

Consultation: Informing the future strategic direction of the Economic and Social Research Council

Response template

This template has two sections: Section A ('About you') and Section B (containing the eleven questions from the ESRC consultation document).

Please send responses to strategicconversation@esrc.ac.uk by **16.00 on 15 July 2014**.

Section A: About you

It would help us to understand the consultation responses if you could answer the following questions. This information will not be used to identify you and will be reported in aggregate form only.

1. Where did you hear about this consultation?

(please tick all that apply)

- | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Direct invite/email | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Colleague or friend | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other social media | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| eNews/Society Now | <input type="checkbox"/> | Twitter | <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (please specify) | |
| ESRC website | <input type="checkbox"/> | Facebook | <input type="checkbox"/> | _____ | |

2. Have you had previous contact or worked with the ESRC before, if so in what capacity?

(please tick all that apply and indicate for how long have you had this contact /relationship)

- | | Tick if yes | No. of years |
|--|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Applicant | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| ESRC award holder | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| ESRC Doctoral Student | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| Collaborator/Partner | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Partner on grant |
| User of research | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| Member of ESRC Committee / Panel/Peer review college | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| Subscriber to ESRC publications/events | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| Interested public | <input type="checkbox"/> | Click here to enter text. |
| Other (please specify) _____ | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Learned Society |

3. Which option best describes your organisation/sector of work?

(please select one option)

- | | | | | | |
|------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Higher Education | <input type="checkbox"/> | Charity/Third Sector | <input type="checkbox"/> | Business/Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Government | <input type="checkbox"/> | Learned society | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | School/college | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Parliament | <input type="checkbox"/> | Think tank | <input type="checkbox"/> | Retired | <input type="checkbox"/> |

General public Other (please specify) _____

4. What word best describes your role?

(please select one option)

Researcher	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Administrator	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Journalist/
Teacher/lecturer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Consultant	<input type="checkbox"/>	communications <input type="checkbox"/>
Student	<input type="checkbox"/>	Director/CEO	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify)
Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>	Independent	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

5. Where do you live?

England
Wales
Scotland
Northern Ireland
Outside UK (please specify) _____

6. Could you clarify if you are responding:

As an individual

On behalf of an organisation

If an organisation, which one? ___Royal Geographical Societ (with IBG)_____

Section B: Your consultation responses

Name: Dr Catherine Souch

Email: c.souch@rgs.org

Job Title: Head Research and Higher Education

Organisation: Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

Question 1: In which areas of activity, and/or in what ways, do you judge that the ESRC currently adds most value?

ESRC adds most value in its 'traditional' roles – research grants to support thematic and blue-skies research; training for the next generation of scholars; and funding of centres and infrastructure for longitudinal socio-economic surveys. In terms of newer initiatives, ESRC's recent (recognising this has been ongoing) leadership in quantitative social science training (at undergraduate and advanced research level including the Q-Step initiative) and the capital bid to enhance social science infrastructure and the establishment of the UK Data Service are particularly notable.

ESRC does, and must, support and encourage critical, independent social science research from a broad range of disciplinary and multi-disciplinary perspectives.

Question 2: Looking ahead, and in the context of on-going funding constraints and our commitment to make best use of public funding, what would you like to see us doing differently, better, more or less of?

We encourage ESRC to continue to support its traditional areas of strength (research grants; training of doctoral students; social and economic data and infrastructure) and to work with others, collaboratively, particularly in the realms of public engagement and work with schools.

Many of the fields supported by ESRC benefit from a spatial (geographical) focus. We encourage ESRC to invest more in this and to recognise the contributions that result from consideration at different spatial scales – community, local, regional – as well as national and international.

We also encourage ESRC not to be unduly UK focused and to recognise, and support, international and comparative work. Members of the geographical community have pointed out before the importance of research on the global south that goes beyond the global south as a problem (poverty alleviation or international resilience/disasters) recognising what can be learnt from social organisations/civic experiences, managing and responding to environmental challenges, the diversity of local experiences etc.

Question 3: What do you anticipate will be the major priorities requiring a response from social science over the next five to ten year period? Please suggest **up to** three priorities in each of the areas of activity set out in the table below

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3

Research	<p>Future Cities - change and resilience</p> <p>Social diversity and population dynamics</p>	<p>Regional inequality in the context of global restructuring</p> <p>Emerging and developing economies (beyond the rising powers), economic and political agendas</p>	<p>Water, energy and food resilience</p> <p>Low carbon economy – social, cultural and economic implications</p>
Data infrastructure	Sustain and invest in longitudinal studies	Small area data	Big/open/geo-data
Social science capability	Quantitative skills	Sustaining and developing capacity across ALL social science disciplines	Languages/field based skills to extend international expertise and focus
Non-academic partnerships and knowledge exchange	Work more closely with Learned Societies recognizing their capabilities are different and compatible to ESRC and university-based academic community.		
International	Extend the breadth of international engagement	Develop capacity of next generation of scholars to work internationally and interdisciplinarily	

Question 4: How can we better enable interdisciplinary working in the social sciences, and between the social sciences and other areas of the science base?

The large projects supported by ESRC are inevitably inter-disciplinary; what is most important is to support/encourage early career researchers to be involved in such initiatives.

We encourage ESRC to continue to pay attention to the peer review process for interdisciplinary grants, taking care to allow for differences between reviewers/assessors from different disciplines in terms of perspectives, approaches and what is valued.

Question 5: In which areas of activity, in particular, should ESRC promote innovative approaches?

We note some social scientists seem to do better in EPSRC than ESRC. We encourage ESRC to investigate why and to adopt appropriate approaches.

Question 6: What value does ESRC's role in funding major infrastructure investment have for you or your organisation? How might this value be maximised?

The role of ESRC in supporting UK data services, longitudinal studies, advances in methodologies to collect small area data are very significant for the geographical community.

Question 7: What roles should ESRC play in the development of social science capability and skills? (Please also provide input on the priority areas for developing social science capability under Q3)

ESRC has a key role both in provision and in leading/collaborating with others. Recent collaborations around quantitative skills are notable here. Opportunities also exist in areas such as language skills and training.

Question 8: How might our strategic relationships with universities and other research organisations be developed further?

ESRC needs to maintain independence as a funder and to work closely with a breadth of organisations, learned societies included, to engage communities with the process of research, findings and their uptake/implications.

Question 9: How can we further strengthen our relationships with our partners beyond academia, particularly in the business area?

We reiterate our comments about working with learned societies, particularly those which are also professional bodies who have strong links with business, not for profit, and government organisations.

Members of the community have highlighted (i) challenges for many businesses of donating time freely; (ii) the length of time for peer review/decision making (for some businesses this is seen to be slow and can be a disincentive to partnership).

Question 10: How should we engage stakeholders in identifying longer-term research, infrastructure and capacity priorities?

Consult widely and use intermediaries.

Question 11: Are there challenges introduced by the co-production of knowledge and partnership working that we should take notice of?

This requires a very particular set of skills, which include but are not limited to multidisciplinary /multi-partner working. These are skills that need to be embedded at early career stages and positively encouraged.

See comments in 9.

Please limit your response to maximum four sides of A4 (excluding the table).

Thank you for taking time to contribute to this consultation.

We value your input and advice.