4.2. Progressing Research Outputs	16
4.3. Sustainable academic KEI awareness and understanding.....	18
4.4. Key Findings	19
5. Creativity and Flexibility	20
5.1. Flexible Approaches to Knowledge Exchange.....	20
5.2. IAA-Enabled Changes for Innovation and Fast Failure.....	22
5.3. Key Findings	22
6. End User Engagement & Strategic Partnerships.....	24
6.1. End User Engagement	24
6.2. Strategic partnerships.....	27
6.3. Key Findings	30
7. Overarching Institutional Impact.....	32
7.1. Key Findings	34
8. Conclusion	36

I Executive Summary

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission process raised the significance of research impact within universities, requiring Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to evidence the wider societal impact and value of research¹.

The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC's) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) programme has played a major part in enhancing knowledge exchange and impact (KEI) within the UK's social sciences research landscape. Across two rounds of ESRC IAA funding, evidence generated through this study emphasises how the ESRC IAAs have supported a step-change within institutions to effectively embed KEI into their strategic goals, ensuring that research translates into real-world benefits.

“I honestly cannot imagine an academic universe, in which we are expected to have impact and seeking to do so, in which the IAA - in terms of funding and the surrounding infrastructure - did not exist.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
Academic / Researcher

I.1 Purpose of the Review

The ESRC commissioned Perspective Economics to review the evidence relating to the impact of its IAA programme. The study utilises a mixed-methods approach to assess the efficacy of the first two funding rounds and provide a baseline for future impact measurement.

I.2 Key Findings

I.2.1 Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture

- The ESRC IAAs have driven cultural changes within ROs, promoting effective and ambitious KEI practices.
- ROs have seen increased skills, awareness, and capacity building, with substantial improvements in the KEI culture.
 - Events, training sessions, and secondments funded by the IAAs have played crucial roles in this transformation.
- Survey findings indicate that 98% of participants gained new KEI opportunities, 92% are more likely to consider KEI in their research designs, and 80% have increased awareness of KEI.

I.2.2 Sustainability of Support

- Many ROs have integrated IAA-funded initiatives into permanent structures, although the longer-term sustainability of KEI practices in the social sciences remains uncertain in the absence of continued IAA funding.

¹ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a803df4e5274a2e8ab4f03d/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf>

- Institutions have leveraged substantial additional funding and in-kind contributions, **almost equivalent to the level of original core IAA funding**.
- In some cases, the **skills and capacities developed through IAA-funded training and mentorship programmes have been embedded** into core operations of the ROs.

I.2.3 Creativity and Flexibility

- The flexibility and creativity in approaches to impact promoted by the IAAs have empowered ROs to respond swiftly to emerging opportunities, something that was particularly evident during Round 2 of IAA funding and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ROs have embraced innovative funding models and fast failure strategies, fostering **a culture of creativity and responsiveness** in KEI activities.
 - Fast failure has been highlighted as an area for future focus, with strategic RO stakeholders suggesting that academics and researchers were often risk adverse.
- The IAA funding has supported a wide range of projects, from creative collaborations with artists to the development of policy hubs and technology transfer initiatives.

I.2.4 End User Engagement and Strategic Partnerships

- The IAA has facilitated **increased engagement with non-academic partners**, including businesses, NGOs, and government agencies, leading to the co-creation of impact.
- Recipient ROs formed approximately 7,900 new or unique partnerships over the two funding rounds, highlighting the **extensive reach and impact of the IAAs**.
- Enhanced end-user engagement has led to better alignment of research with stakeholder needs and increased the application of research findings in real-world settings.

I.2.5 Overarching Institutional Impact

- ESRC IAA's have driven significant institutional changes in recipient ROs, **prioritising and embedding KEI activities beyond the social sciences disciplines**.
- The funding has **elevated the profile of social science research**, aligning KEI with institutional strategies, and fostering a culture of impact-driven research.
- The IAA's impact is evident in the creation of dedicated roles and structures to support KEI, leading to sustained improvements in research practices and outcomes.

The ESRC IAA programme has been a catalyst for positive change within the UK social sciences research community. It has enhanced KEI culture, fostered sustainable support structures, promoted creativity and flexibility, and strengthened end-user engagement and strategic partnerships. These achievements have laid a strong foundation for continued impact.

Ultimately, the review highlights the importance of continued support through ESRC IAA funding to maintain and build upon these successes.

1. Introduction

Perspective Economics was commissioned by UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI's) Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to review evidence relating to the impact of the ESRC's Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAA) programme. Using a theory-based approach, the review sought to evidence the impact and added value of the first two rounds of the ESRC IAA programme, and to provide a framework against which future ESRC IAA funding impacts can be measured.

1.1. Scope of the report

This report presents findings from extensive qualitative and quantitative research regarding programme-level outcomes arising as a result of ESRC IAA funding. Sources of evidence used to inform the review include:

- Analysis of ESRC monitoring data and final project reports spanning ESRC IAA funding Rounds 1 and 2 (between 2014 to 2023).
- 20 in-depth semi-structured interviews with stakeholders from the research organisations that received Round 1 and / or Round 2 ESRC IAA funding.
- An online survey of 57 researchers involved in ESRC IAA funding².

The review aims to act as a baseline, providing ESRC with information on the efficacy of the ESRC IAA funding rounds to date, and offering suggestions about how to improve the programme in future.

1.2. Methodology

The review adopted a mixed methods approach, combining desk-based research, co-design, quantitative analysis and in-depth qualitative research.

1.2.1. Desk-Based Research

An initial desk review was conducted to examine existing evidence of Round 1 and Round 2 of the ESRC IAAs, including internal monitoring data and final summary reports of the IAAs. This review provided a foundation for understanding the current state of knowledge and informed the development of the research framework.

1.2.2. Co-Design

An impact framework was developed to align ESRC IAA objectives with the research questions and sub-questions, including impact statements. The framework was co-designed through close collaboration with a steering group consisting of key members from the ESRC IAA and the broader ESRC team. This co-design process sought to ensure that the framework was tailored to the specific needs and goals of the ESRC IAA.

² Survey responses were cleaned using a series of quality markers and a manual review to remove incomplete and low-quality responses. The survey provided 57 quality usable responses out of 75 responses in total.

1.2.3. Quantitative Research

An online survey was also administered to IAA participants including early careers researchers, academics and principal investigators, to gather quantitative data on a wider scale³. The survey obtained 57 responses from IAA participants across the UK. The survey results were analysed in conjunction with the qualitative findings from the interviews to provide a comprehensive understanding of the IAA's impact and effectiveness.

1.2.4. Qualitative Research

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with IAA Managers from 20 recipient research organisations, with the list of stakeholders finalised in consultation with the steering group⁴. These interviews provided deeper, qualitative insights into the experiences and perspectives of strategic representatives across 20 institutions in receipt of ESRC IAA funding in Round 1 and / or Round 2⁵. There were 24 ESRC-funded IAA recipients in Round 1 (plus one IAA that self-funded) and 26 ESRC IAA recipients in Round 2. Of these, we consulted with 16 institutions that received funding in Round 1 and 18 that received funding in Round 2⁶.

1.2.5. Analysis and Reporting

The qualitative and quantitative data collected through the desk review, interviews and survey have been analysed in relation to the impact framework to assess the impact of ESRC IAA funding in Rounds 1 and 2.

1.3. Review Structure

Analyses have been oriented around five key impact themes that will be explored throughout the remainder of the report, namely:

1. Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture
2. Sustainability of Support
3. Creativity and Flexibility
4. End User Engagement and Strategic Partnerships
5. Overarching Institutional Impact

Each impact theme is aligned to one or more specific research questions, as summarised in Table 1.1 below.

³ Early careers researchers: n=4, academics: n=28 and principal investigators n=21 (note: 4 respondents left this blank but completed the rest of the survey).

⁴ Note: As interviews were semi-structured, for some topics the evidence cannot be aggregated due to the subjective nature of responses.

⁵ There were 24 (plus one self-funded IAA) and 26 ESRC IAA recipients in Round 1 and Round 2 respectively.

⁶ Of the RO's we interviewed, 15 received IAA funding in Round 1 and Round 2.

Table 1.1 – Impact Themes and Research Questions

Impact Theme	Research Question(s)
Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs driven culture change in ROs to enable effective and ambitious knowledge exchange and impact (KEI) and improve related skills, knowledge and capabilities?
Sustainability of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs demonstrated how longer-term support for and sustainability of knowledge exchange and impact (KEI) support would be maintained? • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs supported early-stage activities that progress research outputs past the initial stages? • How have the ESRC IAAs driven continuous improvement through new processes and mechanisms in place to support progress towards knowledge exchange and impact (KEI)?
Creativity and Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs supported institutions with flexible approaches to knowledge exchange?
End User Engagement and Strategic Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs improved engagement with end users / beneficiaries? • To what extent have the ESRC IAAs supported strategic partnerships for new, innovative and imaginative approaches to knowledge exchange and impact (KEI)?
Overarching Institutional Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This theme encompasses all the Research Questions explored in the above sections.

2. Background to Impact Acceleration Account Funding

Research Organisations (ROs) are increasingly expected to play a greater role in translating research into real world benefits⁷. However, ROs require support to build capacity and capability to translate research into impact, including:

- **Capacity Development:** building the skills and understanding needed to transform research into tangible societal and economic benefits.
- **Purposeful Impact:** planning impact with clear intentions, ensuring alignment with institutional and funder objectives.
- **Institutional Changes:** monitoring post-funding outcomes, to assess the lasting effects of institutional changes.

2.1. Scope and Scale of IAA Funding

UKRI IAAs are strategic financial awards provided to research organisations to achieve a range of aims and objectives. IAAs provide early-stage support to all stages of the research life cycle, such as providing early-stage support to progress research outputs through various stages in the impact pipeline, such as proof of concept projects, commercialisation, market validation, and activities targeting policy, business, and the third sectors.

2.2. In-Scope ESRC IAA Funding

The IAA programme is one of the key tools through which ESRC can help ROs to maximise the overall impact of social science research. It provides strategic, targeted yet flexible funding to ESRC funded ROs with an excellent social science research base will increase their capacity and capability to respond to impact opportunities in flexible, responsive and creative ways. Specific objectives of ESRC IAA funding include:

- Strengthening engagement with users in order to accelerate the translation of research outputs into impacts.
- Supporting, developing and fostering strategic partnerships for knowledge exchange and impact, including across disciplines and sectors.
- Building and maintaining an environment and culture which enables effective and ambitious knowledge exchange and impact, including development of skills, capacity and capability within research organisations.
- Providing early-stage support for progressing research outputs towards the next stages in the impact pipeline, for example proof of concept projects, commercialisation, market validation or activities targeting policy, business and the third sectors.
- Driving continuous improvement in impact by supporting innovation, enabling 'fast failure', and capturing learning through appropriate mechanisms.

