Final Report

Global Challenges Research Fund Evaluation

Module: Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Poverty
Audit

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List of acronyms and abbreviations

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Centre
AMS	Academy of Medical Sciences
BA	British Academy
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
BEIS	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (formerly BIS)
CI	Co-investigator
Covid-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DEFNI	Department for the Economy Northern Ireland
DFID	Department for International Development
DP	Delivery Partner
EDI	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCO	Foreign & Commonwealth Office
FLAIR	Future Leaders African Independent Research
GAM	Gender Analysis Marker
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GE	Gender Equality
GEDI	Gender Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
GESIP	Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Poverty (Alleviation)
GtR	Gateway to Research
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEPSSA	Higher Education Partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IPP	International Partnership Programme
KII	Key Informant Interview
KPI	Key Performance Indicator

LMIC	Low and Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MEQ	Main Evaluation Question
MRC	Medical Research Council
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PI	Principal Investigator
R&I	Research and Innovation
RAEng	Royal Academy of Engineering
RODA	Reporting Official Development Assistance
RS	Royal Society
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SI	Social Inclusion
STFC	Science and Technology Facilities Council
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
UKSA	UK Space Agency
VfM	Value for Money

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Executive summary

The approach to the combined gender, social inclusion and poverty (GESIP) module of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) evaluation is a 'social audit'. This audit assesses the extent to which poverty, inequality and other forms of social exclusion (including disability) are addressed in the planned outcomes and the pathways to impact of (GCRF) programmes and investments.

The audit accompanies three other modules (each of which is focused on the topics of management, relevance and fairness) in seeking to review the £1.5 billion United Kingdom (UK) government fund – established in late 2015 to support cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. The GCRF forms part of the UK's official development assistance (ODA) commitment and contributes to the achievement of the UK's 2015 aid strategy's goals.

The GCRF ensures that UK science takes a leading role in addressing the challenges faced by developing countries while also developing the UK's ability to deliver cutting-edge research and innovation (R&I) for sustainable development. The GCRF is implemented by 17 of the UK's R&I funders, which commission R&I as delivery partners (DPs).

Background

The national policy discourse on ODA has been evolving since GCRF started in 2015. Several significant changes have taken place since 2020, with the implications for GCRF still emerging. First, in February 2020 the UK government announced the Integrated Review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development. Second, the merger in August 2020 of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and Department for International Development (DFID) into the new Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) is expected to be central to the delivery of this emerging vision.

In parallel, a number of reviews have provided insights from which to explore the broader aspects of GESIP across the GESIP ecosystem. The 'Foundation Evaluation of GCRF', the 'BEIS Gender Equality Review of GCRF and Newton Fund' and external evidence reviews conducted by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) on the key challenges for equality, diversity and inclusion in the UK and internationally[1] collectively show that the GCRF's policies and systems did not directly address GESIP issues at the inception of the fund, although all three dimensions are implicit in its objectives and goals. This audit continues and builds on the trajectory of these previous reviews.

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[1] Itad (2019), Tetra Tech (2020), Guyan & Oloyede (2019) and Moody & Aldercotte (2019) respectively.

Methodology

The GESIP audit was designed to provide an audit of the organisational layers of GCRF, with a particular focus on a sample of DPs and award holders. The audit assesses how: strategies, policies and processes have provided a consistent strategic focus for GESIP; what expertise is available to support award holders integrate GESIP issues into their research; how far monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) activities are supporting improvements in capturing the GESIP dimensions of research outcomes; and the extent to which the GESIP dimensions of research are being communicated and disseminated across GCRF and externally.

The GESIP Audit addresses four sub-evaluation questions (EQs) – each of which also included considerations for adapting to Covid-19.

- EQ 1. How is gender equality mainstreaming currently being strengthened throughout the fund?
- EQ 2. How effectively is poverty framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?
- EQ 3. How effectively is social inclusion framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?
- EQ 4. Recommendations: How can the targeting (poverty), gender sensitivity and social inclusion of GCRF be improved?

The audit draws upon four bodies of evidence: a DP literature review (313 documents from 16 DPs), an assessment of award topics (1143 awards reviewed using data science techniques), an award-level audit (201 documents across 54 awards, and engaging 45 female and 49 male award holders), and two co-creation workshops (a dozen participants).

Findings and conclusions

The conclusions below demonstrate that the GCRF ecosystem, as it currently stands, is moving positively towards an improved compliance culture in relation to ODA expectations on GESIP. Shifts in this direction are more evident with respect to gender equality concerns, and to a lesser extent across social inclusion/Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (SI/EDI) concerns. Compliance concerns regarding the framing and addressing of 'poverty' are shown to be the least fulfilled and fairly problematic.

The conclusions also show that some of the recommendations of the Tetra Tech 'Review of Approaches to Gender Equality' report (2020) and the EDI reviews (2019) have been gaining momentum.[2] For example, the positive trajectory of growth leading towards comprehensive systems, policies, expertise and MEL systems for GESIP-related compliance is demonstrating opportunities for improvement and consolidation (Tetra Tech recommendations 1–3). Gaining traction on the fourth recommendation of the Tetra Tech report ('dedicated senior management capacity, sufficient resourcing and clear accountabilities at all levels to design, implement, monitor and adapt the approach') will also be particularly challenging given challenges noted around the strategic development and maintenance of GESIP-related expertise, capacity building and monitoring systems.

Overall, although there are pockets of promising or best practice across all GESIP areas, there is still some way to go before GCRF can foreseeably demonstrate a shift from a culture of ODA

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[2] **Recommendation 1**: BEIS should develop a clear, coherent approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion at the ODA portfolio level.
Recommendation 2: BEIS should institute a systematic approach to learning, clearly differentiating between internal and external functions at key stages in the fund management cycle.
Recommendation 3: BEIS should develop a fund level approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion that is tailored to each of the funds.
Recommendation 4: BEIS should ensure there is dedicated senior management capacity, sufficient resourcing and clear accountabilities at all levels to design, implement, monitor and adapt the approach.

compliance towards a culture of excellence in addressing GESIP concerns. The metaphor of a 'broken trail' is used frequently in the report to identify where specific attention is required. This term has variable meanings in the report, but 'broken trails' can refer to the unfulfilment of accountability measures being in place or acted upon (conclusions 1 and 3), the limited capture of quality MEL compliance data (conclusions 2 and 3), as well as gaps in compliance guidance between higher-level ODA commitments and award holders (conclusions 2 and 3).

Conclusion 1: Gender equality mainstreaming

The mainstreaming of gender equality concerns across GCRF is moving at a gradual pace and is being supported by a variety of mechanisms from the DP level through to award holders – although strategic steers at both levels are mostly uncoordinated. This lack of strategic guidance is leading to a 'broken trail' of MEL reporting and, thereby, accountability between the DP and award level**.** As a result, while progress is gradual, GCRF is broadly 'on track' at the DP level in terms of mainstreaming gender compliance concerns – but could move in a faster and more coordinated way while also celebrating 'excellence' as much as 'compliance' results with award holders.

Conclusion 2: Poverty

There is limited evidence of a coherent framing for poverty or 'poverty alleviation' guiding GCRF, its DPs and award holders. Under the umbrella of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), poverty is implicitly and simplistically assumed to be core to all R&I activities undertaken through the GCRF, although there is a wide range of framing and understanding of poverty-related terminology across the system. As a result, there is continuing evidence of a 'broken trail' in the capture and dissemination of the poverty dimensions of GCRF-supported research alongside an under-reporting of poverty results and outcomes.

Conclusion 3: Social inclusion/equality, diversity and inclusion

The mainstreaming of SI/EDI compliance concerns is fragmented at both the DP and award holder level, although there are promising signs of downward diffusion of EDI language and concepts in a good number of DPs and awards. As a result, and in line with preceding conclusions, there is evidence of a 'broken trail' of managerial guidance and accountability with respect to the mainstreaming of SI/EDI issues across GCRF – particularly in relation to LGBTQIA+ concerns. Consequently, progress on the mainstreaming of SI/EDI compliance concerns is somewhat behind that of gender compliance mainstreaming concerns – particularly at the award level – while a small number of DPs and awards are actively endeavouring to innovate for 'excellence' in SI/EDI mainstreaming, rather than 'compliance'.

Conclusion 4: Adapting to Covid-19

Explicit guidance from DPs on adapting to a Covid-19 context with respect to the GESIP dimensions was rarely found or reported. The absence of guidance does not mean that dialogue and more formal guidance between some award holders and some DPs, as well as Challenge Leaders or Hubs, is non-existent: evidence from the award holder review suggests that GESIP-related dialogue was prominent, but largely driven horizontally by the interests of award holders (primarily in relation to methodological adaptations).

Recommendations

The recommendations are designed to support GCRF achieve and move from a culture of ODA compliance towards a culture of excellence in addressing GESIP concerns. They work to consolidate and strengthen the progress made to date to mainstream gender equality and address the social inclusion and poverty dimensions of ODA-supported research. They build on the Tetra Tech Review of Gender Equality Approaches in the GCRF and its guiding principles and Theory of Change (ToC). The recommendations are framed to inform the development of the GCRF's Gender,

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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (GEDI) Strategy, to optimise interlinkages between gender and social inclusion and poverty alleviation, and to address various 'broken trails' in the GCRF system.

Recommendation 1: Embed GESIP in the GCRF principles

The ongoing development of the GEDI strategy offers the opportunity to review the narrative of GCRF's key principles (Challenge and Impact Focus, Interdisciplinary Research Excellence, Global Partnerships, Organisation and Leadership) in relation to the objective of making explicit the GESIP-related compliance expectations of the fund. The process of reframing the key principles narrative should underpin and run in parallel with the development of the GEDI strategy. This will optimise cross-fertilisation between the two activities and build ownership across the whole GCRF ecosystem for the GEDI strategy.

Recommendation 2: Integrate a clear poverty perspective into the GEDI strategy

Poverty compliance guidance constitutes the weakest part of the GESIP compliance infrastructure across GCRF. By further clarifying GCRF's expectations and framing in relation to the interlinkages between poverty on the one hand and gender equality and SI/EDI on the other, a broader poverty impact narrative can be developed over time. This foundation provides an avenue for GCRF to assess both compliance and excellence. While a critical interface will be at the call and in the proposal stage, clarity is needed as to how these interlinkages apply at all stages of the funding management cycle.

Recommendation 3: Standardise the MEL infrastructure and communication of GESIP expectations (and associated resource support) across the GCRF and its funding cycles

Standardising these expectations throughout the GCRF system is fundamental to consolidating and expanding the emerging and promising practices among some DPs in the way GESIP expectations are communicated. It is recommended that GCRF strengthen and standardise activities at the pre-proposal stage, extend the engagement time with researchers on the approach and design of the proposal with respect to GESIP concerns, extend the use of gender champions to include SI/EDI and poverty champions, build and facilitate access to GESIP expertise and knowledge repositories, and embed a GESIP focus in the redesign of the reporting official development assistance (RODA) system. GCRF could also work with DPs to increase the accuracy, visibility and – where possible – the complexity of disability and LGBTQIA+ data categories in the Business Energy and Industry Strategy (BEIS) tracker and ResearchFish platform.

Recommendation 4: Open up learning spaces for GESIP that are facilitative and reflexive as part of an increased emphasis on GESIP-oriented knowledge management for both compliance and excellence

Building on observed and growing communities of practice and horizontal learning mechanisms, GCRF can with DPs and award holders to identify entry points and actions for developing a GESIP focus within GCRF's knowledge management system. This recommendation supports recommendation 2 of the Tetra Tech (2020) Approaches to Gender Equality Review – '*BEIS should institute a systematic approach to learning, clearly differentiating between internal and external functions at key stages in the fund management cycle*'. A more GESIP-focused knowledge management system will serve to better coordinate actions for capturing and disseminating GESIP-specific lessons on compliance and excellence.

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1 Introduction

This is the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) Gender Equality, Social Inclusion and Poverty (GESIP) audit report, one of four modules in the GCRF Evaluation, Stage 1a. The following section provides background on the strategic and policy context surrounding the GCRF with respect to GESIP issues in recent years, and provides a summary of findings from previous relevant assessments.

Stage 1a assesses GCRF's core commissioning and management functions – the activity level in the Theory of Change (ToC) – via four modules that focus on management, relevance and targeting, fairness and the integration of gender, social inclusion and poverty as core concerns in the fund. The main evaluation question (MEQ) for Stage 1a asks: **is GCRF relevant, well targeted, fair, gender sensitive, socially inclusive and well managed**?

The aim is to provide a learning (formative) assessment to ensure that the conditions are in place to support GCRF's outcomes and impact. Stage 1a will produce an in-depth view of how GCRF works as a fund, where it is working well and where it could be improved (Box 1 provides an overview of the GCRF Evaluation).

The GESIP audit and the other three modules together contribute to addressing Stage 1a's MEQ 1: 'Is the GCRF relevant, coherent, well targeted, fair, gender sensitive, socially inclusive and well managed?'

The aim of the GESIP audit is to provide a light touch assessment of the extent to which the GESIP concerns have been addressed throughout GCRF at all levels of operation between 2016 and 2020.

The GESIP audit addresses four sub-evaluation questions (EQs) under the MEQ as follows:

- EQ 1. How is gender equality mainstreaming currently being strengthened throughout the fund?
- EQ 2. How effectively is poverty framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?
- EQ 3. How effectively is social inclusion framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?

The fourth EQ – 'How can poverty, gender sensitivity and social inclusion of GCRF be improved' – is addressed in the conclusions and recommendations of this audit report.

> **Box 1. Overview of GCRF and the evaluation**
>
> **GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund announced by the United Kingdom (UK) government in late 2015 to support cutting-edge research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries.** GCRF forms part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment and contributes to the achievement of the UK's 2015 aid strategy's goals. It ensures that UK science takes a leading role in addressing the challenges faced by developing countries while also developing the UK's ability to deliver cutting-edge research and innovation (R&I) for sustainable development.
>
> GCRF is overseen by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and implemented by 17 of the UK's R&I funders, which lead on commissioning R&I to address development challenges. GCRF-funded teams in the UK partner with organisations in the Global South to deliver interdisciplinary R&I on a

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wide range of urgent issues, from health and well-being to peace and justice, alongside agile responses to global crises such as Covid-19.

The purpose of GCRF's evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact. This has a dual learning and accountability purpose, as clearly set out in the evaluation objectives:

1. To assess whether the fund is achieving its aims (*accountability*)

2. To assess whether it is on course to achieve impact (*accountability*)

3. To support BEIS in their development of a cross-fund and fund-specific key performance indicator (KPI) framework to provide a robust measure of the fund's impact and value for money (VfM) (*learning and accountability*)

4. To provide evidence of what works and make interim assessments of VfM to feed into GCRF learning loops to improve the fund while it is in operation (*learning and accountability*)

5. To inform the design of a VfM case for future funds (*learning*).

As the evaluation has both accountability and learning functions, it will provide evidence of GCRF's contribution towards impact and engage with BEIS's developing processes for learning about aid effectiveness.

