



RESEARCH
COUNCILS UK

Research Outcomes System

Principles of Use

Introduction

The seven UK Research Councils have been working together to agree a common approach for gathering quantitative and qualitative evidence of the outcomes and impact of their investments. This information is key to the Councils strengthening their evidence base for strategy development, and crucial in demonstrating the benefits of Research Council work to society and the economy.

Research Councils expect researchers to provide this information under the terms and conditions of research council funding, but wish to move away from collecting this information only at the termination of funding agreements and, instead, establish an ongoing dialogue with the research community which allows outcomes to be reported at any point within the funding agreement and beyond. This recognises that outcomes and impacts from research can be realised some time after funding agreements have been completed and final grant reporting processes therefore provide an incomplete picture of the resulting outcome/impact.

Four of the research councils (AHRC, BBSRC, EPSRC and ESRC – referred to as ‘the research councils’ throughout this document) have agreed to use the same collection platform: The Research Outcomes System (ROS, which will be referred to as the ‘system’ throughout this document).

This document aims to communicate the objectives of data collection through the Research Outcomes System and explain how the collected data will be used / will not be used and under what conditions researchers are asked to submit data.

The Principles of Use are also expected to form part of the application guidance for the new system.

1. Objectives for the collection of research outcomes

The system will:

- Hold data items which will allow Research Councils to improve the evidence base for defending and maintaining public investment in research in the UK
- Become the preferred method for capturing data on the outputs and outcomes from research funded by the Research Councils
- Allow outcomes and impacts to be captured beyond the end of the grant, vastly improving the snapshot currently available from the final report

- Be easy to use, allowing data to be entered quickly, and maintaining the reduced burden on the research community compared with previous processes
- Be harmonised across Research Councils, producing efficiencies through not having to enter data into different systems and in different formats
- Enable research organisations to cross-attribute outcomes against funding from more than one Research Council
- Take account of and where possible accommodate the reporting requirements of other bodies, for example the UK Funding Councils' Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data returns.

2. Expected use / non-use of the data

The following identifies common uses for the data captured in the system by the Research Councils:

- The system will help to provide more accurate and comprehensive data than existing methods, leading to improved reporting both internally and to the UK Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), including reporting within the Performance Management Framework. It is envisaged that this would provide government with a sounder evidence base with which to justify ongoing funding levels.
- The Research Councils (RCs) need to collect evidence to produce case studies, often in specific areas of research. In these instances, individual data may be used to demonstrate key outputs and outcomes from RC funded research. Research organisations should be aware that data and commentary provided through the system may be quoted by Research Councils - in full or in part and it will be assumed that research organisations consent to this.
- Analysis of the outputs and outcomes from different modes of Research Council funding, specific initiatives, grant schemes or programmes will be provided for consideration by Research Council Strategy Boards. This will give Research Councils the evidence to make better informed, strategic decisions.
- To facilitate the analysis of outcomes and impact over time for all grants funded by the Research Councils and to identify emerging impacts earlier than current ad-hoc methods.
- The Research Councils may contact researchers or their research organisation for further information if more detail or clarification is required. Where this is the case, it will always be explained how this information is to be used. For example, when requesting further information to compile a case study or to revise any data that contravenes the Data Protection Act 1998.
- The system will provide an evidence base to inform evaluation exercises, offering opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of current evaluation procedures.
- The information gathered in the system may also be accessed by external peer reviewers for quality review at the final reporting stage.
- The Research Councils may make data available for public use, either directly or as part of the data.gov.uk initiative. Data may be made available in detailed form or may be aggregated at various levels (e.g. grant scheme, strategic

initiative, field of research with other funding agencies or research organisations, or as part of joint evaluation studies).

- Research organisations will have access to the raw outcome data associated with their affiliated researchers and grants.

These are areas where the data will not be used:

- The Research Councils do not intend to use the collected data to judge the performance of individual researchers. This is seen as the responsibility of the researcher's direct employer. However, it may be used as one of a number of inputs providing information on track record for the peer review of any subsequent research proposals.
- The Research Councils do not intend to use the collected data to judge the performance of individual research organisations or departments. This is the responsibility of the Funding Councils, previously managed via the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and in future through the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Note that this does not preclude collected data being used by other stakeholders to inform the REF or other evaluation exercises.
- The Research Councils will not sell the data captured in the system to third parties.
- The Research Councils will not use the data or publish the data in reports to draw comparisons between the outcomes from individual researchers.
- The system will not be used as a publically accessible repository of content, although it may provide access into existing Research Council repositories.
- The system will not capture finance information relating to the grant, this will continue to be captured via the Final Expenditure Statement process.
- The system will not contain the detail to produce comprehensive case studies; where these are required, individual Research Councils may request additional information from the researcher or research organisation.

3. Compliance with relevant legislation

1. The Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)

The system will comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998 with regard to the collection, storage, processing and disclosure of personal information and is committed to upholding the Act's core data protection principles.

It is intended that the system will only collect information that is or would be available in the public domain. If personal information is disclosed it is the responsibility of the research organisation's submission / validation process to ensure this information is amended or removed. However, if data of this nature are identified, the Research Councils will, in conjunction with the research organisation, revise or delete the data as appropriate.

2. Freedom of Information

The system aims to be as open as possible in informing others how the Research Councils conduct their business through publications, websites and face-to-face discussions. The RCUK Freedom of Information policy applies to

the data collected and held within the system. One of the key principles of the system is that researchers and their host institutions are asked only to provide information that is already (or soon will be) in the public domain.

Researchers are advised to ensure that they do not disclose data that contravenes agreements they may have with the Research Councils or third parties, that is sensitive or may, in some other way, be considered confidential. Further guidance can be sought from unit administrators or university research support offices.

Information provided to the Research Councils via the system may be made available in response to a request, except where there is a good reason not to do so in line with relevant exemptions under the Act.

3. Disability Discrimination Act

The system will provide accessibility options in accordance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and meet the guidelines and web standards agreed by the Central Office of Information (COI) for UK public sector websites.

4. Local Research Council Policies

Research Councils also have an agreed, cross-Council Information Charter as well as their own, local, Information Security Policies.