⁷ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a803df4e5274a2e8ab4f03d/ind-16-9-ref-stern-review.pdf>

- Empowering institutions with flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact, including the ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities.

ESRC IAA awards considered to be within the scope of this review comprise c.£57.5m in core funding between 2014 and 2022, across more than 3.7k projects. ESRC IAAs provided funding to social sciences in 24 ROs in Round 1 (plus a 25th that self-funded) and 26 institutions in Round 2.

3. Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Build and maintain an environment and culture which enables effective and ambitious knowledge exchange and impact (KEI), including development of skills, capacity and capability within research organisations.

The following section explores to what extent the ESRC IAAs have driven culture change in ROs to enable effective and ambitious KEI and improve related skills, knowledge and capabilities. ESRC IAA's aim to drive KEI culture change in recipient ROs in the social sciences disciplines and more broadly across the institutions. The following discusses the impact of IAA funding on institutional issues such as skills, awareness and capacity building, and changes to KEI approaches and practices.

3.1. Skills, awareness and capacity building

A better KEI culture benefits ROs by enhancing the quality and relevancy of research, increasing funding opportunities, improving reputation and visibility, and fostering skill development and career progression. Further, a better KEI culture within institutions contributes to societal and economic development, attracts and retains talent, and helps fulfil individual institutional missions⁸.

“The benefits of IAA to me have been extraordinary. They have enabled me to build my networks, and reputation, at pace and with institutional backing. They have greatly improved my knowledge and skills in this area. They have enabled me to greatly improve the potential - and actual ability - of my research to influence policy debates and practice.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
Academic / Researcher

The ESRC IAAs aim to promote a culture change that enables effective and ambitious KEI. This includes the development of skills, capacity building and capability development within the ROs. Culture change is driven through a range of outputs, as set out in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Skills and Capacity Metrics for ESRC IAAs Round 1 and Round 2

Metric	Round 1	Round 2
No. of events (total)	695	1,318
No. of training events	862	387
No. of secondments	425	188

Source: ESRC IAA Internal Monitoring Data

⁸ <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/bite-size-briefings/university-research-for-the-benefit-of-others-part-of-the-culture-of-higher-education/>

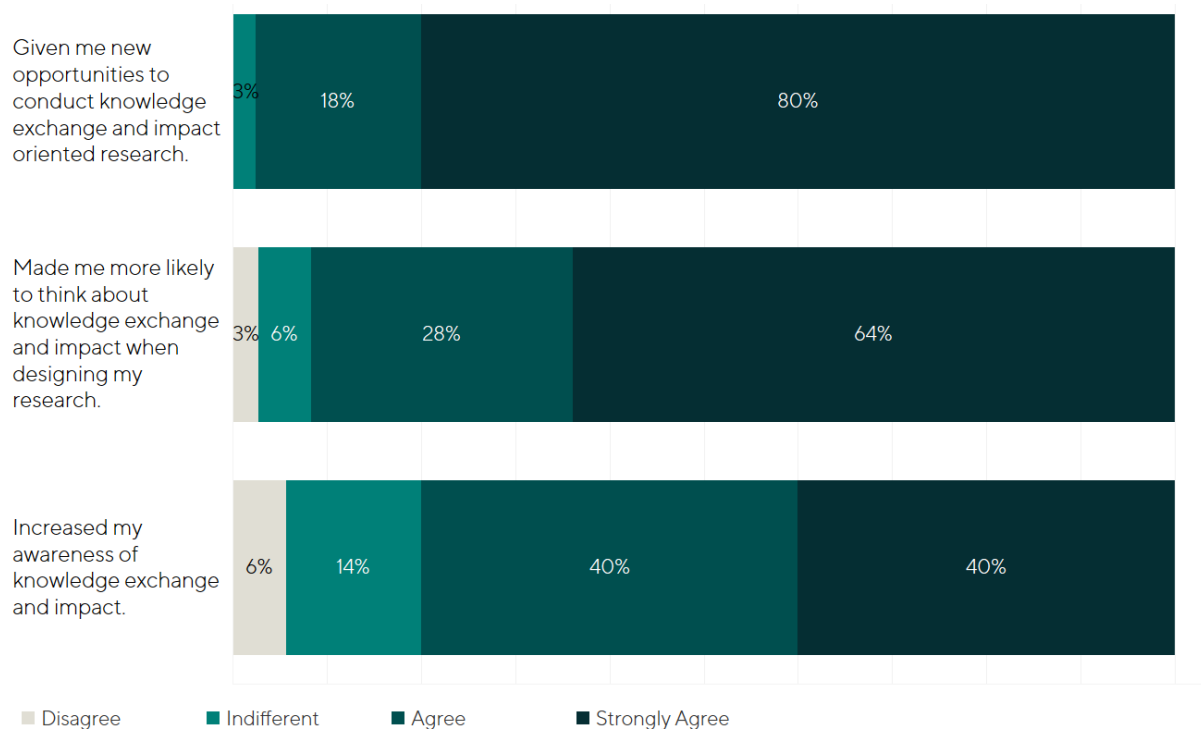
Across the two rounds of ESRC IAA funding, ROs have held 2,013 events, 1,249 training events and 613 secondments. These events and secondments contribute to KEI culture change through skills development and opportunities for knowledge exchange. Consultations with strategic RO representatives suggest that these training events contribute to the broader culture change of institutions, embedding impact into how their staff approach research.

Increasing the awareness of impact in ROs embeds KEI culture change through all aspects of the institution. The survey asked researchers and academics to what extent they agree with three statements regarding the extent to which ESRC IAA's have:

- Provided new opportunities to conduct knowledge exchange and impact-oriented research.
- Made IAA participants more likely to think about KEI when designing research.
- Increased IAA participants awareness of knowledge exchange and impact.

Almost all (98%) survey respondents agree that the ESRC IAAs have given them new opportunities for KEI research, 92% agree that the ESRC IAAs have made them more likely to think about KEI when designing their research and 80% feel that the ESRC IAAs have made them more aware of KEI in general.

Figure 3.1: KEI Culture Changes for Academics and Researchers



Source: Perspective Economics (Base n=41, 36, 36)

3.2. Changes to KEI approaches and practices

While a range of broader initiatives have enabled culture change by fostering a greater understanding of the real-world implications of social sciences and embedding KEI considerations into research design, some ROs have gone further by driving institutional strategy changes. In some cases, IAA funding has catalysed the development of institutional KE policies and strategies, cementing the cultural shift towards impact-driven research at a strategic level. Additionally, some ROs have incorporated KEI activities as criteria for academic progression and promotion, further reinforcing their importance within the institutional culture and strategy.

Based on interviews with strategic RO stakeholders, Round 1 and Round 2 of ESRC IAA funding has been an enabler of cultural shifts within ROs and driving improvements in their KEI strategies. The ESRC IAA funding has motivated academics to actively consider and integrate impact into their research proposals, repositioning it as an opportunity rather than an afterthought. As discussed previously, ROs have invested in various initiatives to facilitate this cultural change, including:

- Through the consultations, ROs reported that the IAA supported the development of better infrastructure and governance structures for impact work, such as:
 - establishing centralised impact offices, steering groups, and dedicated personnel to institutionalise KE and impact activities, supporting their longevity beyond the IAA funding period.
- Developing training programmes, toolkits, and mentorship schemes to upskill researchers, with several RO's (n=8) focusing particularly on training early-career researchers (ECRs) on KEI delivery.
- Increasing the recognition and visibility of KEI work within ROs, leading to greater cross-disciplinary collaboration and input on institutional committees and working groups.
- The IAA has encouraged more academics to engage with impact, as evidenced by the steady increase in the number of applications for IAA funding at several ROs.

“Having the IAA gives researchers the confidence with which they can present social sciences impact and the confidence with which we can support impact...gives [ROs] the ability to drive impact and promote impact agenda... it has made a fundamental difference.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 2)

The longevity of these culture changes within institutions may depend on the extent to which they have become integrated into their institutional strategies. Since the 2012 introduction of the impact element, in preparation for REF 2014, impact has become firmly rooted in the strategies and practices of academic institutions. The impact agenda has evolved from its initial definition to the creation of supporting infrastructure, the rise of the impact case study as a new type of academic writing, and the gradual incorporation of impact as a core value within academic identities. Consequently, impact has transitioned from a new concept to a key

driver of institutional strategies, influencing researchers, as well as how universities allocate resources and support.

Strategic RO stakeholders have indicated that the IAA funding has played a pivotal role in this evolution, facilitating the development and refinement of institutional KEI strategies. In cases where it has driven institutional strategy changes, the IAA has enabled ROs to align their practices with the broader impact agenda at a strategic level, positioning themselves as leaders in knowledge exchange and societal impact. However, even in cases where the IAA has primarily enabled culture change, it has laid the groundwork for impact-driven research to become ingrained within institutional practices and researcher mindsets.

“From an academic perspective, [the ESRC IAA] has given academics the time and space to engage with partners and use their research in a meaningful way, allowing them to create future impactful partnerships... the culture change that it is worth the time and effort to do these things.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

In some cases, these changes to KEI approaches and practices have improved ROs' capabilities for monitoring and evaluation at an institutional level. Several strategic RO stakeholders (n=2) suggested that the monitoring requirements of the initial ESRC IAA funding led to the development of better systems and databases for tracking information, which they can use for monitoring other funds and measuring impact more generally.

3.3. Most significant IAA-driven culture changes

A majority of strategic RO stakeholders (n=15) indicated that ESRC IAA funding has had a significant impact on driving culture change in ROs regarding KEI within the social science disciplines. When asked to state the most significant KEI culture changes to which ESRC IAA funding has contributed, strategic RO stakeholders commonly referred to a) critical infrastructure, b) interdisciplinary collaboration, c) heightened engagement and recognition from academics.

The funding has facilitated the development of crucial infrastructure within ROs, such as the establishment of steering groups and impact teams dedicated to supporting social sciences researchers throughout their impact journey. This capacity-building has been instrumental in fostering a culture that values and prioritises KEI activities.