Given the complexity of the fund, the evaluation is designed in three stages from 2020 to 2024. The evaluation design was developed under the earlier Foundation Stage Evaluation carried out in 2017–18.[3] It addresses the purpose through five MEQs and a three-stage design that tracks GCRF's ToC from activities to impact over five years. Each stage applies specific modules to focus on different aspects of the ToC and the fund. Stage 1a of the evaluation runs from May 2020 to February 2021. The first stage – Stage 1a – consists of four modules conducted in parallel that aim to understand how BEIS and GCRF's delivery partners (DPs) manage and position the fund to deliver on its intended aims and commitments. These four modules focus on GCRF's management, relevance and targeting, fairness and the integration of gender, and social inclusion and poverty in the fund's commissioning and processes.

1.1 Strategic and policy context for the GCRF GESIP audit in 2020/21

The legal and policy context for GESIP is framed by three UK acts. **First there is the International Development Act (2002)**, with an explicit requirement that the provision of ODA can show it is likely to contribute to poverty reduction.[4] **Second, since 2014, UK law requires ODA spending 'to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender'**.[5] Initially the legal requirement applied to the now defunct Department for International Development (DFID), and by 2017 it extended to BEIS and GCRF. Beyond legal compliance to ODA spending commitment, the R&I sector, including BEIS and its DPs, are subject to the wider UK equalities framework driven by law and policy, which also impacts on research development and delivery. **Third, the 2010 Equality Act requires that public organisations**[6] **promote equal opportunities for everyone** and protect the rights of those with protected

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[3] GCRF, 2018. GCRF Evaluation Foundation Stage. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation

[4] UK Parliament International Development Act 'may provide any person or body with development assistance if he [*sic*] is satisfied that the provision of the assistance is likely to contribute to a reduction in poverty'. Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/1/contents

[5] UK Parliament International Development (Gender Equality) Act (2014). Available at: www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2014/9/section/1/enacted

[6] UK Parliament Equalities Act (2010). Available at: https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents. There are nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, and pregnancy and maternity. All of these were covered by protected by previously existing legislation which the 2010 Act replaced.

characteristics (including but not limited to gender, sexual orientation, age, race and disability) through implementing policies and strategies which prevent disadvantage and discrimination.

These legal accountabilities set the parameters of GCRF as a government ODA fund, which expects that funded research show development impacts that are poverty focused, gender sensitive and socially inclusive. As such it is incumbent on the R&I sector to show ODA compliance through tackling instances of under-representation, differential needs and systemic disadvantage to improve the relevance of R&I findings, to support inclusion, to reduce the impact of bias and, ultimately, to contribute to reducing poverty and thereby inequalities between genders.[7]

Moreover, the imperative to address Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) quickened in 2020, with Covid-19 and 'Black Lives Matter' throwing a spotlight on deep and persistent inequalities which are now receiving increased attention in the R&I sector. Many of GCRF's DPs have in consequence signalled increased priority to EDI. ODA gender and poverty requirements under the 2014 Act remain in force although, with substantive changes in ODA architecture and policy context under way, the strategic and policy framework for gender and other equality commitments is also subject to possible reconfiguration.

The changing strategic and policy context for GCRF[8] outlined in the evaluation's Inception Report (2020) is set to accelerate in 2021. Since GCRF started in 2015, the national policy discourse on ODA has been evolving. Several significant changes have taken place since 2020, with the implications for GCRF still emerging.

First, in February 2020, the UK government announced the Integrated Review of foreign policy, defence, security and international development.[9] This review covers all aspects of the UK's place in the world, from the role of the diplomatic service and approach to international development to the capabilities of the armed forces and security agencies. (At the time of writing in early 2021, the Integrated Review has not yet been published.) The emerging vision is to achieve influence in an increasingly complex world by bringing together all of the UK's national assets in a coherent, fused approach.[10]

Second, the merger in August 2020 of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and DFID into the new Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) is expected to be central to the delivery of this emerging vision. It is anticipated that the broad view of national interest will be based on values (e.g. open societies and democratic values) as much as it is on the UK's core interests of security and prosperity. In November 2020 the Foreign Secretary announced a new strategic framework for ODA that will replace the UK government's 2015 aid strategy.[11] The framework notes the lack of 'coherence, oversight or appropriate accountability across Whitehall' for aid spending. The new framework sets out a range of measures to deliver better outcomes, including focusing aid on seven global challenges, focusing on countries where the UK's development, security and economic interests align, and increased oversight by FCDO of

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[7] Cavaghan, R. (2020) Gender, Science, Technology and Development: Literature Review for the University of Edinburgh's Working Group on Integrating Gender in GCRF Applications. University of Edinburgh, January 2020, unpublished.

[8] GCRF Evaluation, Inception Report, Itad/Rand, August 2020, unpublished.

[9] Prime Minister's Office, 2020. 'PM outlines new review to define Britain's place in the world' [press release]. Available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-new-review-to-define-britains-place-in-the-world

[10] This may be influenced by the fusion doctrine. HMG, 2018. National Security Capability Review, March 2015. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf

[11] 'UK aid to refocus on countries where 'interests align', Devex, 25 November 2020. Available at: https://www.devex.com/news/uk-aid-to-refocus-on-countries-where-interests-align-98648

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ODA allocations to other departments. Programmes will be judged by fit with the UK's strategic objectives, evidence of impact achieved and VfM.[12]

Alongside strengthened FCDO oversight of ODA spend and the Integrated Review, the Covid-19 pandemic is also likely to influence broader policy changes taking place to ODA spending and management – and perhaps more so than any other time in the last 30 years. The economic recession and resultant fiscal policies have affected the Spending Review that was carried out in autumn 2020, limited to a one-year time frame and featuring a reduction in the ODA commitment from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross domestic product (GDP).[13] New legislation is planned to reconcile this decision with the 2014 International Development Act, but it is not clear how this will relate to the 2002 International Development Act, which binds UK aid to make a 'contribution to a reduction in poverty'.[14] Nor is it clear what the implications of this are for GCRF funding at the time of writing.

In the research sector, the formation of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in 2018 brought a shift in how the nine Research Councils (RCs) operate. UKRI was created to strengthen cross-disciplinary research and collaboration. UKRI's International Development Team provides central leadership and capability on GCRF strategic management and evaluation functions, managing many of GCRF's large investments centrally from the International Development Team, in collaboration with the individual Research Council. GCRF's overall fund management function, while part of BEIS, is also hosted within UKRI, creating a centre of gravity for international development research.

In 2020, Covid-19 has had an impact on research institutions and especially universities, both in terms of budgets[15] and capability. This will not only affect the delivery of the evaluation but will also change the strategic context where the purpose of GCRF may be modified, including the ways commitments to GESIP are integrated into the ecosystem.

Taken together, this shifting context is likely to have significant impacts on GCRF's strategic role, funding and objectives, including those relating to GESIP, during the evaluation period. For the period under audit there are lessons for the future on how GCRF, with legal ODA accountabilities in relation to GESIP, addresses the inherent creative tension at its core between meeting the demands of ODA-supported research while still respecting the independence of researchers enshrined in the Haldane principle,[16] the dynamics of which will be further tested by the rapidly changing context for ODA research in the UK.

1.2 Addressing GESIP within the GCRF: key principles and findings of previous GESIP assessments

At its inception, GCRF identified four key principles which guide how it supports UK and international researchers and innovators to take on key issues affecting developing countries. These principles state that all GCRF-supported research must demonstrate:

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[12] Letter from the Foreign Secretary to the Chair, International Development Committee, 2 December 2020. Available at: https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3683/documents/38142/default/

[13] Insight. Spending Review: Reducing the 0.7% aid commitment. House of Commons Library. Published Thursday, 26 November 2020. Available at: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spending-review-reducing-the-aid-commitment/

[14] 'Poverty reduction missing from new UK aid strategy', Devex 26 November 2020. Available at: https://www.devex.com/news/poverty-reduction-missing-from-new-uk-aid-strategy-98655

[15] In April 2020 the sector-wide loss from tuition fees to universities was estimated at £2.6 billion. London Economics, 2020. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on university finances, April 2020. Available at: http://londoneconomics.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/LE-Impact-of-Covid-19-on-university-finances-FINAL.pdf

[16] The Haldane principle, originally stated in 2018 and reinstated by a ministerial statement in 2010, holds that decisions on individual research proposals are best taken by researchers themselves through peer review.

- a challenge and impact focus
- interdisciplinary research excellence
- global and equitable partnerships
- organisation and leadership.

GCRF has provided extensive guidance[17] on these principles and how they underpin the goal and objectives of the fund. **Absent from these materials is explicit discussion and guidance on the fund's gender, social inclusion and poverty ODA commitments**.

The absence points to an underlying challenge to the framing of ODA-supported research which has been picked up in three previous reviews: the Foundation Evaluation of GCRF, the BEIS Gender Equality Review of GCRF and Newton Fund, and external evidence reviews conducted by UKRI on the key challenges for EDI in the UK and internationally.

These reviews highlighted that **GCRF's policies and systems did not directly address GESIP issues at the inception of the fund, although all three dimensions are implicit in its objectives and goals.** All indicate an increasing focus on gender equality from 2018 onwards both from GCRF and the wider R&I sector. To a lesser extent, there was increased attention to social inclusion in terms of organisational diversity. The internal reviews point to a number of blockages in the way GESIP issues are addressed in the *planned* outcomes and pathways to impact of GCRF-supported research.

The challenge for GCRF, as the reviews indicated, is that without embedding GESIP within systems management as well as the design and implementation processes shaping funded research, these blockages undermine the effectiveness of GCRF. Without a strong and strategic GESIP focus, the development impacts and ODA excellence expected by GCRF through its principles, goal and objectives are unlikely to be met, as the findings from the reviews detail.

The GCRF Foundation Stage Evaluation[18] **in November 2018 highlighted weaknesses in GCRF's approach to gender equality and pro-poor socially inclusive research.** As a result, the report provided a co-produced ToC, with one of the intended impacts being:

> *'contribute to achievement of the SDGs [sustainable development goals], enhancing people's wellbeing, improving equality for people of all genders, promoting social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability in developing countries'.*

Underpinning the pathways to impact is the explicit assumption that gender and social inclusion can be designed into R&I for inclusive impacts, generating both short-term and longer-term outcomes on the way to impact.[19] A necessity for GCRF in achieving the intended impact, emphasised by the Foundation Stage Evaluation, is bringing GESIP into the evaluation purpose of the fund and setting a baseline through a formative audit.

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[17] Through its website, face-to-face seminars, webinars and online videos. See for example: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow0yO5-Kh5g

[18] GCRF, 2018. GCRF Evaluation Foundation Stage. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation

[19] Ibid. (Part A Theory of Change – Figure 3 Theory of Change, pp. B1–3).

The UKRI series of reviews in 2019 on EDI found that the focus of research internationally was still largely at the nascent stage in addressing intersections and interlinkages between different dimensions of inequality and discrimination.

> *'A large proportion of interventions focused on gender (or sex) equality, or wider EDI issues (such as 'diversity training'). Other characteristics such as disability, religious inclusion or age were less likely to be the primary target of interventions'.*[20]

Importantly, the international review of EDI approaches concluded that monitoring and evaluation exercises (particularly those focusing on effectiveness) were constrained by a lack of comparable data sets across different RCs. The review also pointed to a wider issue in commissioned international research, of which GCRF is part; that is, the emphasis has been on EDI, including gender diversity, in the management and composition of research and research teams. Less (albeit increasing) attention has been given to the content and impacts of research. In 2019 UKRI, as part of its EDI commitments under the 2010 Act, also published data for diversity characteristics of its funding applicants and recipients from 2014 to 2019, including (post-2016) GCRF data.[21] The data indicated positive changes in composition of applications for women and ethnic minorities, with no change in composition in applicants with disability. The data also indicated that large awards and the role of principal investigator (PI) remained dominated by white male applicants. A second review is scheduled for 2021. There is potential in the future for disaggregating GCRF data from the main data set for comparative and stand-alone analyses.

The implications for GCRF are twofold. First, the findings highlight the synergies and reinforcing drivers for strengthening attention to equality, including gender equality, and inclusion between the GCRF and the wider UK R&I sector. Second, the existing systems do not enable the R&I sector to capture and amplify the results and impacts of ODA-support research, resulting in missed opportunities to capitalise on the synergies to improve the gender and inclusion dimensions of the fund's operations.

The BEIS Gender Equality Review of GCRF and the Newton Fund, completed in April 2020 just prior to the start of this evaluation, found that BEIS was committed to improving its approach to gender equality as an administrator of ODA funds. In response to critical reviews, efforts have been made to strengthen the approach. It was noted that these were largely focused at the DP level, with less attention given to strengthening the overarching architecture and systems and strategies of the GCRF with respect to gender equality, diversity and inclusion (GEDI).

The review did not address broader aspects of EDI, the extent of gender mainstreaming within BEIS and its DPs, or the intersection with ODA poverty commitments. Nor, since it was outside its remit, did the review assess in detail the processes, content and impact pathways at the award level. It did note, however, the mixed picture at the award level in how gender equality and inclusion were being addressed because of the absence of an overarching strategy guiding BEIS's approach.

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[20] Moody, J. & Aldercotte, A. (2019) Equality, diversity and inclusion in research and innovation: international review, Advance HE, for UK Research and Innovation. London, UK.

[21] UKRI (2019) Diversity results for UKRI funding data 2014-15 to 2018-19. It analysed data from UKRI and the Arts and Humanities Research Centre (AHRC), the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Medical Research Council (MRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC).

The recommendations (see Box 2 below) focused on the management of GCRF to improve effectiveness. They were predicated on the assumption that addressing gender, diversity and inclusion systematically, coherently and across all levels of GCRF would increase the impact of the fund, resonating with the ToC developed through the Foundation Stage Evaluation. BEIS intends to use the report to inform the development of its ODA R&I GEDI Strategy. Responses to the recommendations are a work in progress within BEIS, with the expectation that findings from this audit will provide a further steer in how to develop a strategy that strengthens its approach to GESIP.

Box 2. Review of GCRF and Newton Fund evaluation (2020)

The Review of Approaches to Gender Equality in GCRF and the Newton Fund made four interlinked recommendations aimed at strengthening the management, operations and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) of both funds:

- **Recommendation 1**: BEIS should develop a clear, coherent approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion at the ODA portfolio level.
- **Recommendation 2:** BEIS should institute a systematic approach to learning, clearly differentiating between internal and external functions at key stages in the fund management cycle.
- **Recommendation 3:** BEIS should develop a fund-level approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion that is tailored to each of the funds.
- **Recommendation 4:** BEIS should ensure there is dedicated senior management capacity, sufficient resourcing and clear accountabilities at all levels to design, implement, monitor and adapt the approach.

None of the reviews directly assessed how the GCRF addressed poverty as an ODA requirement through the layers of operation and by the different entities under the fund – the 17 DPs, the Hubs and the challenge areas. The finding from the Foundation Stage Evaluation that the pro-poor focus of the GCRF was not well defined is picked up by the audit and addressed in detail in EQ 2.

These three reviews provide a good baseline from which to explore the broader aspects of GESIP across the GESIP ecosystem. The evidence indicates that there are extant processes and practices that, if harnessed, can support the GCRF to strengthen its approach to GESIP and move from ODA compliance to ODA excellence. Yet the findings also underscore the challenges the GCRF has faced and still faces in developing a strategic focus for GESIP in a complex ecosystem when the original architecture for the fund and its founding principles did not support GCRF to embed GESIP in its systems and policies.

1.3 Structure of the report

The GESIP audit report is structured as follows. After this section, section 2 outlines the audit methodology. Section 3 presents the findings against three of the sub-EQs (sub-EQs 1.5, 1,6, 1.9). Section 4 gives the conclusions, broadly structured around sub-EQ 4. Finally, section 5 outlines a set of recommendations designed to support the GCRF strengthen its approach to GESIP.

2 Methodology

This section provides an overview and justification of the methodology used in the GESIP audit. First, we give an overview of the GESIP audit (which includes the audit principles and framework) second, we give a summary of the data collection and the data analysis approaches. The section ends with a review of the strengths and limitations of the audit approach and associated methodology.

2.1 Overview of the GESIP audit approach

The approach taken in the GESIP audit takes into account the previous reviews of GESIP issues in the context of GCRF and ODA-funded research (see sections 1.1 and 1.2 above). The audit therefore builds on an understanding of how well GESIP are taken-up across the GCRF ecosystem, where progress has been made, where there are ongoing blockages, and where there are opportunities to further improve the GESIP compliance focus of GCRF.

The audit combines two audits set out in the original Terms of Reference (ToR): the formative poverty and social inclusion audit and the gender audit. These were consolidated, firstly because of the important linkages between the two in promoting ODA compliance and excellence, and secondly to optimise efficiencies in data collection and analysis, thereby reducing the burden on DPs and award holders.

In summary, the audit approach focuses on:

- where and how strategies, policies and processes have provided a consistent strategic focus for GESIP
- what expertise is available to support award holders integrate GESIP issues into their research
- how far MEL activities are supporting improvements in capturing the GESIP dimensions of research outcomes and pathways to impact and,
- the extent to which the GESIP dimensions of supported research are being communicated and disseminated across GCRF and externally.

2.1.1 Principles and framework of the audit

The audit takes a forward-looking, appreciative and utilisation-focused approach that recognises the embryonic state of current GESIP strategies, policies and processes across the GCRF ecosytem. It thereby covers both the accountability and learning interests of GCRF.

Mainstreaming gender into GCRF is ongoing. The audit, in recognition of significant action taken to strengthen its approach to gender, assesses how far GCRF stakeholders are meeting ODA gender accountabilities. It also focuses on the wider context of GESIP in R&I and how, if at all, stakeholders have considered the impacts of Covid-19 on the GESIP dimensions of research. Further details of the approach are given in Annex 1.

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The audit framework is underpinned by selected components from the McKinsey 7s framework,[22] together with a Social Relations Framework[23] (see Annex 1). While the McKinsey 7s framework provides the framing to review the GESIP categories from an 'institutional mainstreaming' perspective, the adapted Social Relations Framework adds emphasis on more context-specific categories of analysis that relate specifically to GESIP concerns. The framework is naturally reliant on specific understandings of GESIP and audit terminology (see Box 3).

The components of the frameworks are embedded in the audit's evaluation matrix (see Annex 2). Each EQ was addressed using a harmonised set of judgement criteria relating to strategies, processes, expertise, MEL and communication, plus the issue of accountability for exploring compliance for mainstreaming GESIP issues. The audit also included a particular interest in the presence and reporting of disability-sensitive approaches, as well as in the implications of Covid-19 adaptations.

> ### Box 3. Audit, gender, social inclusion and poverty definitions
>
> **An audit** is an independent assurance activity designed with an objective to add value and improve the working and operations of a particular organisation. An audit approaches differs from an evaluation approach in that the latter is often guided by OECD/DAC criteria,[24] while the former generally tend to prioritise compliance interests along a predetermined set of guidance materials at the expense of wider contextual enabling environment concerns. Consequently, audits tend to generate findings more aligned with accountability concerns – although the GESIP audit also incorporates a strong focus on appreciate learning.
>
> **Gender** is a social scientific term used to describe shared social ideals of femininity and masculinity, associated behavioural expectations and relations between sexes.[25] These shared ideals vary across organisations, countries and legislative and cultural boundaries. Gendered attitudes and behaviours are (re)produced at multiple levels – in individuals' identities and expectations, in social, economic and political institutions, and in wider society and culture. This leads to inequalities between genders, where one gender (usually women) is excluded or disadvantaged in terms of accessing and benefiting equally from economic, political and societal resources and opportunities. The concept of 'Intersectionality' – an important component in understanding gender equality – draws attention to the ways in which different identity markers (e.g. disability, race age, migration status, caste) intersect with each other to structure privileges and disadvantages. It incorporates the idea that gender, social inclusion and poverty can combine to further exclude gender identities.
>
> **Social inclusion (SI)** is defined as the process of improving the terms of participation in society, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, through enhancing opportunities, access to resources, voice and respect for rights.[26] Some authors focus on the three domains of social participation, economic participation and political participation as key aspects of SI, thereby capturing elements around gender equality and poverty.[27] However, for the purposes of this

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[22] www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/enduring-ideas-the-7-s-framework. See the Management Review module for a fuller explanation of the 7s framework.

[23] Kabeer, Naila, and Ramya Subrahmanian. Institutions, relations and outcomes: Framework and tools for gender-aware planning. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 1996.

[24] www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm accessed February 2021.

[25] Cavaghan, R. (2020) Gender, Science, Technology and Development: Literature Review for the University of Edinburgh's Working Group on Integrating Gender in GCRF Applications. 10.13140/RG.2.2.18199.73125. Further elaborated in Tetra Tech (2020) The Newman Fund and The GCRF: Review of approaches to gender equality, p.7.

[26] UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2016) Report on the world social situation 2016. Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development. Available at: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/2016/chapter1.pdf

[27] Beall, J., & Piron, L. H. (2005). DFID social exclusion review. London: Overseas Development Institute, 32, 37.

evaluation we will exclude gender and poverty from our definition of SI and will also highlight aspects concerning inclusivity issues for disabled persons.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) is a conflagration of terms closely linked with that of SI, and is common parlance in the GCRF ecosystem (see Guyan & Oloyede (2019) and Moody & Aldercotte (2019)). The use of the EDI acronym often implicates gender concerns with respect to 'equality' – and can be used as a catch-all for gender equality and SI concerns. However, for the purposes of this report, SI/EDI is combined, and excludes a focus on gender equality (GE).

Gender equality, diversity and inclusion (GEDI) refers specifically to the upcoming GEDI strategy being developed across GCRF. It should not be conflated with SI or EDI for the purposes of this report.

Poverty entails more than the lack of income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods. Its manifestations include hunger and malnutrition, limited access to education and other basic services, social discrimination and exclusion, as well as the lack of participation in decision making.[28] We take a consciously broad approach to the framing of poverty in this note in order to capture the full range of ways in which it is expressed in and across GCRF structures.

2.1.2 Scope of the audit

The successful integration of GESIP into a fund as complex as GCRF (see Figure 1) requires that, as the BEIS Review of Gender Equality recommended, a clear direction is set at the portfolio level and that dedicated capacity and clear accountabilities cascade down the different levels of the fund, with mechanisms in place to allow learning, monitoring information and results to percolate upwards. With these conditions in place, GESIP concerns can be designed into innovative research addressing development challenges for inclusive impacts.

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[28] https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/ending-poverty

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Figure 1: Overall structure and allocation of GCRF funds

Overall structure and allocation of funds
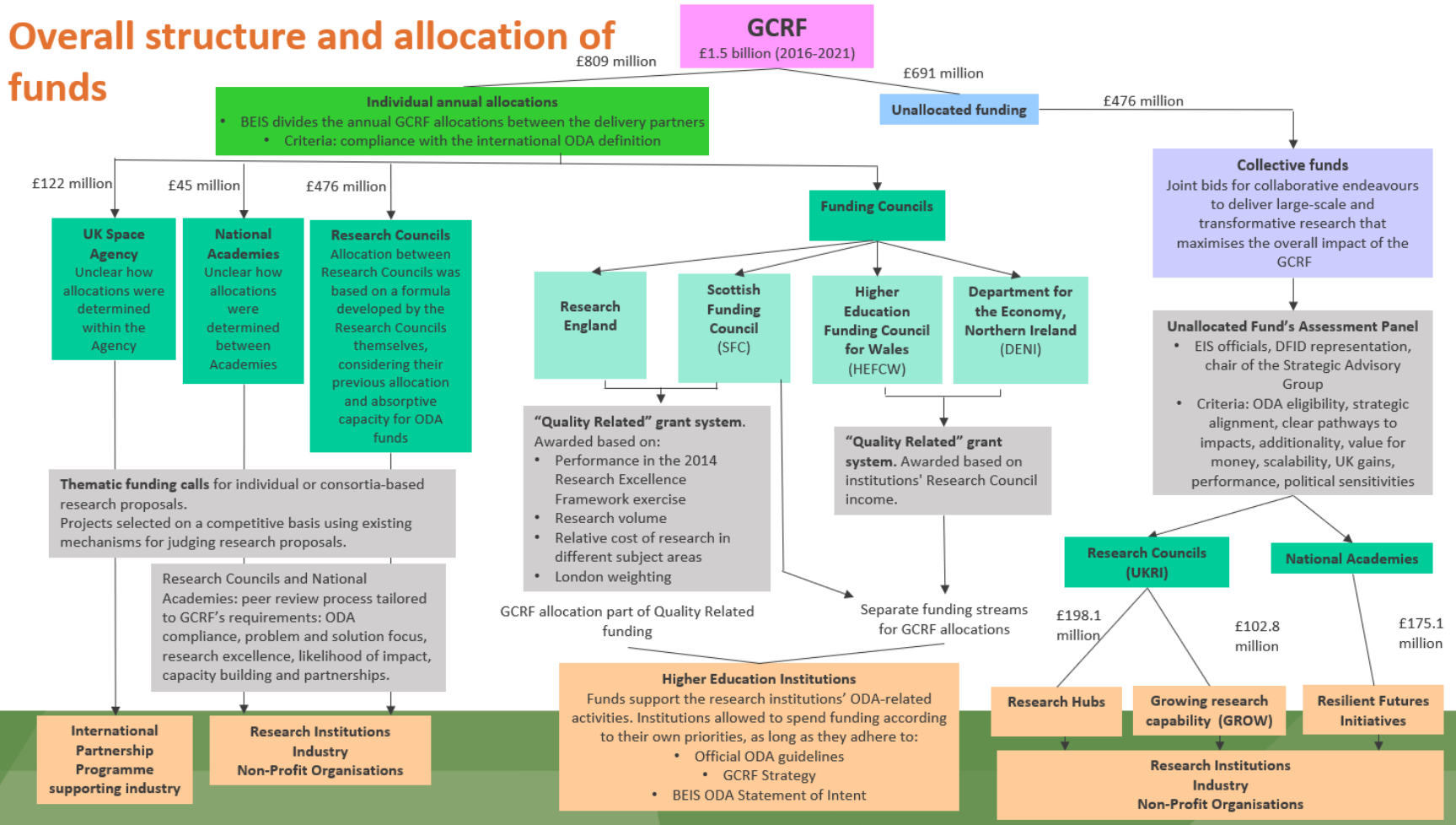
The management module noted that the complexity of the fund – with over 30 transition points where funding moves from one resource holder to another – provides a challenge for 'finding a strategy, structure and system that can sustain a consistent focus on development impact'.[29]

As a consequence, the GESIP audit focused on a simplified version of the GCRF structure to frame the audit scope of enquiry. For instance, the GCRF can be presented as having four levels (see Figure 2). For the GESIP audit, this scoping emphasises the dynamic linkages across the GCRF system – in particular:

- how well the current and developing policies, strategies and processes are cascading down from primarily the DPs (level B) and also, to a lesser extent, GCRF (level A), and how well this supports the integration of GESIP into programmes (level C) and awards (level D)
- how GESIP results, learning and practices are being used to support better practice and development outcomes both upwards to level A (BEIS) and downwards to level D (the awards).