Further, consultations with strategic RO stakeholders indicate that ESRC IAA funding has encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration, supported by the fact that more than 500 interdisciplinary projects were reported in Round 2 alone⁹. Some institutions (n=6) have reported increased cooperation between the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and other subjects on impact-focused projects. These collaborative approaches have enhanced the research landscape and have led to more diverse and comprehensive impact initiatives. In some cases, these approaches also involved less traditional collaborations, with the

⁹ Source: ESRC IAA Round 2 Internal Monitoring Data

[respondent organisation] connecting artists with researchers to communicate their research insights through art and finding ways to reach new audiences.

The heightened engagement and recognition from academics is another notable cultural shift attributed to the ESRC IAA funding. Influenced by ESRC IAA funding, one RO noted that they have even incorporated impact as an academic progression criterion, resulting in greater participation and commitment from the wider research community.

Some ROs highlighted the difficulty in determining whether cultural changes were driven by IAAs or existing culture. However, they noted that while the ESRC IAAs may not have been the primary driver, they have acted as an enabler for culture change. Prior to the introduction of IAA funding, the focus on research impact was often associated primarily with STEM subjects. However, the ESRC IAA funding has brought to light the importance and potential of social sciences impact, emphasising that impact can extend beyond direct research outcomes.

Across the interviews, recipients emphasised that ESRC IAA funding, through Rounds 1 and 2, has been a catalyst for positive culture change within ROs, elevating the importance of social sciences impact, building essential support structures, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and increasing academic engagement in KEI activities.

The Transformative Impact of ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Funding on Queen's University Belfast's Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture

Embedding a stronger culture of knowledge exchange and impact has been a focus at most universities, including [respondent organisation], since before the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) submission process. That submission process required Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to evidence the wider societal impact and value of research, in addition to previous performance metrics which focused on the quality and quantity of research.

Consultation with ESRC IAA recipients at [respondent organisation] indicated that while the 2014 REF submission process heightened the general focus on impact within the university, prior to ESRC IAA funding, engagement in university KEI by senior university leadership remained relatively unstructured. Consultees indicated that the scale and flexibility of ESRC IAA funding offered greater impetus for senior leadership to develop and engage more fully in governance and administration of KEI activity.

“ESRC IAA funding brought high-level involvement into KEI activities. It contributed to the development of a Steering Group that oversees all IAA activity and involves senior leadership to Pro-Vice Chancellor level.”

The Queen's IAA Steering Group, comprising PIs from all five IAAs at QUB, enables cross-disciplinary conversations, ensuring that social science research permeates other disciplines, and it has subsequently had a key role in shaping KEI culture at QUB through, for example, the QUB 2030 strategy¹⁰. Consultees indicated that KEI language used in QUB's 'Strategy 2030' *aligns much better with social sciences than ever before*.

¹⁰ <https://www.qub.ac.uk/home/Filestore/Filetoupload,1118456,en.pdf>

Our ambition for 2030 is to further enhance our impact by strengthening our research position and working with industry to broaden our translational impact and innovation, ensuring we deliver high-quality, world-leading research, which addresses local and global challenges.

Consultation with QUB representatives also indicated that ESRC IAA funding enabled a much more detailed understanding of, and engagement with the social science community across the entire university.

"[ESRC IAA funding] enabled us to scope across the whole university to better understand our social science community. It's not just the AHSS Faculty, but it's one of our largest cohorts across the university, spanning medicine, food security, natural and built environment to name a few. ESRC funding helped us to build a social sciences community that goes beyond the stereotypical AHSS scope."

The IAA has been instrumental in providing support to staff for KEI activities, through initiatives such as the 'Impact Engagement Academy'. The Impact Engagement Academy is an online hub and staff community that provides information, resources and training events for KEI. The information, resource and training provided via the Academy are substantively supported by IAA funding.

The IAA has also facilitated collaboration and knowledge sharing with external partners, supporting the translation of research findings into practical applications, policy recommendations, and commercial opportunities, aligning with QUB's strategic approach to impact and knowledge exchange.

The senior leadership's buy-in and the focus on early career researchers have been identified as the most valuable IAA-enabled changes to the KEI culture at QUB. The IAA has helped to foster a culture of mentorship and collaboration, with senior faculty members supporting junior colleagues to develop their capacity and capability in impact and engagement.

The university has significantly enhanced support for social science commercialisation through specialised training and development programmes and the strengthening of expertise within the Commercial Development team. Various strategies have been employed to sustain capability and capacity among research and professional staff, including seed grants, assistance with securing external grants, and support for attending conferences and workshops.

The four-year training and capacity building programme has helped researchers develop the expertise required to navigate the longer-term opportunities of their IAA projects effectively. The Impact Team and network of Impact Champions in Schools offer support for monitoring and evaluating the progress and impact of IAA projects, allowing staff to assess the success and sustainability of outcomes and make informed decisions about continued support and resource allocation.

The ESRC IAA funding has had a transformative impact on QUB's KEI culture. The funding has driven high-level involvement in KEI activities, influenced the university's KEI strategy and policy, and enhanced KEI governance and management. As a result, QUB is now well-positioned to maximise the societal and economic impact of social science research through collaboration and knowledge sharing with external partners.

3.4. Key Findings

Round 1 and 2 of ESRC IAA funding has been a significant driver of positive culture change within ROs regarding KEI in the social sciences. Specifically, it has:

- Facilitated the development of crucial infrastructure, such as dedicated impact teams and steering groups, to support social sciences researchers throughout their impact journey.
- Encouraged more interdisciplinary collaboration, leading to more diverse and comprehensive impact initiatives, such as novel collaborations between artists and researchers in the University of Warwick.
- Increased academic engagement and recognition of KEI activities, with some institutions now incorporating impact as a progression criterion.
 - In some institutions, this has been particularly evident through increased recognition of the potential of social sciences impact by senior staff, leading to the creation of steering groups and further senior buy-in.
- Motivated academics to actively consider and integrate impact into their research proposals, repositioning it as an opportunity rather than an afterthought.
- Led to ROs investing in training programmes, toolkits, and mentorship schemes to upskill researchers, particularly early-career researchers (ECRs), on KEI delivery.
- Catalysed the development of institutional KE policies and strategies, cementing the cultural shift towards impact-driven research at a strategic level.

The longevity of these culture changes within institutions may depend on the extent to which they have become integrated into their institutional strategies, aligning with the broader impact agenda that has evolved in research over the past decade.

4. Sustainability of Support

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Demonstrate how knowledge exchange and impact (KEI) support can be sustained (in the absence of ESRC IAAs).

This section explores the extent to which the ESRC IAAs have demonstrated longer-term support for KEI and how the sustainability of KEI would be maintained. For the purposes of the review, sustainability is influenced by a) positive KEI culture change (Section 3), b) follow-on opportunities to progress research beyond original scope and c) raising awareness and understanding of KEI among researchers and academics.

We asked strategic RO stakeholders how KEI practices would differ in the absence of IAA funding. This analysis explores RO views on whether the new and / or improved IAA-enabled KEI supports are embedded and sustainable, either specifically for the social sciences disciplines or across their institution.

We also explore whether IAA stakeholders believe that the learnings from IAA funding is reflected in the design of the institution's other ESRC and/or UKRI grant applications. Through this we can determine whether the lessons learned from IAA-supported initiatives are being applied more broadly, potentially shaping the future landscape of research funding and KEI practices.

4.1. Sustained Support for KEI

The following section sets out evidence on whether the ESRC IAAs have ensured sustained support for KEI initiatives, both within the immediate context of the funded institutions and in wider research funding and practice.

"[The ESRC IAAs] helped provide grant funding to researchers so impact became an opportunity rather than something that just has to be done. The changes are embedded and sustainable, and the University has recently made investments in impact."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

Through the series of semi-structured in-depth interviews, strategic RO stakeholders were asked how confident they were regarding the sustainability of the changes facilitated by the IAAs. While a minority (10%) of interviewees were confident that IAA enabled changes could be sustained in the absence of future ESRC IAA funding, a majority felt less certain, tempered by uncertainties around funding levels, strategic priorities, and maintaining the full scope of IAA-enabled activities and initiatives. As such, while ESRC IAA funding is clearly deriving positive impacts on KEI culture (evidenced in Section 3) longer-term sustainability of strong KEI cultures have not yet been cemented. As discussed in the Section 3, the ESRC IAAs have in many cases enabled an institutional culture change. With this, interviewees highlighted the growth of the teams built to support impact activity over the course of IAA funding. Some of the ROs (n=4) interviewed have transitioned initially IAA-funded personnel and initiatives to

permanent funding sources or RO paid roles, demonstrating institutional buy-in and a commitment to sustaining KEI activities beyond the ESRC IAA funding period.

Additionally, the skills and capacities developed through IAA-funded training and mentorship programmes have been integrated into the ROs' core operations, ensuring the longevity of acquired knowledge and expertise. Certain ROs have also established internal funding streams dedicated to KEI work, reducing reliance on external funding sources, and promoting long-term sustainability of these activities.

The Impact and Sustainability of ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Funding at the University of Sussex

In-depth interviews with strategic representatives at the University of Sussex indicated that ESRC IAA funding had a significant positive impact on KEI practices at the university. The IAA provided an opportunity for risk-taking and fast failure, allowing researchers to work on areas that otherwise may not have received funding. ESRC IAA funding played a crucial role in increasing the appreciation of the impact of social sciences within the institution, which previously had been more focused on STEM subjects and their commercialisation.

The ESRC IAA enabled Sussex to take a more flexible and agile approach to supporting impact, meeting researchers at various stages of their impact journey. The five-year funding period allowed for the nurturing and growth of impact projects, providing the time needed for impact to develop, as it is rarely immediate. The IAA also provided pockets of funding and a structure to mobilise short-term funding effectively.

Sussex used the IAA to build relationships and engage with external partners, as well as to support their social science researchers. The university focused on core themes, particularly digital and health, collaborating with partners such as Wired Sussex and the Kent Sussex Surrey Academic Health Science Network to co-design and deliver a programme of work using a challenge-led approach to facilitating knowledge exchange. The IAA also continued to work with Policy@Sussex and others on policy impact.

The IAA funding allowed for a managed programme of work, complemented by an open call fund (Fast Track Engagement Fund) that enabled researchers to engage with users of research through collaboration or develop and widen their networks to support the development of impact. The university also administered funding for participation in the ESRC Festival of Social Science through the IAA.