Level A: Fund Level
- BEIS accountable for ODA GESIP commitments

Level B: Delivery Partners
- DPs' ODA compliance guiding GESIP policies, approaches

Level C: Programmes
- Internal programming within and across DPs frames GESIP within calls, selection & reporting

Level D: Awards
- Award holders frame GESIP within design, implementation, MEL subject to research focus & reporting requirements
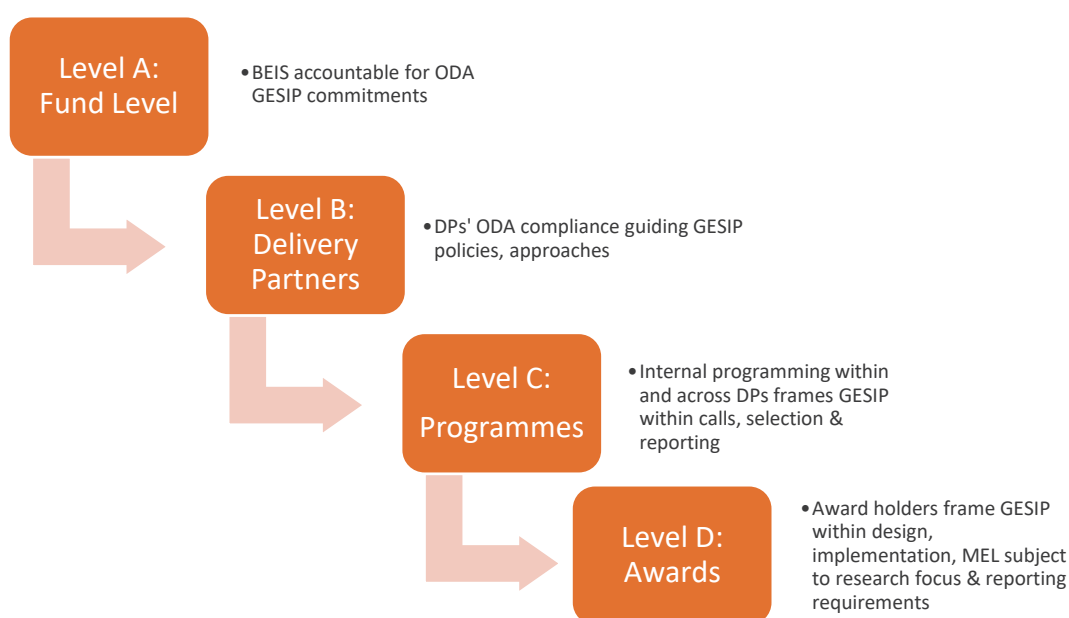
Figure 2: GESIP within different levels of GCRF management

Our scoping also reflects issues identified in earlier reports – including the Tetra Tech (2020) Gender Equality report.[30] These emphasise the importance of an overarching gender, inclusion and diversity strategy (developed in parallel with an approach to MEL) which is sensitive to these institutional dynamics. However, it is unrealistic to expect, in a fund as complex and multi-faceted as the GCRF, that any overarching strategy will work perfectly. As such, the heterogeneity and variety of the fund creates opportunities to learn from organic experimentation and adaptations regarding how GESIP can be successfully integrated into development research. The audit scope therefore appreciates that creating a collective system-wide approach to learning capitalises on the creative tension between independence of research and the strategic oversight of the fund. In so doing, the audit seeks to

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[29] Management module report 2021:18.

[30] Tetra Tech (2020) Approaches to Gender Equality in the Newton Fund and GCRF.

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appreciatively examine spaces where GESIP practices and innovations by researchers can be valued and adopted to support progress across the ecosystem.

Using this scope, and as outlined in section 2.2, the audit examined compliance on GESIP-related **strategies, policies and processes, expertise, MEL systems, and communication and dissemination within and across DPs and award holders.**

2.2   Overview of data collection

Data collection for this GESIP audit was collected in four steps: a DP-focused literature review, an overarching award level topic assessment, an award-level audit and co-creation workshops. Data collection included interviews and extensive document analysis (see Figure 3).
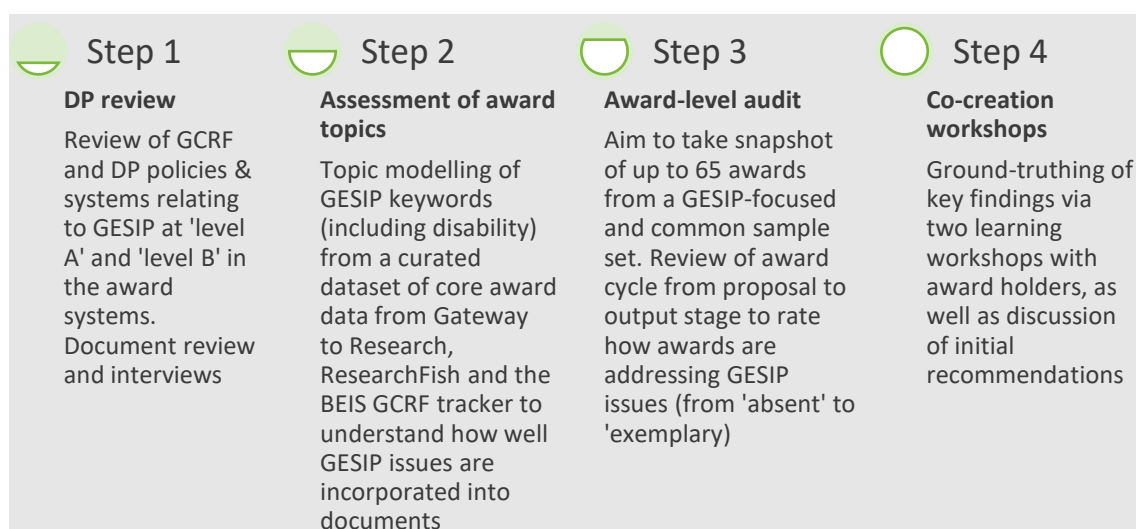
Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
DP review	**Assessment of award topics**	**Award-level audit**	**Co-creation workshops**
Review of GCRF and DP policies & systems relating to GESIP at 'level A' and 'level B' in the award systems. Document review and interviews	Topic modelling of GESIP keywords (including disability) from a curated dataset of core award data from Gateway to Research, ResearchFish and the BEIS GCRF tracker to understand how well GESIP issues are incorporated into documents	Aim to take snapshot of up to 65 awards from a GESIP-focused and common sample set. Review of award cycle from proposal to output stage to rate how awards are addressing GESIP issues (from 'absent' to 'exemplary)	Ground-truthing of key findings via two learning workshops with award holders, as well as discussion of initial recommendations

Figure 3:   Data collection components of the GESIP audit

Restrictions resulting from Covid-19 and initial findings from the organisational and award-level review resulted in adjustments in steps 1, 3 and 4, which are described in Table 1. The core reason for this shift is that it became apparent in the inception stage that GCRF (level A) and DPs (Level B) were not recording information about GESIP consistently or systematically. In order not to overlook the evolutions in addressing GESIP over time, changes were made to the organisational assessment and the sampling criteria for the award-level audit (see Table 1 for details), while Table 2 provides a summary of the audit sample size against the four steps of data collection.

Method	Original	Adjusted
DP Review	Light touch document review at level A and B – BEIS and DPs	Extended document review focusing on DPs in order to further capture the dynamics between levels B, C and D
Award-level audit	65 GESIP awards randomly sampled across	Discretionary sample of 38 awards purposively sampled to capture

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	DPs, challenge areas, Hubs and calls against sub-EQs	diversity of GESIP approaches and to optimise learning
Learning workshops	Up to six half-day workshops involving up to 60 people	2 online half-day workshops with restricted number of participants (12) to compensate for Covid-19 working context

Table 1: Summary adjustments made to original GESIP audit

Method	Sample
DP Review	Analysis of 313 documents from 16 DPs (one DP had no documents with GESIP content). Special focus given to DPs which had awards being audited in the GESIP snapshots. Types of documents reviewed included: funding calls, proposals, strategic plans, delivery plans, funding/proposal guidance, notes, research Hub documents, impact and monitoring reports, and examples of communications/ knowledge dissemination.
Assessment of award topics	The sample size for the BEIS tracker review was 2925 awards (2016–20), while for the topic modelling the sample was restricted to Gateway to Research (n=1,143). These awards were reviewed with respect to key words relating to gender, SI, disability and poverty (see Annex 7 for keyword list).
	A further topic analysis of just over 500 awards using data from ResearchFish was placed into clusters based on the similarity between abstract and text title.
Award-level audit	Of the target of 65 awards, the GESIP module reviewed 54 in practice (an achievement of 84%). This included a sample of six 'GESIP-led' awards from the core sample, 17 from the 'non-GESIP-led' awards from the core sample, and a further 31 from the GESIP-focused sample. An approximate total of 107 persons were engaged in discussion (49% female, 51% male) – a female to male ratio of 0.9 (almost parity). A total of 201 award-level documents were reviewed and graded according to topic guides (see Annexes 3 and 4).
	The selection criteria included: collective cover for the time frame 2016–20; a representative mix of small (<£100k) and large (>£1mk) awards; coverage for a range of DPs, including Hubs and Challenge areas; and a geographical spread – Asia, Africa and Latin America.
Co-creation workshops	2 workshops – 11 participants (6 women, 5 men) purposively selected as leaders in their field (PIs, panel members, Hub leader, co-investigators (CIs), challenge leader).
	23 key findings were collated and organised across the evaluation matrix. A set of semi-structured questions was developed to facilitate discussions. Questions were also asked about the impacts of Covid-19 on participant's awards.

Table 2: Breakdown of audit sample against the four steps of the data collection

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2.3 Approach to data analysis

The approaches to the data analysis naturally varied between the individual methods and sampling focus:

DP Review: Documents relating to the policies, strategies and management of awards across DPs were mined and coded for GESIP-related text. Data was then logged against the evaluation matrix (see Annex 6 for the methodology). Data was also extracted from the BEIS tracker with respect to the Gender Analysis Marker (GAM) and disability markers and reviewed against the evaluation matrix (Annex 2).

Assessment of award topics: The GESIP topic modelling drew out information about how GESIP, with a particular focus on disability issues, were being integrated into grants and publications. The data science approach mined publicly available data triangulated with data from the BEIS tracker. Annex 7 provides the list of keywords modelled.

Award-level audit: Checklists for interview and award review protocols were developed against the evaluation matrix to strengthen qualitative enquiry into the current position of GCRF DPs and award holders in relation to GESIP ambitions (annexes 3, 4 and 5). Data was assessed using a set of rubrics which rated both the level of GESIP sensitivity in the award and the confidence in the evidence to make that judgement.

Co-creation workshops. Workshops were held to test key findings and explore conclusions and recommendations arising from the findings. Participants were purposively selected as leaders in their field with a history of engagement with the GCRF.

2.4 Strengths and limitations of the approach

A number of strengths and limitations were encountered in the design and implementation of the audit, none of which significantly undermined the principles or purposes of the audit.

Strengths:

- The review period of the audit (2016–20) allows a clear picture of the changes in the way GCRF addressed GESIP since its inception and the momentum of progress made. Looking backwards across the whole GCRF ecosystem enabled us to draw insights on the different focal points where GESIP practices and innovations emerged and where policies and strategies were able to gain traction in promoting GESIP improvements.
- The analysis covers different levels of the fund and allows for deeper analysis of DP GESIP policies and strategies as well as GESIP-sensitive practices at the award level. By expanding the DP document review, the audit was able to develop a robust baseline of the heterogenity of DP policies and strategies against which we could explore the effectiveness of processes used to implement them.The purposive sampling with the GESIP-focused sample optimised the team capacity to identify where the DP processes held traction and where the awards were generating independently gender-sensitive, inclusive and poverty-focused mechanisms of utility to the wider GCRF ecosystem.

Limitations of the GESIP audit:

- **The audit approach provides a partial picture**. Given the scale and complexity of the fund, we purposively selected awards for learning and supporting the progress made to date within GCRF. However, this was a small subset of the ongoing research being supported given the need to engage with both documents and key informant interview (KII) respondents from each of the 54 reviewed awards (from a total sample of 2,925 awards between 2016 and 2020). Inevitably, these snapshots will not capture

the nuances and differences in the interplay between DPs, award holders and the broader structures of the fund, or capture the full picture of the changes over time. Similarly, in some cases where key informants at award level were limited to PIs – because CIs were not available – the audit may not have fully captured in the analysis how some awards adjusted their design and implementation approaches during the research process and the reasons behind adjustments, if any. Collectively these limitations may have skewed findings at a granular level, but given the extensive document review and award-level assessment, the GESIP team are confident of the findings generated.

- **Variability in the quality and quantity of data available for audit.** For the DP GESIP data, there was substantial variation in the quantity and quality of documents available for review. Inevitably for some DPs, and at the programme level (level C) with large research portfolios, there was more GESIP-related documentation. There were major gaps in how DPs record, assess and support award holders, partly because the audit was not able to analyse DP response documents which record their decision-making processes in response to award proposals. Fund-wide reporting systems also did not consistently provide data on the gender or inclusion dimensions of the research or highlight a poverty focus. Equally, we could not assess the full GESIP dimensions of research, since reporting systems for capturing the range of research product and results existing reporting systems do not always include reguirements to report against the GESIP dimensions (e.g. outcomes of fellowships and capacity building; documentaries, webinars).
- The audit can only partially access the impacts of recent GESIP policy changes because of the time lag between introducing a stronger GESIP focus and full implementation. The introduction of new policies in late 2018 means changes are still filtering through the systems of the GCRF and its partners. Inevitability it will take some time to see the impacts on working practices and the communication of results.

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3 Results

This section provides the findings for EQs 1 to 4. Each section begins with a summary finding for each sub-question, and is followed with supporting narrative – first from the point of view of delivery partner experience, and second from the point of view of award holders.

3.1 EQ 1: How are gender mainstreaming activities currently being strengthened throughout the fund?[31]

3.1.1 Strategies, policies, systems and processes to address gender equality

> **Summary finding:** At the DP level there has been an expansion of policies, strategies and processes to review GE compliance concerns – particularly as of 2018/2019 – but this growth appears to be sporadic and broadly uncoordinated. At the award level, there is ample evidence to suggest that overall experience in framing and addressing GE concerns in strategies, policies and systems is fairly technocratic (e.g. having a 'parity' focus), highly variable and largely dependent on the inclination of both the award subject matter and associated teaming arrangements and interests within awards. Nevertheless, the proposal stage is seen to be a critical fulcrum where award holders and DPs converge on dialogue to address GE concerns in research systems and processes. Moreover, at this stage there appears to be a broad distinction between gender-oriented and non-gender-oriented awards, in that the former generally considered guidance to be overly simplistic whereas the latter found the framing sufficiently broad and non-prescriptive.

At the DP level, there is a clear trajectory of growth on policies, strategies and processes to address and promote GE that has been growing across GCRF since 2018/2019. However, this growth is fragmented and uncoordinated, and the breadth, depth and focus of such mechanisms vary substantially across the DPs. This finding draws on the review of DP-level documentation, where GE discussions are more evident since 2019. In addition, according to a key informant at the DP level,[32] UKRI introduced GE statements early in 2019 on their own initiative and were not directed and/or facilitated by GCRF in doing so. Rather, it was stated that the main drivers of the shift were a combination of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) Review (2015), the Gender Equality Act (2014) and internal appetite among European and United States (US) colleagues: 'we anticipated there would be [compliance measures] and we acted'.[33]

In particular, and as noted in the Tetra Tech Review (2020), the flagship example of promoting compliance with the Gender Equality Act using ODA requirements is UKRI's

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[31] EQ 1.5 has been reframed for the findings section. The original question sought to focus on recommendations rather than findings. The original EQ is retained in the conclusions section.

[32] KII with DP (Scoping stage).