Through increased focus on impact, Sussex now has a dedicated team working to link KEI with the institutional strategy through matrix management. The IAA funding highlighted the importance of social science in supporting impact from other disciplines and represented a novel and different approach for the institution, making people more open to risk and opportunities.

ESRC IAA funding had a transformative impact on the KEI practices at the University of Sussex, providing the flexibility, time, and resources needed to develop meaningful relationships with external partners and support researchers in achieving impact. While sustaining these practices in the absence of IAA funding has been challenging, the university continues to build on the lessons learned and the maturity developed in social science impact during the funding period.

The heightened visibility and recognition of KEI work within social sciences have contributed to securing senior leadership buy-in and institutional prioritisation of these activities, indicating a strategic commitment to their longevity. Successful partnerships and collaborations facilitated by IAA funding have led to follow-on funding opportunities, enabling the continuation of impactful projects and embedding these relationships within the institution.

However, half of the interviewees (n=10) expressed concerns about the potential challenges to sustaining changes without continued IAA support. **Several ROs (n=3) expressed concerns about the potential loss of flexibility and the ability to support high-risk, experimental approaches if the IAA funding were to be combined with other funding sources or harmonised across different research councils.** While internal funding streams have been established in some cases, several interviewees noted that the internal funding levels might be lower than the current IAA funding, potentially reducing the scope and depth of KE and impact activities. Furthermore, through interviews with strategic stakeholders, some suggested the removal of IAA funding for social sciences could present a reputational risk for the institution, signalling a potential reprioritisation of KEI work, which could discourage academics from engaging in these activities. Some interviewees also highlighted the risk of a reduction in the breadth of partnerships and the ability to support early-stage, high-risk projects without the IAA funding, potentially limiting the pipeline of impactful research.

“The incentive can drive and influence academics to pursue impact – without the reward it may not work as well as it does now...”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

While many ROs have taken steps to embed the changes brought about by the IAA funding within their institutional strategies and practices, there is a recognition that continued external support may be necessary to maintain the current level of focus on KEI activities in the social sciences, particularly in supporting high-risk, innovative approaches and sustaining the breadth of partnerships and collaborations.

4.2. Progressing Research Outputs

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Provide early-stage support for progressing research outputs towards the next stages in the impact pipeline, for example proof of concept projects, commercialisation, market validation or activities targeting policy, business and the third sectors.

ESRC IAAs have provided pathways towards further funding, enabling ROs to support high-risk, innovative projects that may not have otherwise been pursued. In many cases, this initial funding has led to follow-on funding, with successful projects growing far beyond the scope of the original grant. While interviewees found it difficult to directly attribute the success of progressing research outputs solely to the IAAs, recipients have noted that the ability to support early-career researchers and seed fund new project ideas has been instrumental in advancing research and its potential impact.

“A key value of the IAA has been in enabling match-funding of activity: giving another organisation the confidence and ability to support either financially or in-kind a valuable project that on their own could not proceed. This has enabled important work to proceed, and produced outcomes whose value greatly exceeds the contribution themselves, with the 'doubled contribution' achieving an exponentially bigger impact.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
Academic / Researcher

From the first round of ESRC IAA funding, 335 partners pursued additional collaborations with the research organisation following secondments or placements. This initial round secured nearly £2.6m in investment for further engagement after the secondments, with approximately 750 supplementary projects continuing beyond the initial engagement. Moreover, following the completion of Round 1, there was a rise of more than 800 collaborative activities, resulting in over £20m in funding¹¹.

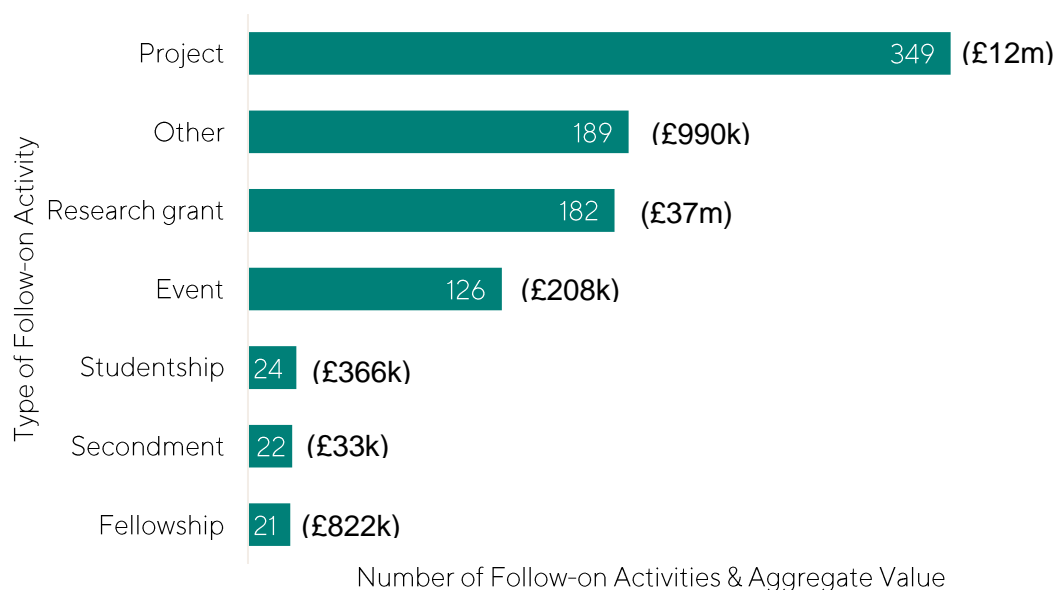
Through Round 1 and Round 2 of the IAAs, recipient ROs have leveraged £31.8m funds in-kind, and an additional £24.4m in cash contributions, almost matching the original core IAA funding (£56.5m). Further, through Round 2 institutions reported £52m in follow on funding, and that 20% of follow-on activities required no funding, emphasising that KEI practices have continued following the initial IAA funds¹².

The following figure sets out the number of different follow-on activities that have been secured from Round 2, along with the value of these activities (i.e., non-IAA funding through public sector, other ESRC funding etc).

¹¹ ESRC IAA Round 1 & Round 2 Monitoring Data

¹² ibid

Figure 4.1: Round 2 Follow-on Activity



Source: ESRC IAA Round 2 Monitoring Data

As set out in Figure 4.1, IAA funding has supported the progression of research outputs and the achievement of follow-on impacts in several key ways, such as:

- IAA funding has enabled ROs to engage in outreach work, developing outreach infrastructure and providing skills and development training. This support has facilitated the translation of research outputs into accessible outreach materials and activities, extending the reach and potential impact of the research beyond traditional academic audiences.
- Allowed ROs to create online toolkits and explore real-world applications in various contexts. By facilitating the development of practical resources and supporting the application of research in diverse settings, the IAA has helped to bridge the gap between academic findings and tangible, real-world impacts.
- Played a crucial role in fostering long-term partnerships and collaborations. These partnerships have been essential in progressing research impacts, as they provide access to networks, resources, and expertise that can help to translate research outputs into meaningful outcomes. The IAA funding has enabled ROs to meet the needs of potential partners and establish enduring relationships that extend beyond the initial funding period. Throughout Round 1, ROs collectively secured over £850k to support ongoing engagement activities following the initial secondments, demonstrating their commitment to maintaining and strengthening the partnerships established through the IAA funding.
- Supported increased engagement with end users, which is critical for ensuring that research outputs are relevant, usable, and impactful. By facilitating end user engagement and providing opportunities for researchers to learn from experienced colleagues, the IAA has helped to build capacity and knowledge within ROs, ensuring that the benefits of this approach can be sustained over time.

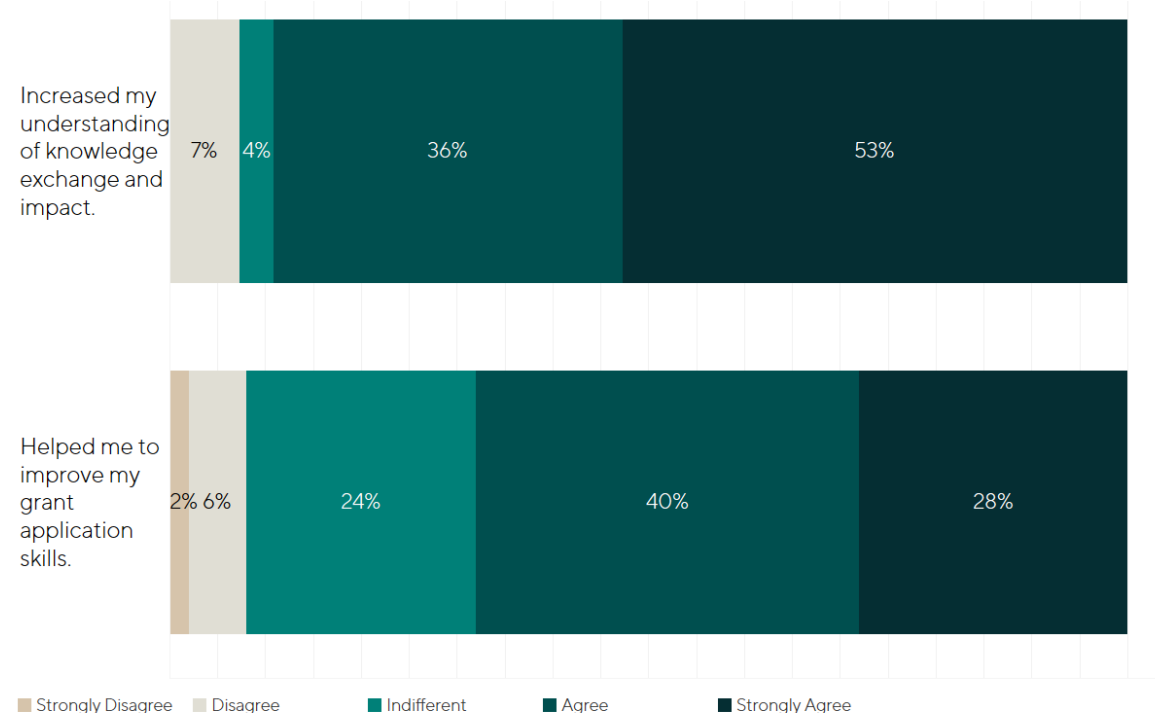
- Promoted co-creation between academics and external partners. By providing the resources needed to engage external partners in the research process and ensuring that these collaborations are based on equal footing, the IAA has fostered an environment conducive to maximising impacts. This co-creation approach has been instrumental in aligning research outputs with the needs and priorities of stakeholders, increasing the likelihood of successful progression towards real-world impacts.