[33] Ibid.

introduction in 2019 of a mandatory gender statement requirement for all GCRF calls. The requirement is supported by guidance.[34]

This gradual growth is also observed in 2020, when UKRI gave guidance on the design of Gender Equality Statements. The UKRI's GE compliance process has also led to some institutions (Edinburgh University – see Box 4 – SOAS and Imperial College) developing guidance for applicants on how to satisfy the GE compliance requirement. Interestingly, although written for the purpose of assisting the application process, some of these guidance notes expand and deepen the understanding of GE formulated in UKRI's process, providing a further background and context on gender dimensions in the context of ODA. The guidance offers more detail on *why* GE is relevant to GCRF research (beyond ODA compliance) and *how* researchers can better integrate GE understanding/analysis into their work in ways that go beyond equal participation and impact (DP Review).

> **Box 4. University of Edinburgh – Gender Equality Toolkit**
>
> As part of the genderED project, the University of Edinburgh developed a Gender Equality Toolkit for GCRF work. The toolkit provides guidance on the GE statement required by UKRI. It lays out the GE statement assessment criteria, provides background and context on the ODA rationale, and highlights why GE is relevant to GCRF research. Case studies are also used to illustrate key points (e.g. the links between poverty and gender inequality).
>
> To aid thinking about the degrees to which GE can be integrated into research, the toolkit borrows Oxfam's rubric for integrating GE, which ranges from gender blind to gender transformative. The toolkit therefore provides guidance on how to consider GE at multiple levels: (i) project conceptualisation; (ii) equal and meaningful participation in the project; (iii) gender in impact and dissemination; (iv) monitoring risks. Each stage is accompanied by practical examples for illustration.

Accompanying UKRI, the UK Space Agency (UKSA), MRC, the British Academy and the Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng) are also shown to be developing policies and processes explicitly to address GE within the context of GCRF (DP literature review). For example, UKSA's internal governance for the GCRF-funded portfolio explicitly highlights the need to be ODA compliant, including through contributions to enhancing GE.

However, at the other end of the spectrum, several DPs demonstrated little evidence of developing substantial systems for engaging with GE concerns. Indeed, a significant number of DP strategy/policy-level documents (strategic plans, delivery plans) were effectively gender blind, with no specific engagement with or references to GE (DP Review).

Guidance from DPs on institutional gender-responsiveness generally tends to focus on internal systems (team parity, etc.) rather than on research content or associated methods. This suggests that while some ODA guidance is being pursued among DPs, the overall focus is one of 'compliance' rather than an interest in 'excellence' per se. For instance, outside of UKRI's GE compliance process, where DP policy and strategy on GE was well-documented, guidance is usually framed in terms of EDI. In this sense, GE is focused largely on equal opportunities and affirmative action. This was particularly the case with UKRI and the RCs, as well as with the British Academy. Other examples include EDI strategies and action plans (UKRI and MRC), equality and diversity specified as key strategic aims or goals (UKRI, British Academy and NERC), the development of an external EDI Advisory Committee (UKRI), a series of internal

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[34] UKRI (2019) Gender Equality Statement Guidance. Available at: https://www.ukri.org/files/research/gcrf/genderequality-statement-guidance/

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reviews of GE and ethnic diversity (UKRI and MRC), and the promotion of steps to ensure peer review systems and research panel committees are gender equal (UKRI).

Overall, while GE guidance is deepening and widening at the DP level, it is difficult to clearly determine the degree to which it has been developed in response to the UKRI GEstatement requirements. However, there are certainly indications that UKRI and a small selection of other institutions have been engaged in a cascading and/or collective learning process that has stimulated a shift in the interests of GE concerns across the GCRF. By providing this leadership and a clear policy framework, UKRI has created space through which institutional best practice leaders (genderED, etc.) have been able to horizontally promote engagement and understanding of GE concerns. Nevertheless, the broader picture is one of DPs administering their GCRF funding separately, employing varied individual measures to address GE.

At the award level, the picture is similarly patchy compared to the DP level in terms of the consistency of GE strategies, systems and processes being integrated into various operational activities – although a small number of award holders have moved from 'a culture of compliance' to one of 'excellence'. For example, of the 1,143 GCRF Grants in Gateway to Research analysed through the topic modelling analysis, only 1% suggested a high focus on gender (>40 keywords), 6% demonstrated a consistent focus on gender (>20 keywords) and 24% showed low focus on gender (5 keywords).[35] While the majority of gender results mapped against the sustainable health and well-being challenge area (given this area contained the largest number of awards), there are nonetheless promising signs that gender terminology is fairly present across the topic modelling sample.

There are also clear signs that a small proportion of awards are recognising GE concerns in both internal systems and research content – particularly among award Hubs and awards that are centrally situated in the social sciences (see Box 5).

> **Box 5. Award holders taking advanced steps for gender transformative approaches**
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> For the handful of awards that held GE as a central focus, there is a strong tendency to refer to critical 'feminist approaches' and the need to incorporate an intersectional lens into both the awards' methodology and teaming arrangements by going beyond terminology focused on the category of 'women's interests'.[36] Such awards are seen to be undertaking a 'gender transformative' approach to understand GE concerns as they apply to research processes. However, feedback from these award holders also strongly suggests that they think of themselves 'far in advance' of current 'compliance' framing, and that they lean more towards aspirations of 'excellence'.

However, even for awards that are comparative leaders in undertaking gender mainstreaming in internal or thematic content, the drivers are largely shown to be internal and dependent on predisposed interests and experience rather than direct or indirect support from DPs. Almost all awards that exhibited a strong 'feminist' foundation in research design and process articulated in interviews that they based this on either the gendered nature of the award or the inherent qualities of the team in question (or both). This trend was also observed among awards that demonstrated a less intensive or radical approach to GE.[37]

By contrast, internally driven gender mainstreaming activities were less clear among awards that were not overtly 'gendered' in terms of their thematic focus. Such award holders

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[35] See Annex 7 for a list of GESIP-related keywords used in the topic modelling.

[36] G18, G4, G5.

[37] G19, G29, G31.

reflected that they were largely appreciative of reminders and guidance on gender mainstreaming requested by DPs – although this guidance was almost uniformly encountered at the proposal stage only.[38] Indeed, common to the relatively few awards (social science based or not) that explicitly encountered some form of strategic guidance on gender mainstreaming was the fact this this support was almost always concentrated at the proposal stage.

Consequently, the proposal stage appears to be a critical entry point for all award holders to be engaged by both DP panel reviewers as well as written guidance on gendered subject matter. Despite this fairly systematic engagement at the proposal stage, the guidance is nevertheless largely considered to be perfunctory and light touch in nature by the majority of award holders. On the other hand, in a small minority of cases, award holders expressed frustration and concern that guidance to support gender-responsive thinking at the proposal stage is overly simplistic and largely 'meaningless in terms of [understanding] impact, and meaningless in ways for our own working'.[39] The same award team suggested that a space to present and discuss more complex and contested ways of understanding relationships of power was not facilitated by UKRI-ESRC in the proposal stage, which has the ultimate effect of building and perpetuating gender stereotypes[40] – a sentiment that was echoed by two other award teams that were highly experienced in gender-responsive and feminist thinking.[41]

Finally, on the few occasions where systematic and comprehensive support on strategic gender mainstreaming was afforded to award holders by GCRF, the support is largely more evident among either award Hubs or a small minority of very experienced award holders that declared a significant degree of familiarity with the GCRF ecosystem. These awards were able to 'tap' tacit networks and engage in horizontal learning activities to promote gender mainstreaming in a more strategic fashion.[42] This suggests that there are pockets of promising practice among a cadre of award holders that can be specifically targeted for review and learning purposes.

3.1.2 Expertise available to support gender equality

Summary finding: A number of mechanisms to develop and maintain GE expertise have been observed at the DP level, although these mechanisms are generally uncoordinated and variable in nature. At the award level, particularly those with a humanities focus, many respondents self-reported a satisfactory performance with respect to ensuring appropriate GE expertise was developed and maintained. However, a strong tendency for focusing on team parity was observed at the award level, at the expense of more progressive thinking about gender-related barriers and power issues. This thinking has broadly developed without a clear line of sight of DP expectations regarding gender expertise.

There is good evidence showing that mechanisms have been put in place across the majority of DPs to build and maintain GE expertise at the DP level and award level – although these mechanisms are variable and mostly uncoordinated. As evidenced in the DP Review, the teaming arrangements, skills and competencies around gender that are promoted across GCRF include: the creation of advisory teams that supervise how GE is considered at all levels; the

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[38] CS24, CS6-8, CS16, G33, CS99.

[39] KII 1, G3.

[40] Ibid.

[41] G2, G5.

[42] G4, G5.

provision of training programmes for employees; the designation of 'equality champions' to ensure that GE concerns are embedded within DP systems; and the promotion of toolkits that outline ways for capturing and building appropriate gender expertise. More specifically, UKRI engages with an EDI External Advisory Committee that reports to the UKRI Executive Committee on EDI performance. Similarly, Innovate UK has created a team of experts that addresses EDI topics. UKRI has also established an International Development (Gender Equality) compliance process that provides guidance and training to UKRI staff, applicants, peer reviewers and panellists (DP Review).

Similarly, MRC provides equality and 'unconscious bias' trainings to managers and employees and has developed a network of 'equality champions' composed of employees that work with human resource teams as well as local trade unions to closely monitor gendered teaming arrangements internally and ensure support. A good example of how these practices have trickled down within the GCRF ecosystem is the uptake of the Gender Equality Toolkit developed by the University of Edinburghwhich has been made available to the other institutions in the consortium through the Scottish Funding Council (SFC). In addition to this, no evidence of such expertise-building mechanisms has been found among the other DPs. Finally, with some minor exceptions (such as the MRC trainings), most of the practices and resources that have supported the building of gender-responsive expertise seem to have been initiated in 2019 (DP Review).

At the award level, there is routine respondent feedback and evidence suggesting that considerations on appropriate gender expertise are driven internally and without a clear line of sight regarding expectations that might be associated with ODA compliance concerns. Almost all award holders note that concerns for team parity arrangements are intrinsic to their ways of working, although this is often framed as a parity issue at higher levels of the award (i.e. among PIs and CIs), and/or in terms of ensuring a teaming balance at the data collection level. In addition, any shortfalls or missed opportunities in improving the parity of teaming arrangements are reportedly raised and addressed at the proposal or interview panel stage.

While the majority of award holders consider parity concerns in isolation of any formal guidance, only a minority of awards undertake a sophisticated approach to understanding and addressing gender expertise in their activities. The latter award holders are largely able to go a step further in considering not only parity but also the gendered expertise of core team members and the systematic barriers that they might encounter across the academic arena – particularly for early career researchers in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Fewer yet provide strategic plans or informal visions relating to team capacity building in the medium to long term – one exception being an engineering-focused award that not only proactively sought to fill gaps in gender expertise at the pre-proposal stage but also considered capacity building activities for partner organisations at national level as well as for women smallholder farmer organisations.[43]

A key characteristic that differentiates awards that go beyond a parity focus and those which seek to take a sophisticated or strategic approach to ensuring gender-specific expertise are addressed in their awards is those that have an explicit top-level interest in gender issues as a result of their award objectives and/or individual team member interests. For instance, a number of award holders referenced predecessor projects and associated networks, where 'both PIs were on advisory committees for other GCRF projects', and who had access to 'two external evaluations who are gender experts'.[44] Another award, situated in a hub, had access

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[43] CS55.

[44] G18.

to a hub-wide 'Gender Champion' from the outset, as well as a gender expert located at the Hubs' executive advisory board,[45] and continues to embed gender champions at several research site locations where required.

Overall, given the general focus on parity, and that award holders generally state that they 'are doing it all already', few respondents requested specific suggestions on advanced approaches to gender-response capacity building at the team level. However, one respondent noted a cautionary concern that even the provision of 'more advanced' or intensive guidance may not necessarily equate to effectiveness: 'if guidance was made available on this, it is likely that there would be very little power analysis undertaken, and this would not be grounded in 'everyday' implementation and practice – thereby giving the impression of change, rather than building on insights gained from the empirical aspects of [research delivery]'.[46] This insight serves as a reminder that progress on formal guidance for improving GE expertise across GCRF also needs to be accompanied by organisational culture shifts, to ground progress into the everyday thinking and practice of DPs and award holders.

3.1.3 Monitoring and learning in GCRF's approach to gender equality

Summary finding: At the DP level there is no consistent approach regarding gender-responsive MEL approaches, while a small number of promising practices are emergent – the BEIS gender tracker being a promising example (although the tracker is seen to be error-prone and overly simplistic). At the award level, the picture is similar in that awards broadly maintain their own ad hoc systems for capturing disaggregated data. With respect to learning, this is largely conducted in a horizontal, organic and opportunistic fashion across both DPs and awards, and is clearly the dominant mechanism for learning diffusion. There is also considerable inequality between DPs in terms of the amount of MEL data captured and actively used for reflection vis-à-vis award holders.

Guidance from DPs on Gender Equality Statements and/or other gender-responsive MEL mechanisms in proposal documents and associated guidance is generally lacking, although some notable exceptions exist. Examples of systematic good practices for addressing GE concerns include UKSA's M&E function, used to measure the impact of the International Partnership Programme (IPP) on GE at programme and project level (e.g. Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Handbook 2020), or the Gender Monitoring and Evaluation Guidance provided by UKRI to assess the performance of Hubs in terms of GE aspirations. Additionally, UKRI engages with the International Development Team that coordinates and delivers an M&E of Gender Equality Act Compliance processes. More widely, SFC has requested universities to provide information regarding GE compliance at three different levels: within research, within GCRF activities, and in the context of projects. Higher education institutions subsequently reported on their plans to enforce GE considerations overall (e.g. achieving and Athena SWAN Award[47]) and within specific projects (DP Review).

While UKRI and UKSA have developed tools and guidance documents that provide a framework supporting MEL within GCRF, few mechanisms have been found among other partners. Of these few, evidence of gender-specific or gender-responsive MEL systems includes review templates that explicitly address GE at the programme level or request gender

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[45] G30.

[46] G3.

[47] The Athena Swan Charter is a globally recognised framework supporting gender equality in higher education and research.

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assessments of applicants (Innovate UK), reports on applicants' gender diversity (Royal Society (RS)) or less formal means requesting higher education institutions to provide GE statements (SFC). For the remainder of DPs, no evidence of formal MEL mechanisms for capturing GE at the award level have been found. This may largely be a result of institutional inertia, given that Gender Equality Statements largely gained traction in 2019 and 2020.

As noted from a DP-level key informant, the other main mechanism for tracking gender concerns is ResearchFish, although there are also plans for UKRI to introduce an option for institutions to include a 500-word case study focused on gender in their proposals. As noted in parliamentary (International Development Committee) feedback from the Newton Fund Review (2020),[48] there are plans on track to begin the onboarding process for the Research ODA (RODA) platform as from October 2020, thereby allowing users to begin reporting on gendered components of ODA compliance.[49] However, as noted in the parliamentary response to the Newton Fund report,[50] it should be maintained that there is 'no one size fits all', given that DFID (FCDO) uses a different model and prioritises other ODA objectives.

At the award level, one of the central MEL mechanisms for capturing ODA compliance is the GAM, captured in the overarching BEIS tracker. Guidance is provided in the BEIS tracker to explain the logic through which a score is provided by reviewers (see Box 6), and the results of the tracker – as of August 2020 – are provided in Figure 4 below.

Box 6. BEIS tracker guidance for capturing progress on gender equality commitments

An activity should be classified as GE-focused if GE is explicitly promoted in activity documentation through specific measures which:

(a) reduce social, economic or political power inequalities between women and men, girls and boys, ensure that women benefit equally with men from the activity, or compensate for past discrimination; or
(b) develop or strengthen GE or anti-discrimination policies, legislation or institutions.
This approach requires analysing gender inequalities either separately or as an integral part of agencies' standard procedures.

(2 – principal, 1 – significant, 0 – assessed but not targeted, blank – not assessed).

In summary, the evidence shows that approximately 15% of awards have not been assessed to date, and that a significant majority have been given a '0' rating (assessed, not targeted). The proportion of scoring for 'significant' and 'principal' engagement on GE is 6.6% (150 awards) and 4.3% (65 awards) respectively. However, a review of all awards in the BEIS tracker (n= 2,925 awards) that reflect a strong emphasis on gender and/or women in their titles shows that at least 30 awards have assessed by the GAM to have a '0' rating.[51] Consequently, there is good evidence to suggest that a notable proportion (up to 26%) [52] of gender-focused awards

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[48] https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmintdev/742/74202.htm accessed February 2021.

[49] RODA is an internal submission service that reflects requirements appropriate for the R&I context. It is a hybrid mixture of client data submission for DPs to report actual/forecast spend and finance/programme management. A range of tools and platforms is available for viewing BEIS published ODA data, including d-portal, DfID's Dev-tracker and a newly-launched International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) data query builder.

[50] Ibid.

[51] The latter awards include research to address 'Visualizing Gender-Based Violence in Graphic Awareness Campaigns in Nepal', 'Debating, Performing & Curating Symbolic Reparations and Transformative Gender Justice', 'Articulating Women: Interrogating Intersectionality and Empowering Women Through Critical Engagements' and 'Improving healthcare at the intersection of gender and protracted displacement amongst Somali and Congolese refugees and IDPs'.

[52] There are 150 1-rating awards and 65 2-rating awards, making 215 awards. Given that there are at least 30 awards that appear to have been overlooked, this constitutes a potential MEL shortfall of 26%.

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are being overlooked in current MEL systems – suggesting there is room for improvement on how the GAM is maintained and reviewed.
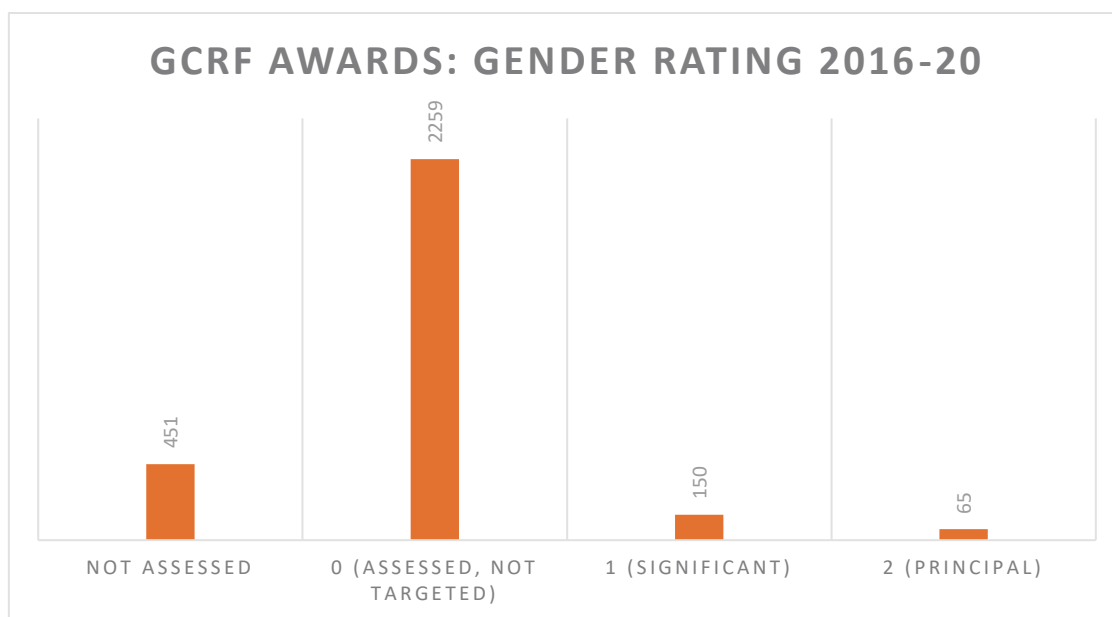
GCRF AWARDS: GENDER RATING 2016-20

Figure 4: Count of GCRF awards obtaining gender rating (0–2), 2016–20

The GAM guidance can also be argued to be overly simplistic in that,there is no distinction afforded to the gender-responsive nature of awards on either a thematic content or teaming level. As a result, the BEIS tracker marker cannot currently distinguish between performance on the gender-responsiveness of internal teaming arrangements and associated capacity building activities, as opposed to the degree of gender-responsive framing inside award content.

There are also shortfalls in the gender-responsiveness of MEL systems at the award level: feedback and documentation from award holders shows that while the promotion, uptake and completion of GE statements has been improving since 2019, a considerable majority of award holders are unfamiliar with the need to use or be informed by these statements. Award-level respondents stated that they were largely agnostic about the shortfalls in gender-responsive MEL systems outlined above. The majority of those interviewed explained that they maintained their own ad hoc systems for capturing sex-disaggregated data (either in teaming arrangements or in data review). However, a small number of respondents – primarily those engaged in gender-responsive awards – were critical of the tools and mechanisms to monitor progress on GE mainstreaming. Broadly put, the latter award holders consider GCRF MEL systems to be overly simplistic and inappropriate for unpacking complex behavioural change, given that little space is afforded to a deep analysis of unequal power relations. However, these award holders did not venture further in suggesting concrete solutions in this regard.

3.1.4 Accountability for gender equality ODA requirements

Summary finding: There is a variety of accountability measures that have been put in place by DPs to frame compliance on GE mainstreaming, but evidence of implementation with award holders – especially following the proposal stage – is lacking. Thereafter, where GE statements (or similar) are sent up the delivery chain, feedback on their quality or content is largely absent. There are, however, pockets of promising practice among awards which

> go beyond a 'compliance' framing towards one of 'technical excellence' – but these examples are scattered and few.

Accountability processes among DPs and awards for ensuring GE mainstreaming are generally fragmented and uncoordinated by GCRF, but are concentrated at the proposal stage – particularly in panel review dialogues. One of the limited examples found in the DP-level review is the GE Act Compliance process, developed by UKRI, that formally requires awards to report an end-of-year survey, which includes an assessment of the award's impact on GE. Also, some funding guidance documents, published in or after 2019, explicitly require applicants to incorporate GE in specific sections of the proposals (e.g. in 'Pathways to Impact' and 'Case for Support' documents). Similarly, UKSA and Innovate UK's proposal templates incorporate GE requirements. UKSA's templates include a separate section on 'impact on gender' and Innovate UK refers to GE as a requirement for participation under the International Development (GE) Act 2014. Research England (RE) has included the act in grant conditions for the GCRF funding stream it administers.

As noted above (3.1.3), given the sporadic and embryonic MEL systems currently in place for reviewing ODA compliance, the formal upward accountability process for this is equally patchy and inconsistent. Rather, the majority of award holders note that the proposal stage (and associated interactions with the review panel) is the primary locus for formal feedback and corresponding adjustments to be made on proposals.[53] However, a small number of award holders noted that while this accountability process was generally constructive, it was not always effective: 'The reviewers forced us to unpack [gender issues] in more detail. They also encouraged thinking on [alternative gender-specific enquiries]'. In so doing, they demonstrated an understanding 'far better than ours' around these complications [and]were 'spot on – which is not always the case'.[54]

The framing of 'accountability' beyond the proposal stage is largely understood and practiced informally in terms of horizontal learning and other internal systems at both the award level and the DP level. This finding is also evidenced in feedback from a number of award holders who state that if Gender Equality Statements (or similar) are developed at any point in the post-proposal stage and sent up the delivery chain, there is often no feedback or reflection back towards award holders in order to nuance their approach on ODA compliance for GE. As a result, apart from a few key awards that demonstrated that strong internal incentives for ensuring accountability mechanisms are in place,[55] the accountability process is fairly technocratic and focused on compliance at the proposal stage, with little focus regarding ongoing compliance or technical excellence later in the research delivery process.

3.1.5 Gender sensitivity of communication strategies and research outputs

> **Summary finding:** At the DP level, there is no central or core guide through which the gender-responsiveness of communications or other outputs can be reviewed. At the award level, there is a generally a strong commitment to bottom-up and co-created communication and dissemination approaches – although these commitments vary in nature, and the degree to which gender-responsive messaging is consistently mainstreamed in practice is relatively unclear.

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[53] G17, G18, CS44, G29, G37, G38.

[54] G2.

[55] G2, G3, G4, G5.

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At the DP level, there is a considerable heterogeneity in the amount and type of communication material found – particularly the extent to which gender-responsiveness is an issue of concern. The typical dissemination material found includes case study reports (SFC, Innovate UK, Research England), brochures (UKSA), slides (RAEng) and event feedback reports (UKRI). Among these, only Research England and Innovate UK case study reports regularly include GE considerations as part of programme activities.

Similarly, award holders could rarely unpack the mechanics of a gender-responsive communication approach, nor could they articulate the role of DPs in encouraging such approaches. The majority of award holders were able to demonstrate basic or limited accounts of their communications and dissemination approaches in Pathway to Impact statements and/or Case for Support (proposal) materials. These accounts are largely focused on the targeting of specific stakeholder groups and on explanations of any innovative multimedia approaches. One of the few key documents to address gender-responsive communication and dissemination at the award level was the 'Developing inclusive conferences – Best Practice Guide' (Chautard and Hann, 2019).

Despite the broader lack of guidance materials, a small number of awards articulated in fair detail the promotion of bottom-up communication approaches and a commitment to including a gender lens in all their communication materials.[56] However, these awards were largely predisposed to a gender-responsive communications approach, on the basis that GE is front and centre in their award profile. These award holders developed the approaches internally, and at no stage were they made aware of any guidance from DPs or GCRF on expectations for gender-responsive dissemination or communication approaches.

3.2 EQ 2: How effectively is poverty framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?

3.2.1 How is 'poverty alleviation' understood across GCRF?

Summary finding: Addressing 'poverty alleviation' is considered by DPs and award holders as implicit in the research funded by GCRF. However, it is rarely – if ever – explicitly defined in relation to ODA compliance. There is no high-level BEIS/GCRF guidance or consistency in guidance across the DPs with respect to poverty terminology, although – in a limited number of cases – programmes and calls have considered poverty in their framing. There is also a high degree of diversity around how award holders understand and apply poverty concepts in the research process.

At the DP level, guidance on poverty or the poverty requirements of ODA funding is either non-existent or limited to specific programmes or calls. Many award holders report being given limited guidance in relation to poverty. For instance, the pathways to poverty alleviation are not requested in any observed guidance. There is some limited evidence of poverty alleviation being considered in the rationale of programmes and in the funding calls (UKRI and ESRC), delivery plans (ESRC, RAEng) or as part of communication material (RAEng, UKSA). As pointed out by some KIIs, one of the challenges historically has been that the GCRF was not

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[56] G2, G4, GR6, GR7, GR2.

under the authority of the International Development Acts (2002, 2014), and therefore explicit framing of policies and programmes was not a requirement.[57]

As a result, it appears that the interpretation of poverty implications has been left largely to the proposal writers and award holders. Since late 2018, there has been growing awareness among some DPs that more could be done to guide, shape and capture the poverty dimensions of supported research, and there are expectations among some award holders that there will be more clarity regarding poverty terminology in the future. However, some DPs observed that there were limited resources to address the poverty dimensions to the depth they would like, and cautioned a gradualist approach to change.[58]

At the award level, poverty reduction appears to be largely understood in terms of working in and collaborating with developing countries listed as ODA countries – and these understandings are largely framed at the proposal stage.[59] Evidence from interviews and award-level documents shows that consideration for poverty dimensions occurs most often at the proposal stage. For instance, proposals and Pathway to Impact statements are largely the only places where poverty considerations are addressed, and the framing is primarily associated with relevant SDGs and the GCRF challenge areas – rather than an exposé of the detailed poverty dimensions that would be addressed by the award.[60] While awards may not be systematically defining or making explicit references to poverty, the majority were clear that poverty was being indirectly addressed given the inherent nature of the research and the context (e.g. economic and social development, food insecurity, human rights or health inequalities). Despite this, few awards provided details in the documents regarding how these concepts would be addressed, the poverty status of targeted populations or how the impacts of the research would contribute to poverty reduction. The only resource found across the ecosystem to support awards to consider the poverty dimensions of their research is the Edinburgh University's GE toolkit, which includes case studies that illustrate the links between poverty and gender inequality.

In a small minority of awards,[61] poverty was understood in a broader framework encompassing structural inequalities and multiple deprivations. These awards, often also demonstrating robust approaches to SI and GE, considered the framing of poverty alleviation in the GCRF to be overly simplistic or problematic, taking account of neither the changing ODA context of poverty alleviation nor the advances in conceptualisation of poverty. For these awards, poverty is embedded within their methodological framework and intersects with concepts relating to, for example, spatial disparities, disabilities, identities, marginality, power, gender and exclusion.

The range of ways in which poverty and poverty alleviation have been understood across DPs and award holders highlights the challenges involved in tracing the framing of poverty throughout the fund. Findings from the topic modelling (n=1143 from Gateway to Research) suggested that there was a potential bias towards econometric or income-based categories of poverty, and there is some evidence in documents to support this finding.[62] However, the lack of explicit guidance for awards about how to frame or report on the poverty dimensions of the research meant it was impossible to determine the extent of the bias. In a large proportion of the awards audited, documentation available indicated causal links were implicitly assumed,

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[57] DP12, Feedback from Learning workshop, DP3.

[58] DP9, DP12.

[59] Almost 80% of common pool and over 50% of core sample.

[60] Over 70% of common pool and more than 50% of GESIP-focused.

[61] G2, G5, G8, G19, G18, G26, G27.