4.3. Sustainable academic KEI awareness and understanding

Further, the survey asked researchers and academics about how the ESRC IAAs have increased their understanding of KEI, and how they have helped to improve their grant application skills. The responses are reflected in Figure 4.2, highlighting the positive impact that ESRC IAA funding has had on researchers in the long term.

The ESRC IAAs have supported the progression of research outputs by enabling outreach activities, facilitating the development of practical toolkits and real-world applications, fostering long-term partnerships, encouraging end user engagement, and promoting co-creation with external partners. The IAAs have also helped researchers and academics to become more aware of KEI and embed this in their future practices. While the direct attribution of success to the IAAs is challenging, the experiences of recipients demonstrate the critical role that this funding has played in advancing research and its potential for meaningful impact.

Figure 4.2: Long-term Impact of ESRC IAAs on Researchers and Academics



Source: Perspective Economics (Base: n=55, 50)

It's worth noting that nearly a quarter of respondents (24%) were neutral about whether ESRC IAAs have enhanced their overall grant application skills. This finding indicates that there may be room for improvement in terms of providing researchers with long-term benefits and skills that extend beyond the immediate scope of the IAAs and into their wider research endeavours.

4.4. Key Findings

Through interviews, ESRC IAA funding recipients have expressed confidence in the sustainability of the changes facilitated by the IAAs, with many ROs transitioning IAA-funded personnel and initiatives to permanent funding sources or RO paid roles.

- Skills and capacities developed through IAA-funded training and mentorship programmes have been integrated into ROs' core operations, ensuring the longevity of acquired KEI practices.
- Successful partnerships and collaborations facilitated by IAA funding have led to follow-on funding opportunities, enabling the continuation of impactful projects and embedding these relationships within the institution.
- ROs have leveraged £31.8m funds in-kind and an additional £24.4m in cash contributions through Round 1 and Round 2 of the IAAs, almost matching the original core IAA funding (£56.5m).
- Some interviewees expressed concerns about potential challenges to sustaining changes without continued IAA support, such as a loss of flexibility, reduced ability to support high-risk projects, and a potential reprioritisation of KEI work.
 - The IAAs have provided pathways towards further funding, enabling ROs to support high-risk, innovative projects that may not have otherwise been pursued, with Round 2 leading to over £52m in further funding (non-IAA).
- Researchers and academics report that ESRC IAAs have increased their understanding of KEI and helped improve their grant application skills, although some felt indifferent about the impact on their broader grant application skills.
- IAA funding has supported the progression of research outputs through outreach work, online toolkits, real-world applications, long-term partnerships, increased engagement with end users, and co-creation between academics and external partners.

The ESRC IAA funding has been instrumental in driving sustainable KEI practices and enabling the progression of impactful research outputs, but continued support may be necessary to maintain the current level of focus on impact in the social sciences.

5. Creativity and Flexibility

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Empower institutions with flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact (KEI), including the ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities.

This section presents evidence about the role that ESRC IAA's play in enabling flexible approaches to knowledge exchange and creativity, and act as a catalyst for institutional changes that help to spur innovation and fast failure.

5.1. Flexible Approaches to Knowledge Exchange

The ESRC IAAs provide institutions with the means to take flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact, enabling them to respond quickly to emerging opportunities. This flexibility allows ROs to pivot resources and adjust project scopes as needed, a benefit that was particularly evident during the overlap of Round 2 and the Covid-19 pandemic, as noted by several interviewees.

The agility of IAA funding is seen as having been instrumental in helping ROs navigate uncertainty and respond to evolving circumstances. It has facilitated the testing of new funding models, such as pitch-style panels and rapid response programmes for small grants, fostering creativity in impact delivery.

"Flexibility has allowed them to adjust and pivot funds where necessary and adapt to changing external context. This was especially important during covid."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

ROs highlighted that the IAA's flexibility enables them to allocate money quickly to innovative ideas without the need for lengthy funding applications, allowing them to respond to different calls and adapt projects according to current needs. In addition to supporting research impact projects, IAA funding has enabled ROs to engage in a range of activities that foster a culture of knowledge exchange and collaboration.

These include culture-building initiatives, the creation of policy hubs, increased regional engagement, and the pursuit of commercialisation opportunities. The flexibility of the funding has allowed ROs to experiment with higher-risk, innovative approaches to developing impactful work.

"[ESRC IAA funding] Gives the flexibility to give money quickly to key ideas... made the culture more creative on what they are willing to fund because the money is there through ESRC IAA."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

Through Round 2, ESRC IAAs funded c.700 events which reached more than 3 million attendees¹³. Of these, almost 70 events and activities supported new, innovative and imaginative approaches to KE and impact, including processes that enabled “fast failure” and appropriate learning. These events hosted more than 26k attendees, including Early-Careers Researchers, third sector, general public and other academics. These events have had a range of impacts, including academic/knowledge impacts, societal impacts and economic impacts. This highlights the reach of ESRC IAA impact through the flexibility of RO KEI approaches.

The flexible nature of ESRC IAA funding has been crucial in allowing ROs to be agile, responsive, and innovative in their knowledge exchange activities. Through creative and flexible approaches, the ROs have been able to support a diverse range of projects and partnerships that may not have otherwise been possible. The creative approaches to IAA funding can be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of each RO, enhancing the impact of their research.

The Impact of ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Funding on Flexibility and Creativity at the University of Warwick

ESRC IAA funding has played a significant role in enabling more creativity and adaptability in KEI at the University of Warwick. The IAA has allowed the university to pursue higher-risk, more experimental projects and approaches to generating impact from research, which may not have been possible without the flexibility provided by the funding.

A key benefit of the IAA’s approach to facilitating impact is its ability to support culture-building activities - such as the creation of a Policy Hub, increased engagement with the local region, and more commercialisation efforts. ESRC IAA funding has also enabled Warwick to accommodate ‘fast failure’, adopting a stage-gate approach for high-risk activities. This means that if a researcher wants to pursue a project with high impact potential but with questions surrounding feasibility, the IAA can provide a small amount of funding for scoping or pilot work. If the scoping phase is successful, the project can then receive the next step of funding. This also provides a mechanism for developing and enhancing approaches to impact, ensuring regular feedback and support to increase projects’ chances of success.

An example of the enhanced flexibility and creativity enabled through IAA funding is the university’s involvement in Coventry UK City of Culture activities. The IAA enabled a unique opportunity for the researchers in Warwick Law School and Sociology Department to work with West Midlands Police (WMP) to analyse the regional impact of WMP’s role as a formal partner in this significant cultural event. The work focused on police using the arts as a means of engaging with seldom heard communities in order to strengthen trust. This project has shaped policy and strategy at WMP and strengthened university partnerships with WMP, Coventry City Council, the local community, and other third sector organisations, which continue to date.

Through Round 1 and Round 2 of ESRC IAA funding, the University of Warwick has been able to support more than 180 impact projects, showcasing the breadth and depth of the university’s Social Science research and its capacity to bring about real-world change. The success of these individual projects and the university’s ability to secure funding in the third round of the ESRC IAA demonstrates Warwick’s commitment to maximising the potential of its Social Science research to improve lives, build skills, and empower communities.

¹³ Round 2 ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts 2019-2023 End of Award Summary Report

5.2. IAA-Enabled Changes for Innovation and Fast Failure

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Drive continuous improvement in knowledge exchange and impact (KEI) by supporting innovation, enabling 'fast failure' and capturing learning through appropriate mechanisms.

Recipients of ESRC IAAs are encouraged to take risks through innovative and novel approaches to research and impact. ROs urge their researchers to take risks and 'fast failure' is promoted, with no stigma attached to failure. Through the ESRC IAAs, ROs have embraced "fast failure" approaches, providing seed funding for high-risk, innovative projects and enabling early-stage exploration of promising ideas. By providing small-scale IAA grants, ROs have provided learning opportunities for ECRs, allowing them to gain experience in grant application processes and project management while exploring innovative approaches to KE and impact.

"It has motivated colleagues to think differently about their career development and develop new business focused skills (working with Angel investors, training to pitch a project and not a longer/academic rationale) ...It has also made colleagues think differently about impact generation and the potential advantages of commercialisation (particularly for sustaining and extending research and related initiatives)."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

Further, strategic RO stakeholders have suggested that the availability of flexible funding has enabled them to support a diverse range of projects, from creative collaborations with artists as discussed above, to the development of policy hubs and technology transfer initiatives. Moreover, interviewees have highlighted that the adaptability of IAA funding has allowed ROs to efficiently allocate resources by redirecting IAA funding to more promising or innovative initiatives if necessary. This approach, coupled with the ability to adopt fast failure strategies, ensures that resources are directed to where they have the greatest potential for impact.

5.3. Key Findings

ESRC IAA funding has been crucial in fostering creativity and flexibility in KEI activities, enabling ROs to respond quickly to emerging opportunities and pursue innovative approaches.

- The agility of IAA funding has been instrumental in helping ROs navigate uncertainty and respond to evolving circumstances, with ROs highlighting that this was particularly evident during the overlap of Round 2 and the Covid-19 pandemic.
- IAA funding has facilitated the testing of new funding models, such as pitch-style panels and rapid response programmes for small grants, fostering creativity in impact delivery.
- Further, the adaptability of IAA funding has allowed ROs to efficiently allocate resources by redirecting funding to more promising or innovative initiatives and adopting fast failure strategies.
- IAA funding has enabled ROs to engage in a range of activities that foster a culture of knowledge exchange and collaboration, including culture-building initiatives, the creation

of policy hubs, increased regional engagement, and the pursuit of commercialisation opportunities.

- Through Round 2, ESRC IAAs funded approximately 700 events, reaching more than 3 million attendees¹⁴.
- The IAAs have **embedded new processes and mechanisms in place to support progress along impact pipeline in recipient ROs.**
 - The availability of flexible funding has enabled ROs to support a diverse range of projects, from creative collaborations with artists to the development of policy hubs and technology transfer initiatives.
 - ROs have embraced "fast failure" approaches, providing seed funding for high-risk, innovative projects and enabling early-stage exploration of promising ideas.
 - ROs have highlighted the benefit of using small-scale IAA grants for Early-Career Researchers (ECRs), allowing them to gain experience in grant application processes and project management while exploring innovative approaches to knowledge exchange and impact.

The creative and flexible approaches enabled by ESRC IAA funding have been essential in allowing ROs to support a wide range of impactful projects and partnerships, fostering a culture of innovation and responsiveness in KEI activities.

¹⁴ Round 2 ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts 2019-2023 End of Award Summary Report

6. End User Engagement & Strategic Partnerships

High level ESRC IAA Objective

Strengthen engagement with users in order to accelerate the translation of research outputs into knowledge exchange and impact (KEI).

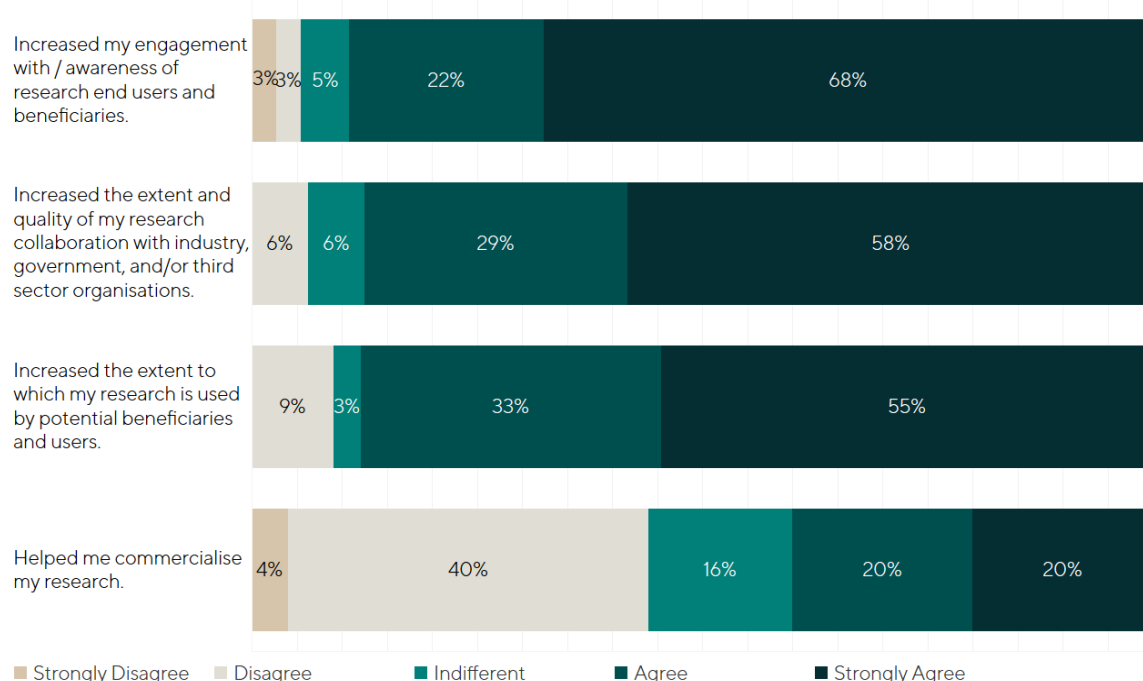
A key objective of the ESRC IAAs is to enhance and deepen engagement between researchers and the end users of their research. Through this, ROs can foster more meaningful and productive collaborations with stakeholders, beneficiaries, and users of research outputs. By prioritising these connections, the IAA aims to facilitate the increased uptake and application of research findings by relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, the IAA strives to raise awareness among researchers about the needs of research users and beneficiaries, leading to a better understanding of their target audiences.

6.1. End User Engagement

Consultations with strategic stakeholders and analysis of ESRC monitoring data highlight how ESRC IAA funding has facilitated increased engagement with non-academic partners, including businesses, industry, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and government agencies. This engagement has led to the co-creation of impactful research and collaborations. The requirement for end-user engagement in IAA-funded projects has fostered a culture of partnership and a broader understanding of potential stakeholders, extending beyond traditional academic circles.

The survey asked academics and researchers about the impact of ESRC IAAs on their awareness and relationships with the end users of researchers (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1: End User Engagement for Academics and Researchers



Source: Perspective Economics (Base: n=39, 48, 34, 42)

The survey findings highlight that 90% of respondents feel that the ESRC IAAs have increased their engagement and awareness of the end users and beneficiaries of research. Further, 88% of respondents have had increased the quantity and quality of research collaborations with industry, government and / or third sector organisations.

“[The ESRC IAAs] have enabled me to build my networks, and reputation, at pace and with institutional backing. They have greatly improved my knowledge and skills in this area. And they have enabled me to greatly improve the potential - and actual ability - of my research to influence policy debates and practice. “

ESRC IAA Recipient
Academic / Researcher

It is worth noting that the Commercialising Research out of Social Sciences (CRoSS) ESRC IAA 'strategic uplift' funding call only opened in autumn 2021 (i.e., 7 years into the ESRC IAAs). CRoSS ran from 2022-2023 and despite its recent inclusion in the IAAs, 40% of respondents agreed that the ESRC IAAs have helped them to commercialise their research.

Several ROs have leveraged IAA funding to establish dedicated business engagement roles, commercialisation managers, and technology transfer officers, supporting the translation of research into practical applications and fostering industry partnerships. The increased visibility of KEI teams within ROs has facilitated the dissemination of research outputs, enabling connections with potential partners and follow-on funding sources.

6.1.1. Engagement Outcomes

Interviewees highlighted that strategic partnerships developed through IAA-funded projects have led to follow-on funding opportunities, sustained collaborations, and long-term advisory roles for researchers. Several ROs have reported an increase in commercialisation activities, with academics developing toolkits, spinouts, and platforms to license their research outputs, fostering sustainable impact.

A notable success story is the University of Bristol, which has been recognised as one of the top cities in the UK for producing university spinout companies¹⁵. Bristol's spinout companies generate [higher average returns](#) on investment compared to those of any other UK university. One such social science focused spinout, supported by the ESRC IAA, is [The Diary Toolkit](#).

The Diary Toolkit aims to empower educators by providing a tool for self-reflection, goal setting, and celebrating achievements. The commercial launch of the Toolkit is close, and research phases are underway in the UK and abroad. The team is collaborating with schools in Bristol and trainee teachers at Southampton University to enhance the Toolkit's impact.

The ESRC IAA has supported the development and growth of The Diary Toolkit, enabling Lucy and her team to turn their vision into a reality. This success story highlights the critical role that ESRC IAAs play in providing support for innovative ideas that allow entrepreneurs to create solutions that positively impact society.

¹⁵ <https://sourceadvisors.co.uk/insights/our-research/university-spinout-report/>

The ESRC IAAs have also facilitated the development of 176 international partnerships and collaborations in Round 2 alone, expanding the reach and impact of research beyond institutional context¹⁶.

"[Our] stakeholder definition is much wider now that it would have been in the absence of ESRC IAA funding... [the funding has] increased the breadth of impact locally, nationally and internationally – been able to do things in far flung places that we wouldn't have been able to do without funding."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

However, some ROs have reported challenges in identifying the "paying customer" or the entity that would financially sustain the impact initiatives, despite the increased engagement with end-users and partners... *"Increased engagement with end users has made it so that it is easier for the researchers to find the end user, but it can still be challenging to see who the paying customer is."*

6.1.2. Impact on Research Organisations

Through consultations, some of the strategic RO interviewees (n=6) commented on how ESRC IAA funding has helped improve end-user engagement and foster strategic partnerships. RO's have noted that the IAA funding allowed them to:

- Embed more end-user and beneficiary activities into their annual events.
- Build new relationships with end-users and beneficiaries outside of academia.
- Engage with more commercial partners and businesses.
- Build more strategic relationships with end-users.

Another interview from a recipient of ESRC IAA funding and strategic RO stakeholder highlighted that the IAA funding helped them shift researchers' and the wider institutions' to focus on collaborative work with partners. IAA funding allowed them to host a secondment scheme where someone from an external organisation could come to the RO to learn more about the research and lead an impact scheme which external organisations could apply to directly to gain access to their researchers and research insight.

"[We have] Been able to provide training to ECR on how to do user engagement, improve how they engage and increase the breadth of researchers that they engage with."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

Interviewees mentioned a general increase in the breadth and scope of partners that researchers within the RO engage with, while another noted that the IAA funding created a culture of high impact partnerships and created a cultural shift on how partnerships are viewed in across the institution.

¹⁶ Round 2 ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts 2019-2023 End of Award Summary Report

6.1.3. Implications for Quality and Effectiveness of Engagement

Survey findings highlighted that the IAA funding has given individual academics the funding needed to engage external partners in their research and to co-create their research with these partners. It has put academics and external stakeholders on equal footing and ensure better collaborative working, therefore maximising the impact of social science research.

The key points mentioned by researchers and academics in the survey, and by strategic RO stakeholders in the detailed interviews include better engagement with end-users across sectors, increased engagement with commercial/industry partners, fostering strategic relationships and collaborations, enabling co-creation of research with partners, and strengthening ties with policymakers and local authorities.

As discussed, several ROs highlighted how the IAA facilitated a shift from just "working on" research projects to genuinely "working with" research partners due to activities such as secondments, co-creation, and more direct channels for knowledge exchange. This shift in approach has led to more effective and impactful engagement with end users.

“All projects require an end user of some sort... [the ESRC IAA] has harnessed some of those relationships and made a big difference to commercialisation, prior to them academics could be reluctant to be commercial.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

Overall, the consultations suggest that the flexible funding from the ESRC IAA has enabled ROs to prioritise end-user engagement, forge new partnerships across diverse sectors, and collaborate more closely with strategic partners throughout the research process, ultimately enhancing the quality and effectiveness of engagement with end users.

6.2. Strategic partnerships

Review research suggests that the ESRC IAA funding has played a significant role in fostering strategic partnerships between the recipient ROs and various stakeholders. These partnerships have been instrumental in driving impactful research collaborations and ensuring the sustainability of impact initiatives.

Recipient organisations formed c.7.9k new or unique partnerships over the course of the two rounds of IAA funding (3,647 new partnerships in Round 1 and 4,209 unique partnerships in Round 2)¹⁷. The following table sets out the total number and types of partnerships that Round 2 ESRC IAA recipients secured.

This highlights that there are more than 4.6k strategic partnerships across the different IAA recipients, highlighting the reach of IAA funded social science research. IAA-funded projects

¹⁷ ESRC IAA Round 1 & Round 2 Monitoring Data, Round 2 ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts 2019-2023 End of Award Summary Report

have facilitated the development of long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with partners from diverse sectors, including industry, government, and charities and more.