[62] 1143 GCRF Grants in Gateway to Research analysed through the topic modelling analysis.

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without a formal process or mechanism within the GCRF for these links to be consistently interrogated or tested across the organisational layers of the fund. As one award holder observed: 'Poverty is a packed concept that intersects with a number of other development concepts.'

The key finding regarding the framing of poverty across GCRF, therefore, is that the current approach does not allow for the consistent unpacking of, and rationale for, varied understandings of poverty. This represents a significant omission given the critical framing of ODA-funded research from a poverty perspective.

3.2.2 Expertise available to address poverty alleviation within the GCRF

Summary finding: Capacities, resources and skills to address and integrate poverty into the proposals and implementation processes of awards remain largely with individual award holders, given there are no expectations from GCRF to outline relevant expertise. There are signs of some cross-fertilisation of expertise between awards, but these efforts are not amplified by current mechanisms and systems within the GCRF.

The findings indicate that there is neither a requirement or expectation within the GCRF ecosystem to define or outline the expertise and resources available to address poverty issues. A small number of DPs also noted that ODA compliance was a key driver for assessing, reviewing and monitoring how poverty had been dealt within awards, including drawing on expertise to support the research approach.[63] Some KIIs reported valuing the poverty expertise in the peer review and selection process, although there was no clear evidence that poverty expertise was routinely brought into the call, appraisal and selection process.[64]

Nevertheless, the vast majority of award holders reported undertaking a number of activities that indirectly informed ODA compliance concerns in relation to fulfilling 'poverty alleviation' expertise. How this was interpreted varied widely, however, from consulting with poverty experts in the design of research to having PIs and CIs with a poverty research background and to having a poverty expert in the term: 'We did not benefit from any assistance or guidance on poverty alleviation [but it] is implicit as a goal in the award since the focus in on communities in poorer countries.'[65] Despite these team activities and the availabilityof expertise, poverty criteria were almost never iincluded at the express interest of DPs, and award holders routinely declared that they were unaware of expectations in this regard.

Consequently, with the limited articulation of expectations on ODA compliance at both the DP and award levels, and with the variable interpretations of poverty in practice, there is limited scope for mapping and assessing GCRF's contribution to poverty alleviation. Given this constraint, the effective mapping of GCRF contributions to the SDGs is likely to be problematic.

3.2.3 Monitoring and dissemination of poverty data, findings and research outputs

Summary finding: Reporting requirements with regard to poverty-related approaches, outputs or outcomes are not consistent across the GCRF, resulting in a broken evidence trail. Data relating to poverty and poverty alleviation remains at the level of the DP, the

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[63] DP3, DP5.

[64] Co-creation workshop, G2, G22.

[65] Award KII.

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> Hub, or in many cases the award holder. The are no systems and mechanisms in place to feed poverty data routinely upwards through the GCRF's organisational layers or to disseminate more widely.

At the DP level it has been challenging to identify the extent to which GCRF-supported research has contributed, or is in the process of contributing, to pro-poor outcomes. The audit found limited evidence that the poverty dimensions of awards were being systematically documented and disseminated. Although the GCRF ToC 'envisaged that a short-term outcome for the fund is the direct application of pro-poor practices, technologies and products as a result of participating in products', monitoring systems are not designed to capture the distinct poverty dimensions of research.[66] The main means for monitoring are programmes and project reports (the British Academy (BA), the Higher Education Council for Funding Wales (HECFW), the Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS), the Department for the Economy Northern Ireland (DEFNI) and Innovate UK). However, both DPs and award holders reported that current procedures did not allow for the full range of poverty-related results to be captured. There are limited avenues to report the multi-dimensions of poverty and the interlinkages with gender and SI.

The introduction of narrative reporting allowing for increased visibility of poverty issues (and all GESIP) in mid-2020 is seen as a positive step. There was poverty data available in some DPs, but mechanisms for elevating data up or throughout system were not in place. DPs reported lack of resources to do so and disincentives in the current system, where it was felt there were challenges in reporting the multi-dimensions of poverty and the interlinkages with gender and SI: 'There is an issue around how we are asked to report and what we report against […] What you ask us to report against can determine what you think you are seeing […] We frame [our reports] around what we are being asked. The granularity is lost and what can be learnt and developed from different perspectives'.[67]

Beyond ODA compliance and 'Pathways to Impact' statements, no additional tangible guidance appears to have been provided to award holders with respect to the reporting requirement and MEL expectations in relation to poverty.

The findings are similar at the award level, where the absence of any requirements to monitor and report routinely on poverty suggests that poverty findings and results are being under-reported. Findings from the topic modelling data set indicated that 26% of the awards analysed in the Gateway to Research (GtR) data set had a consistent focus on poverty (20 or more terms found in the documents). An indication of a higher focus on poverty in reporting research results as compared to GE and SI. Yet the results showed a bias towards a few research clusters (notably maternal pregnancy, peace and violence , and civil society).

However, subsequent analysis of ResearchFish and the BEIS tracker, triangulated with the literature review and award audit, suggests three reasons why the picture is more complex. First, published research is not using specific poverty terminology to describe research activities, nor are poverty-related tags or categories being used routinely during reporting processes at the award level. Second, many of the awards disseminated their findings through workshops, briefings, seminars and webinars, where poverty may have been a dimension of the reporting but was not the main topic. Third, the majority of the awards demonstrating a

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[66] GCRF 'Foundational Evaluation' (Itad, 2019).

[67] DP-level KII.

stronger focus on poverty were either at the beginning of generating results or were experiencing delays as a result of Covid-19 adaptations.[68]

Nevertheless, findings also indicate that some awards are routinely monitoring poverty and using findings to adjust methodologies or activities undertaken. A range of awards built a poverty analysis into the research framework from inception, working with targeted communities to monitor or communicate results.[69] In particular, the evidence indicates that Hubs with an intersectional focus are more likely to integrate poverty analyses into their monitoring, reporting and dissemination of results – primarily through undertaking comprehensive ToC processes and defining multiple poverty-related terms such as 'well-being', 'inequality' or 'capabilities'.

3.3 EQ 3: How is social inclusion/equality, diversity and inclusion framed and understood within the GCRF ecosystem?

3.3.1 How the GCRF ecosystem frames and understands social inclusion/equality, diversity and inclusion (SI/EDI)

> **Summary finding:** At DP level, the framing of SI/EDI and formal alignment with ODA compliance measures is fragmented, although Delivery and Strategic Plans in 2019 demonstrate that there is progress in the promotion of SI/EDI concerns across a handful of DPs. At the award level, while similar progress is evident, the majority of awards do not systematically demonstrate any formal written processes for addressing SI/EDI compliance guidance from DPs. The recognition of 'equality, diversity, and inclusion' terminology is also patchy in terms of its diffusion across award holders – although this is growing awareness of this in many awards.

The conceptual framing of SI/EDI issues across the DP and award levels are largely dependent on the framing of the award, the team composition and the unique specialities of team members, rather than being grounded in written ODA compliance guidance. Nevertheless, there is a handful of awards that are demonstrating promising practice with respect to how they are mainstreaming SI/EDI concerns across both award management processes and the award thematic content itself. At the DP level there is promising momentum on the framing of SI/EDI concerns, given the creation of several Delivery and Strategic Plans in 2019.[70] These materials give some insights about how SI is ideally incorporated and generally understood within the GCRF ecosystem. For instance, ESRC's 2019 Delivery Plan explicitly expresses the ambition to strengthen the focus on EDI, while the AHRC Delivery Plan 2019 brings up the opportunity to focus on SI considerations, i.e. disability, LGBTQ and marginalised communities.

Similarly, NERC's Delivery Plan states its intention to revise its Responsibility Framework – drawing upon UKRI's EDI strategy in doing so. The BBSRC Delivery Plan 2019 is relatively blind to SI/EDI issues but does acknowledge the intention to incorporate SI/EDI considerations in their research – this is understood in terms of disability, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and age. BA's 2019 Strategic Plan

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[68] G2, G5, G19.

[69] G17, G33, G30, G18, G15.

[70] ESRC, AHRC, MRC, BA, BBSRC and NERC.

includes SI as part of its vision for 2022. Similarly, MRC highlighted their intention to enhance the EDI strategy as a long-term aim in the 2019 Delivery Plan.

These delivery, action and strategic plans have emerged after UKRI developed a strategy and action plan for EDI in 2018–19. Within UKRI, this was followed by a formal requirement for all calls to incorporate an equality impact statement. This requirement seems to be reflected in some of the newer calls, which include requirements for inclusive advisory committees to advise on diversity and equality issues. However, only five out of 15 funding calls systematically address SI as part of the selection criteria and the core rationale – the 'One Ocean Hub' being a prime example. Also, the guidance from 2019 for gender M&E, focused on Hubs, specifically requests awardees to provide information about how each award has proven to have an impact on EDI, although reflections and specific guidance concerning disability issues are often under-represented.

Other DPs also seem to have included SI in the framing of funding calls, but the extent to which this is included as selection criteria is lower. For instance, ESRC incorporates SI as such in three out of six funding calls reviewed. BA addresses SI in 11 of the 12 calls, and in four of them as selection criteria. Most of these show evidence an intersectional understanding of SI, including gender, age, disability, ethnicity, race, religion and spatial factors.

A range of other ad hoc actions supporting the mainstreaming of SI/EDI is observable at DP level. These include the elaboration of guidance for applicants and reviewers (BA, RAEng), programme theories of change (Innovate UK) or internal policies and statements that address SI in different forms (RAEng, BA, MRC). For instance, BA have started to take SI into consideration in the assessment guidelines of three particular programmes – referring to ethnicity, race, disability, spatial factors, religion and age factors – as a mandatory requirement for applicants. RAEng guidance documents for applicants and reviewers include a diversity and inclusion statement, and some of the programme calls incorporate specific questions on how these dimensions are to be included in projects. The most recent documents include explicit requirements to increase the participation and under-represented groups (e.g. Frontiers and Higher Education Partnerships in Sub-Saharan Africa (HEPSSA) programmes).

However, this does not seem to be generalised among all DPs, and the degree to which SI is addressed varies. In several cases, regardless of having developed the aforementioned action and delivery plans, there is no observable action in other sections of the literature from 2019 and 2020. No significant evidence has been found among the remainder of DPs regarding SI considerations (RE, RE, SFC, AMS, DEFNI, Innovate UK, MRC). In some of these cases the submitted strategies and proposals incorporate some of these dimensions, but there is no evidence of it having been requested by the DPs.

At the award level, despite some growing recognition of SI/EDI terminology and compliance concerns accelerating at the DP level, research teams are largely unaware of formal guidance on SI/EDI with respect to internal research systems as well as application of SI/EDI to research content or enquiries. The topic modelling analysis shows that SI/EDI terms are largely framed around gender, voice, social justice, diversity, equality, empowerment and participation. Similar to the topic modelling findings on gender, the topic matches drew most results on the topics of maternal pregnancy, peace and violence, and civil society. However, fewer than 1% of results demonstrated a consistent (>20 keyword matches) reflection of SI terms (29% for >5 keyword matches, with only one result for >40-word keyword match).[71]

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[71] See Annex 7 for a list of GESIP-related keywords used in the topic modelling.

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The award analysis also shows that a crude distinction can be made between social science-oriented award holders as opposed to the physical or natural sciences (as noted in section 3.1.1). For instance, despite entertaining a 'holistic vulnerability model', the PI from an environmental risk-oriented award stated that 'We haven't really thought about this [SE/EDI]'.[72] In another award focused on environmental dynamics, award holders stated that while SI was not formally considered in research aims or methods, nor in project management and the formation of associated teams, they were aware of a broader sea-change regarding the recognition of SI themes.[73]

Another pool of awards, the majority of which tread the line between having a social science and physical science orientation, demonstrates a degree of recognition of SI/EDI issues in either teaming arrangements or research content. However, this recognition is usually framed around the importance of a single social axis (caste, socioeconomic status, ethnicity) and not a holistic or intersectional approach, and is largely developed on the basis of researcher interests and academic dispositions rather than formal guidance. For instance, one award focusing on governance issues in South Asia noted in the later stages of the research that certain social groups (castes) were under-represented in participatory consultations and were later added to the cohort list.[74] Another award, focusing on young people, sought to recruit a very specific of young enumerators into teaming arrangements,[75] while others sought to frame SI/EDI awareness in terms of 'community participation'[76] or the inclusion of other marginalised groups (Indigenous communities).[77]

A final body of awards – primarily those that have a substantive or focused lens on social science topics – demonstrate a more comprehensive recognition of a range of SI/EDI concerns in their award documents and feedback. However, these awards – like those mentioned above – have largely under-written their commitments to mainstreaming SI/EDI issues, using either their teams' pre-existing inclinations or the requirements of the subject matter as justification rather than formal guidance from respective DPs. These awards tend to focus on vulnerable populations first and foremost, and disaggregate target groups by 'religion, ethnicity and language', 'geographic and communicational' separation, horizontal inequality, 'multiple age groups', 'ethnicity, age and refugee status', and 'caste, ethnicity, race – intersecting with gender'.[78] There are also indications that awards associated with Hubs are able to invest more time and effort into disaggregating and presenting SI/EDI issues in a more granular way.

A systematic approach for reviewing potentially relevant SI/EDI dimensions in research strategies and systems vis-à-vis ODA compliance expectations is largely lacking. Only a small number of awards go further in appreciating the full implications of an intersectional approach in research design and implementation.[79] One award in particular – situated within a Hub – has demonstrated the capacity and interest to go so far as to pilot different metrics for assessing equality gaps from an intersectional perspective.[80] The pilot activity is also designed with scalability in mind and, as noted by the PI, 'what we are testing can reverberate in different spaces'. This award, along with a small number of others, is able to demonstrate more interaction with DP programme officer staff, who have been supportive in reflecting on such

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[72] CS24.

[73] CS9, CS10.

[74] CS16, CS17.

[75] G34.

[76] GR8.

[77] G21.

[78] G28, G31, G17, G29, G15, GR2.

[79] G2, G3, G4, G5.

[80] G4.

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lessons, and facilitating ad hoc horizontal learning activities – although the energy for these interactions is driven largely at the award or hub level.

However, on the subject disability in particular, very few (if any) awards aspire to take an active or peripheral interest in disability issues – either in isolation or as part of a wider package of potential vulnerability or inequality issues. Three of the sampled awards (3 of 54) undertake an explicit focus on disability or disabilities, while only one award attested to altering their research strategy to accommodate an emerging understanding of the importance disabilities in framing their results.[81]

3.3.2 Expertise available to address social inclusion in the GCRF

Summary finding: The majority of DPs and award holders appreciate the importance of SI/EDI issues in developing team structures and thematic expertise, while acknowledging the role that unequal power relations have in affecting team and partner relations. Overall, there is a strong emphasis on early career professionals – particularly individuals originating from the 'Global South'. However, the evidence suggests that the role of ODA compliance guidance in contributing to this progress has been limited.