These strategic partnerships have not only provided researchers with access to valuable expertise and resources but have also opened new avenues for knowledge exchange and co-creation of research.

Table 6.1: ESRC IAA Round 2 Strategic Partnerships

Type of Partnership		Count
NGO / INGO / Nonprofit / Charity		1,475
Industry or Business	All	776
	SME	475
	Other	158
	Large Corporation	143
Government	All	740
	Local	268
	National Government	230
	International Government	176
	Devolved Government	66
Public Sector	All	587
	Services	141
	Other	446
Research Organisation Staff	All	493
	Academic	458
	Non-academic	35
Third sector		198
Other ESRC IAA		97
Training		26
Other		258

Source: ESRC IAA Round 2 Monitoring Data

The case study overleaf sets out an example of how ESRC IAA funding has enhanced end user engagement and strategic partnerships at recipient institutions.

Case Study: The Impact of ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Funding on End User Engagement and Strategic Partnerships at the University of Southampton

ESRC IAA funding has had an impact on the approach to end user engagement and strategic partnerships in social sciences at the University of Southampton. The IAA has enabled researchers to collaborate with businesses, industry, and policymakers, fostering meaningful relationships and delivering impactful outcomes.

One of the key initiatives supported by the IAA funding is the development of innovative networking and brokering opportunities. For example, the University of Southampton introduced a "business speed dating" event, which provided a novel way for academics to engage with businesses and understand how their research can address industry needs. This event has led to improved processes for businesses, resulting in continued collaborations.

The IAA funding has also been instrumental in upskilling early career researchers and PhD students. By working with other universities that do not have access to IAA money, Southampton has been able to extend the reach of IAA funding and create opportunities for skills development across institutions. This collaborative approach has strengthened the university's strategic partnerships and enhanced the overall impact of the IAA.

Through IAA funding, the University of Southampton has had collaborations with a range of university partners, local and national government, and a range of international partners.

Material Citizenship Skills Enhancement Programme

One notable example of the IAA's impact on end user engagement is the [Material Citizenship Skills Enhancement Programme](#), developed by Health Sciences researchers at Southampton in collaboration with Brendoncare, a registered charity with care homes across southern England.

- This innovative training project, piloted online in 2020 during the Covid19 pandemic, aimed to improve the quality of life for older people in long-term care by making care home workers more aware of the benefits of everyday objects in person-centred care. The programme was adopted by two Brendoncare care homes and generated interest from other care home providers.
- The IAA funding enabled the researchers to develop the programme, deliver it to staff at the Brendoncare care homes, conduct follow-up interviews, identify the need for additional sessions and secured further funding.
- The training programme has now been licenced as social enterprise WISER Health and Social Care¹⁸
- The programme has had a tangible impact on the lives of care home residents, with one manager crediting the training with improving their practice and making care home staff feel good about their work and the difference they can make.

¹⁸ [ESRC, University of Southampton, Material Citizenship](#)

People First Dorset Collaboration

Another example of successful end user engagement supported by the IAA is the collaboration between Southampton researchers and [People First Dorset](#) (PFD) to ensure that day service clients with learning difficulties can easily access and understand information outlining the transition of day services¹⁹. The IAA funding has:

- Enabled the creation of Easy Read information sheets, online workshops and the exploration of the best ways to disseminate the materials to a wider audience.
- Informed new work, with the researchers securing additional funding to enhance the involvement of people with profound and multiple learning disabilities and their families in self-advocacy and research.
- Led to new partnerships forming, expanding the reach of these supportive resources and has led to exploration of new areas for support e.g. financial advocacy.

ESRC IAA funding has had a significant impact on the University of Southampton's end user engagement and strategic partnerships. By supporting innovative networking events, upskilling early career researchers, and facilitating collaborations with industry and community partners, the IAA has enabled researchers to deliver meaningful, impactful outcomes that improve the lives of end users and strengthen the university's relationships with key stakeholders.

Further, the establishment of dedicated roles, such as business engagement managers and technology transfer officers, has further strengthened the ability of ROs to identify and build on their strategic partnerships. These roles have been crucial in aligning research priorities with the needs and interests of external partners, ensuring that the outcomes of collaborative projects are impactful.

As exhibited in the case study, the strategic partnerships fostered through IAA-funded projects have also led to tangible benefits for ROs, such as follow-on funding opportunities, enhanced reputation, and increased influence in policy and practice domains. These partnerships have laid the foundation for long-term, sustainable collaborations that extend beyond the duration of individual projects.

6.3. Key Findings

The ESRC IAA funding has been instrumental in enhancing end user engagement and fostering strategic partnerships between ROs and various stakeholders, ultimately leading to more impactful and collaborative research.

- Interview findings suggest that ESRC IAA funding has facilitated increased engagement with non-academic partners, including businesses, industry, NGOs, and government agencies, leading to the co-creation of impactful research and collaborations.

¹⁹ ESRC, University of Southampton, [SelfBuildingOurLives](#)

- **90% of survey respondents feel that the ESRC IAAs have increased their engagement and awareness of the end users and beneficiaries of research, while 88% have experienced an increased quantity and quality of research collaborations with industry, government, and/or third sector organisations.**
- ROs have leveraged IAA funding to establish dedicated business engagement roles, commercialisation managers, and technology transfer officers, supporting the translation of research into practical applications and fostering industry partnerships.
- Strategic partnerships developed through IAA-funded projects have led to follow-on funding opportunities, sustained collaborations, and long-term advisory roles for researchers, with some ROs reporting an increase in commercialisation activities.
- IAA funding has allowed ROs to embed more end-user and beneficiary activities into their annual events, build new relationships with end-users and beneficiaries outside of academia, engage with more commercial partners and businesses, and build more strategic relationships with end-users.
- The IAA funding has created a culture of high impact partnerships and a cultural shift in how partnerships are viewed across institutions, with a general increase in the breadth and scope of partners that researchers engage with.
- Recipient organisations formed approximately 7.9k new or unique partnerships over the course of the two rounds of IAA funding), highlighting the reach of IAA-funded social science research²⁰.
- The establishment of dedicated roles, such as business engagement managers and technology transfer officers, has further strengthened the ability of ROs to identify and build on their strategic partnerships, aligning research priorities with the needs and interests of external partners.

The ESRC IAA funding has been a catalyst for building strong, mutually beneficial relationships between ROs and end users, driving impactful collaborations and ensuring the sustainability of research outcomes.

²⁰ ESRC IAA Round 1 & Round 2 Monitoring Data, Round 2 ESRC Impact Acceleration Accounts 2019-2023 End of Award Summary Report

7. Overarching Institutional Impact

ESRC IAA funding has had a profound impact on social sciences within ROs across the UK, driving institutional changes that have elevated the importance of KEI activities, and highlighting the value of impact in social science research.

“Having a dedicated UKRI ESRC IAA fund which stood separate to the other research councils IAA funding pots allowed humanities to have an equal share of funding in a landscape which can often prioritise STEM subjects. Shining a light on the exceptional work of our social science researchers has boosted morale and allowed opportunities for ECR workshops and talks that might otherwise not have been possible.”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

One of the most significant effects of the IAA funding has been the heightened profile and recognition of social science research within ROs. The success of IAA-funded projects has encouraged cross-disciplinary collaboration and fostered a broader appreciation of the societal impact potential of these fields. This is further set out through the case study exploring the impact of the ESRC IAA at Cardiff University.

The Transformative Impact of ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) Funding at Cardiff University

Cardiff University has been a recipient of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) funding since 2014, which has had a real impact on the institution's ability to translate social science research into tangible benefits for society and the economy. The £1.2 million in Round 2 funding received between 2018 and 2023 has been instrumental in accelerating the impact of research projects through collaborations with public, private, and third sector organisations.

Through the ESRC IAA funding, Cardiff University has²¹:

- Funded **222 projects**.
- Made more than **50 documented policy changes** inspired by ESRC projects.
- Worked with **210 partners**.

The IAA has facilitated a wide range of initiatives that have enhanced Cardiff University's capacity to engage with external partners and disseminate research findings to diverse audiences. One notable example is the Festival of Social Sciences (FoSS)²², an annual event that showcases the work of social sciences across the UK. The IAA has provided

²¹<https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/work-with-us/use-our-expertise/funded-opportunities/impact-acceleration-accounts/economic-and-social-research-council-esrc-impact-acceleration-account>

²² Festival of Social Science: Cardiff University (Online) Available at: <https://www.cardiff.ac.uk/festival-of-social-sciences>

ongoing support for this and other public engagement activities, enabling researchers to reach a wider audience with their research impacts.

The funding has also been crucial in fostering partnerships with policymakers, as illustrated by the recent appointment of a New Knowledge Exchange Manager. This role, a collaboration between the Senedd (Welsh Parliament), Swansea University, and Cardiff University, aims to strengthen the engagement between the research community and the Welsh government, ensuring that policy decisions are informed by the latest social science research.

Moreover, the IAA has supported regional innovation and city-region working through initiatives such as the Local Acceleration Fund (LAF). This has allowed Cardiff University to contribute to the economic and social development of the surrounding area, using research expertise to address local challenges and opportunities.

Capacity building and career development have been key focus areas for the IAA funding. Programmes such as Spring into Innovation 2024 and Summer of Innovation 2023 have provided training and support for both professional services and academic colleagues, equipping them with the skills and knowledge needed to maximise the impact of their research. The hosting of the AESIS (Societal Impact of Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts) conference at Cardiff University's innovation campus in 2023 further demonstrates the institution's commitment to fostering a culture of innovation and impact.

The IAA has also been instrumental in supporting commercialisation activities, such as the CRoSS initiative (Commercialising Research out of Social Sciences) and funding for ASPECT 3.0 membership, a platform for entrepreneurship, commercialisation, and transformation in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. This support has been particularly valuable for early career researchers and those with limited experience in innovation and commercialisation, providing them with the seed funding and resources needed to translate their research into commercial opportunities.

Networking opportunities funded by the IAA, such as the Women Angels of Wales event in 2023, have enabled researchers to connect with Angel investors and pitch their research-based commercialisation ideas. This has opened new avenues for funding and collaboration, further enhancing impact of social science research.

The IAA funding has also leveraged additional support from partners, often in the form of in-kind contributions. One example is the Knowledge Exchange Partnerships and Secondments scheme (KEPSs), which has facilitated the exchange of knowledge and expertise between Cardiff University academics and external organisations.

The ESRC IAA funding has had a transformative impact on Cardiff University, enabling the institution to accelerate the impact of its social science research and engage with a wide range of stakeholders. The funding has supported public engagement, policy partnerships, regional innovation, capacity building, commercialisation, and networking opportunities, creating a vibrant ecosystem of innovation and impact. As a result, Cardiff University is well-positioned to continue making significant contributions to social science research impact, across the UK and internationally.

This review highlights how ESRC IAA funding has also played a crucial role in aligning KEI activities with institutional strategies and priorities. By positioning these endeavours as integral components of the institutions' long-term vision, the IAA has ensured that impact-driven research receives the necessary support and resources to thrive. This alignment has been further reinforced by the integration of KEI considerations into institutional policies, progression criteria, and research designs, fostering a culture of impact-driven research across all levels of the academic community.

The partnerships and impact track record developed through IAA-supported projects have given ROs a competitive edge in securing follow-on funding and achieving research objectives. The ability to demonstrate the real-world impact of their research has strengthened the position of ROs in funding applications and has attracted the interest of potential collaborators and stakeholders.

ROs have used IAA funding to facilitate the development of international partnerships and collaborations, expanding the reach and impact of research beyond domestic contexts. These global connections have opened new avenues for knowledge exchange, enabling ROs to contribute to addressing global challenges and enhancing their international reputation.

“[The ESRC IAA] has helped people to think beyond the boundaries of their single projects and think about their work as more of a trajectory and ongoing process...”

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

ESRC IAA funding has had a transformative effect on ROs, driving institutional changes that have prioritised and embedded KEI activities within the fabric of these institutions. The funding has elevated the profile of social science research, aligned KEI with institutional strategies, fostered a culture of impact-driven research, and facilitated international collaborations. While challenges remain in ensuring the financial sustainability of impact initiatives, the IAA has laid a strong foundation for ROs to continue building upon the successes achieved thus far.

7.1. Key Findings

The ESRC IAA funding has had a transformative impact on social sciences within ROs across the UK, driving institutional changes that have prioritised and embedded KEI activities.

- One of the most significant effects of the IAA funding has been the heightened profile and recognition of social science research within ROs, encouraging cross-disciplinary collaboration and fostering a broader appreciation of the societal impact potential of these fields.
- The IAA funding has played a crucial role in aligning KEI activities with institutional strategies and priorities, ensuring that impact-driven research receives the necessary support and resources to thrive.
- The integration of KEI considerations into institutional policies, progression criteria, and research designs has fostered a culture of impact-driven research across all levels of the academic community.

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- Partnerships and impact track records developed through IAA-supported projects have given ROs a competitive edge in securing follow-on funding and achieving research objectives, strengthening their position in funding applications and attracting the interest of potential collaborators and stakeholders.
 - IAA funding has facilitated the development of international partnerships and collaborations, expanding the reach and impact of research beyond domestic contexts and enabling ROs to contribute to addressing global challenges and enhancing their international reputation.

The ESRC IAA funding has laid a strong foundation for ROs to continue building upon the success of impact in social sciences, driving institutional changes that have prioritised and embedded KEI activities within the strategies, policies and structure of institutions.

8. Conclusion

This review highlights the significant impact that the first two rounds of the ESRC IAA programme have had on recipient ROs across several key themes: Knowledge Exchange and Impact Culture, Sustainability of Support, Creativity and Flexibility, End User Engagement and Strategic Partnerships, Overarching Institutional Impact.

ESRC IAA funding has been a major catalyst for positive culture change within ROs regarding KEI in the social sciences disciplines. The funding has facilitated the development of vital institutional infrastructure, fostered interdisciplinary collaboration, and increased academic engagement and recognition of KEI activities. Notably, 98% of survey respondents agree that the ESRC IAAs have provided them with new opportunities for KEI research, while 92% agree that the IAAs have made them more likely to consider KEI when designing their research.

"[The ESRC IAAs] helped provide grant funding to researchers so impact became an opportunity rather than something that just has to be done."

ESRC IAA Recipient
(Round 1 and Round 2)

In terms of sustainability of support, ESRC IAA funding recipients have expressed confidence in the longevity of the changes facilitated by the IAAs, with many ROs transitioning IAA-funded initiatives to permanent funding sources. Through Round 1 and Round 2, recipient ROs have leveraged £31.8m in-kind and an additional £24.4m in cash contributions, nearly matching the original core IAA funding of £56.5m. The IAAs have also provided pathways towards further funding, with Round 2 leading to over £52m in follow-on funding from non-IAA sources.

The ESRC IAA funding has been pivotal in promoting creativity and flexibility in KEI activities, enabling ROs to respond swiftly to emerging opportunities and pursue innovative approaches. Through Round 2, ESRC IAAs funded approximately 700 events, reaching more than 3 million attendees. The funding has facilitated the testing of new models, supported a diverse range of projects, and encouraged the adoption of "fast failure" strategies, fostering a culture of innovation and responsiveness.

The IAA funding has been instrumental in enhancing end user engagement and fostering strategic partnerships between recipient ROs and various stakeholders. 90% of survey respondents feel that the ESRC IAAs have increased their engagement with and awareness of end users and beneficiaries of research, while 88% have experienced an increased quantity and quality of research collaborations with industry, government, and / or third sector organisations. Recipient organisations formed approximately 7.9k new or unique partnerships over the course of the two funding rounds (3,647 in Round 1 and 4,209 in Round 2), highlighting the extensive reach and impact of IAA-funded social science research.

Finally, ESRC IAAs have had a transformative impact on the overarching institutional landscape, driving changes that have prioritised and embedded KEI activities within the recipient ROs. The funding has elevated the profile of social science research, aligned KEI

with institutional strategies, and fostered a culture of impact-driven research across all levels of the academic community.

In conclusion, the review highlights the impact that the ESRC IAA programme has had in driving sustainable KEI practices, enabling the progression of impactful research outputs, fostering innovation and responsiveness, strengthening end user engagement and strategic partnerships, and to some extent, transforming the institutional landscape of social science research in the UK ROs. The programme has laid a strong foundation for ROs to continue building upon the successes achieved thus far, ensuring that social science research continues to deliver meaningful impacts benefits to society and the economy.

Appendices

Table A: Theory of Change and Impact Framework

Context and Rationale	Theory, Purpose, Objectives
<p>Research Organisations (ROs) are increasingly expected to play a greater role in translating research into real world benefits. However, ROs require support to build capacity and capability to translate research into impact, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Capacity Development: building the skills and understanding needed to transform research into tangible societal and economic benefits. - Purposeful Impact: planning impact with clear intentions, ensuring alignment with institutional and funder objectives. - Institutional Changes: monitoring post-funding outcomes, to assess the lasting effects of institutional changes. 	<p>ESRC IAA Theory: Providing strategic, targeted yet flexible funding to ESRC funded ROs with an excellent social science research base will increase their capacity and capability to respond to impact opportunities in flexible, responsive and creative ways.</p> <p>ESRC IAA Purpose: to support and enhance RO capacity and capability to deliver impact from social science research.</p> <p>ESRC IAA Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - to strengthen engagement with users in order to accelerate the translation of research outputs into impacts. - to support, develop and foster strategic partnerships for knowledge exchange and impact, including across disciplines and sectors. - to build and maintain an environment and culture which enables effective and ambitious knowledge exchange and impact, including development of skills, capacity and capability within research organisations. - to provide early-stage support for progressing research outputs towards the next stages in the impact pipeline, for example proof of concept projects, commercialisation, market validation or activities targeting policy, business and the third sectors. - to drive continuous improvement in impact by supporting innovation, enabling ‘fast failure’ and capturing learning through appropriate mechanisms. - to empower institutions with flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact, including the ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities.

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
<p>ESRC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IAA Funding • Impact Guidance • Investment Management • Specific-purpose Webinars • Annual IAA conferences • Additional Strategic Investments (top-up funds) • Regional ESRC IAA networks <p>ROs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IAA Management Resources • Processes and Policies (pre-funding) • Research • Match funding (strategic funding uplifts, other grants) towards the impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Running of funding processes • Advice / guidance to external organisations • Engaging users and forging strategic partnerships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Network development - Social science events • Knowledge Exchange <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaborative seminars, conferences, workshops, placements and secondments • Commercialisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increasing economic impact through licensing, new commercial and social venture creation • Monitoring and evaluation activities • Training / mentoring for academic and KEI staff • Institutional strategy development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • # projects supported via IAA processes • # new partners participating in collaborative projects / proposals (14/17 reporting) • # new or improved models for business, policy or practice • # impact reports • # impact strategies / policies in place • # papers on KEI approaches / methods • # spinouts created • # new products processes and services • £ university match funding secured through IAA processes • # and £ PoC projects • £ external investment in spinouts / social enterprises / joint ventures • £ external income secured from non-academic sources (e.g., through consultancy) • # RO staff trained • # CPD programmes developed • 	<p>To strengthen engagement with users in order to accelerate the translation of research outputs into impacts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stronger engagement on impact with users / beneficiaries. • Increased use of research by stakeholders and / or beneficiaries. • Greater awareness and understanding of research users / beneficiaries. <p>To support, develop and foster strategic partnerships for knowledge exchange and impact, including across disciplines and sectors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New creative and productive strategic KE / impact partnerships developed. • Increased quality of partnerships with industry, government and third sector organisations. <p>To build and maintain an environment and culture which enables effective and ambitious knowledge exchange and impact, including development of skills, capacity and capability within research organisations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More conducive and sustainable environment and culture for ambitious knowledge exchange and impact created.

- New / improved institutional impact strategy, policy or practice.
- Improved capability for monitoring and evaluation at an institutional level

To provide early-stage support for progressing research outputs towards the next stages in the impact pipeline, for example proof of concept projects, commercialisation, market validation or activities targeting policy, business and the third sectors.

- Improved quality of proposals / research applications.

To drive continuous improvement in impact by supporting innovation, enabling 'fast failure' and capturing learning through appropriate mechanisms.

- New processes and mechanisms in place to support progress along impact pipeline.

To empower institutions with flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact, including the ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities.

- New processes for impact / KE are embedded and effective.
 - More sustainable and diverse sources of impact / KE funding secured.
 - More flexible and adaptive approaches to knowledge exchange and impact are embedded.
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