At the DP level, there is evidence of mechanisms to address SI/EDI only among a good number of partners. This includes the establishment of teams such as UKRI's EDI External Advisory Committee, Innovate UK's Energy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team, or MRC's network of employees designated as 'equality champions'. The 'equality and unconscious bias' trainings facilitated by MRC, for both managers and employees across the organisation, also include SI/EDI dimensions. MRC has developed an adjustment guide to raise awareness and inform staff about the responsibilities of managers towards employees with disabilities. BA has also developed an 'Equality of Treatment' policy, while RS has created a tool to track diversity data on ethnicity and disability among programme.

ESRC highlighted, in their '2019 Delivery Plan', the ambition to improve how diversity data is captured and held with respect to award holders. More broadly, UKRI has incorporated specific requirements to include inclusive advisory boards to advise on matters of diversity and equality within recent projects. Other than these, no more evidence has been found among the remaining partners. However, there is negligible documentation at the DP level which explores how these tools and policies have been applied in practice or how outcomes or promising practice have been observed as a result of their use.

At the award level there are also promising signs of relevant SI/EDI expertise being sought and developed – with a particular focus on early career professionals. The dominant framing of SI/EDI issues with respect to teaming arrangements and associated capacity building across a minority of awards is one that considers the needs and interests of early career researchers. This framing often intersects with gender and geography in the sense that award holders refer to proactively engaging 'female early career researchers situated in LMICs'.[82] However, the remaining number of award holders could not provide detailed insights on how SI/EDI expertise is addressed in their awards.

Where award holders did provide relatively clear detail on their approaches to address SI/EDI issues in relation to expertise, they almost routinely stated that this agenda was driven

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[81] G14, G19, CS18-20, and latterly G25.
[82] CS45, CS10, G23, G8.

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internally and without prompts in relation to ODA compliance guidance. There are also clear signs of a growing awareness of explicit 'EDI' terminology across most award holders – although when pressed, the majority of award holders are unable to reflect on the detail of this expanding lexicon and the formal implications it has on their ways of working.

A minority of award holders do consciously address SI/EDI expertise concerns – although in fairly simplistic ways. For instance, SI/EDI expertise considerations do not normally stretch beyond considerations for early career researchers, the engagement of a diverse team of enumerators or, at best, the additional incorporation of diverse respondents (e.g. in the case of participatory action research or similar ethnographic-based methodologies).[83] In addition to this, there are only a small number of awards that demonstrably intend to use sophisticated frameworks to consider how an SI/EDI lens applies to team expertise and capacity building.[84] For instance,one of these awards undertook a partnership with a leading US-based university specialising in similar subject matter in order to create additional space for diversity-responsive internship programmes for students.[85] Another award sought to undertake a similar exercise, albeit with a series of African universities, and with an explicit understanding of promoting bi-directional capacity building (thereby undermining the common framing of capacity building activities flowing from the 'Global North' to the 'Global South').[86]

3.3.3 Monitoring and dissemination of social inclusion data, findings and research outputs

Summary finding: There is limited evidence that guidelines relating to the reporting or dissemination of SI or EDI issues have been made available at both the DP and award level, although award teams nevertheless develop ad hoc MEL systems and intend to ensure that several multimedia and multilingual communications outputs will assist in addressing EDI concerns.

Several mechanisms to capture and monitor SI data and to appropriately communicate findings have been found in the DP-level documents. However, these are rather limited and found only among a limited number of partners. UKRI's annual diversity data releases seem to be the most systematic and common mechanism found to disseminate SI data within GCRF (ESRC, AHRC, MRC, NERC, BBSRC and STFC are shown to participate in this). In addition, a number of isolated resources to capture SI/EDI findings for different levels of the GCRF ecosystem have been found among several partners. For instance, AHRC engages with an independent annual EDI monitoring mechanism, and according to their 2019 Delivery Plan SI/EDI data findings are planned to be used to strengthen diversity within the institution. MRC also seems to publish diversity data regularly, but there is limited data on its consistency and quality. Innovate UK monitors SI at the programme level (i.e. competition analysis, workshops, outreach and communications).

Of particular interest are the UKRI evidence reviews which are committed to 'transforming research and innovation environments in order to ensure that they are safe, open and inclusive'.[87] These documents provide a UK-based and international-level focus on EDI in R&I.

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[83] G31, CS45, CS10, G23, G8.

[84] G2, G3, G4, G5.

[85] G3.

[86] G4.

[87] See Guyan & Oloyede (2019) and Moody & Aldercotte (2019).

The former found that small proportion of sources 'discussed other characteristics, such as age, disability or socio-economic status, as the primary target of interventions', while the latter found that 'Other characteristics such as disability, religious inclusion or age were less likely to be the primary target of interventions'.[88] Neither document examines or discusses ODA compliance or the roles and functions of GCRF. At the award level in the BEIS tracker there is no mechanism for capturing, monitoring or reviewing SI/EDI metrics. This is surprising given that categories of analysis exist for gender, biodiversity, desertification and climate change. However, this may be understandable given the complexity required for understanding the multiple variables that might apply to a singular metric (e.g. class, caste, socioeconomic status, geography, ethnicity, etc.).

Nevertheless, there is a stand-alone marker on the topic of disability (see Box 7 for a discussion of the scoring criteria). A summary of the score rating is provided in Figure 5 and shows that approximately 25% of awards (n=2,925 between 2016 and 2020) have not been assessed to date. The proportion of awards allocated a 1-rating ('Significant') is approximately 1.6% of the overall sample, while a 2-rating ('Principal') constitutes a total of 0.5% of the overall sample.

Box 7. BEIS tracker guidance for capturing progress on disability focus

Activities are classified as being inclusive of persons with disabilities if:

they have a deliberate objective of ensuring that persons with disabilities are included, and able to share the benefits on an equal basis to persons without disabilities

or

they contribute to promote and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and promote respect for their inherent dignity in line with Art. 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

or

they support the ratification, implementation and/or monitoring of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

2 – principal

1 – significant

0 – assessed but not targeted

Blank – not assessed.

Finally, an analysis of the awards that been designated a 0-rating shows a very small margin of error (only two awards have been miscoded). Overall, while the scoring criteria appear to be broadly accurate, the criteria do not disaggregate between internal teaming arrangements (i.e. the representation of disabled persons in research activities) and research content (i.e. queries concerning disabled persons in research questions or methods).
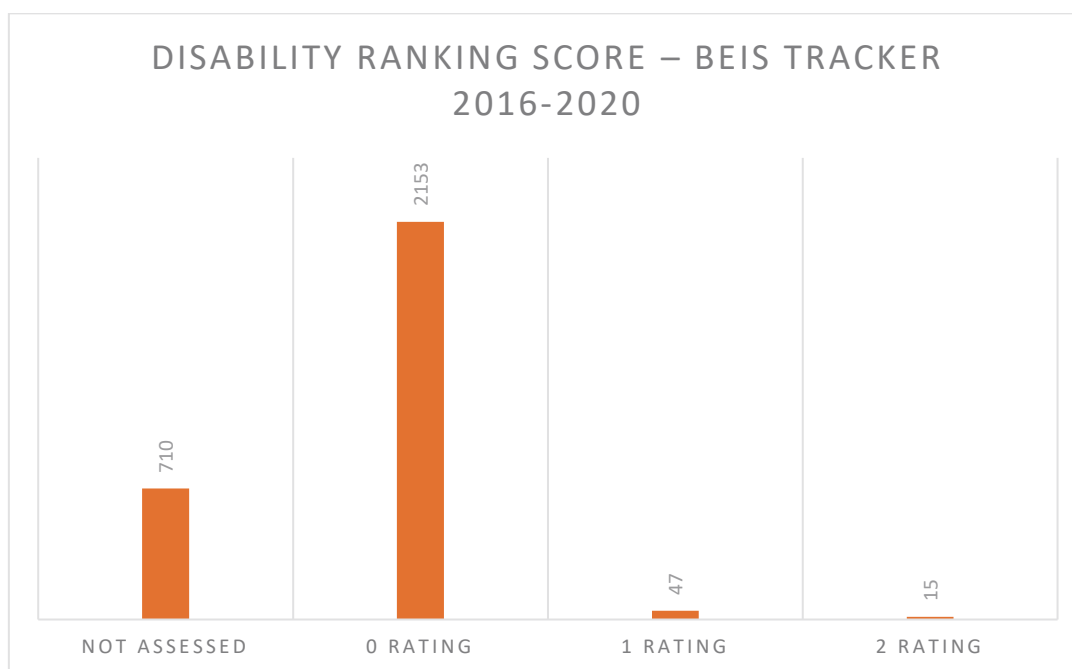
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[88] Ibid.

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Figure 5: Disability ranking score (BEIS tracker, 2016–20)

The award-level analysis also reveals a fragmented picture in terms of the systematic and comprehensive capture of SI/EDI-related MEL data – and there is clear evidence that the majority of award holders have not been required to provide EDI statements as yet. For instance, the majority of awards do not provide disaggregation of MEL data by social categories,[89] and note that 'there we no specific boxes to fill in for social exclusion'.[90]

However, there is a small number of awards that have maintained a proactive focus on SI/EDI concerns using different MEL and communication modalities. These awards have undertaken a small number of horizontal learning activities with like-minded award holders, with little facilitation guidance from GCRF in doing so. One award incorporates a concern for power dynamics – 'including the effect of socio-cultural established roles' – in understanding the power dynamics across the award.[91] Another award fed back that they are engaging a 'wide cadre of thematic specialists using participatory approaches' – but recognised that the capacity to explore this to the desired extent was constrained, and that specific guidance on DP expectations was unclear.[92] Other awards 'intend to ensure that several multimedia and multilingual communications outputs will assist in addressing EDI concerns', while another 'continues to develop multiple non-hierarchical communications and monitoring mechanisms'.[93]

Critically, across the awards, an overarching mapping of research activities using the topic modelling (data science techniques and algorithms) shows that LGBTQIA+ issues are notably under-represented in the data set. Very little evidence was obtained in relation to efforts to map or monitor LGBTQIA+ issues within teaming or capacity building activities or within the

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[89] CS6, CS8, CS10, G33, G17, G21, G22, G32.

[90] G14.

[91] GR5.

[92] GR6.

[93] G2, G3.

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content of research themes. In fact, less than a handful of awards address or discuss LGBTQIA+ issues centrally or peripherally in their research focus.

3.4 To what extent is GCRF responsive to GESIP issues with respect to Covid-19 adaptations?

> **Summary finding:** GESIP-related factors were only one factor in determining an individual award's response to the challenges raised by Covid-19. Explicit general guidance, either by the GCRF or by DPs, with respect to the gender, social inclusion and poverty dimensions was not found or reported. Given the uncertainties and unpredictability of the pandemic, it is hardly surprising that written guidance has not been issued. Despite the absence of guidance, GESIP-related dialogue has taken place, albeit in ad hoc ways and largely driven by the award and its research focus.

The majority of awards have engaged in multiple conversations with both partners and DPs in mapping and addressing Covid-19 implications for ongoing research activities. DPs have reportedly been fairly active in facilitating no-cost extensions and providing logistical guidance. A fair number of awards declare that DPs have supported them in undertaking content adjustments, but award holders generally suggest that DPs could be more active in facilitating adaptive measures and guidance to awards which are critically affected by Covid-19 challenges.

There is no documented evidence that GCRF has influenced how DPs have reacted to Covid-19 in relation to the GESIP dimensions of the pandemic. Evidence across the DP Review and awards suggests that no formal guidance for tailoring research activities was introduced or facilitated by the GCRF in response to the implications of Covid-19. However, given the volatility of the situation, DPs and awards report that they are responding on a case-by-case basis.

Awards already embedding gender and SI in their research reported that a variety of actions has been undertaken to capture the differential impacts of Covid-19 and/or safeguard local researchers, enumerators and participants.[94] As noted by one key informant, 'Different measures have been taken to try to address this challenge'.[95] This sentiment is echoed among a number of award holders, who generally express that they have undertaken rapid learning exercises with other award holders and have undertaken reviews of emerging resources to revise their data collection plans. As a result, award holders have been ensuring that appropriate safeguarding measures are in place for research teams and respondents, while also adjusting their research objectives to cater for a changing context.

3.5 Interlinkages with other modules

Three broad interlinking finding categories have been observed across the GESIP evidence base that are pertinent to the concerns of the Management, Fairness and, to a lesser extent, Relevance modules.

The first interlinkage speaks mostly to the Management module, in that a small but vocal number of vanguard or innovative awards – almost exclusively having a GESIP focus – expressed dismay in relation to the structural constraints of the GCRF award management

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[94] G31, G9, G2, G8, G26, G12.
[95] GR2.

system.[96] Several award holders noted that the purpose of their award was to reverse or circumnavigate alleged 'neo-colonial' or 'traditional' academic models by facilitating southern partners to engage as co-leads in research activities, to manage and distribute funds accordingly and to engage in research that sought to 'reverse the Eurocentric gaze' by engaging actors in non-ODA compliant countries.[97] These award holders noted that the inflexibility of the GCRF management structure was an inhibitor for their award activities and for innovative experimentation.

Second, there are noticeable connections across the GESIP and Fairness module, given various findings of the GESIP module in relation to appropriate to the seeking and fostering of appropriate technical expertise. The findings across gender, SI/EDI and poverty sub-modules all concur that that there is a strong and inherent interest among award holders to balance inequalities between 'Northern' and 'Southern' researchers, particularly early career researchers. These findings are consistent across the sub-modules, and also demonstrate a general lack of sophistication among award holders with respect to undertaking strategic and tailored approaches to ensure diverse and inclusive teaming arrangements.

Third, the issue of horizontal learning and diffusion is likely to resonate with the Management module. The relatively independent, opportunistic and organic nature of learning observed among award holders across the GESIP sub-modules suggests there is a broader management implication for knowledge management considerations across the GCRF. As it currently stands, award holders are mostly sharing approaches to improve the GESIP responsiveness of their awards based on ad hoc personal networks and engagements. There are, therefore, wider managerial concerns for GCRF to consider with respect to its role in facilitating and resourcing knowledge sharing and capturing more innovative experiences observed among DPs and award holders.

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[96] G2, G3, G4, G5.

[97] CS16.

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4 GESIP audit conclusions

This section provides an overview of the GESIP audit conclusions for each EQ and summarises findings in terms of the more promising results as well as the ongoing challenges across gender, poverty and SI concerns.

The aim of the GESIP audit is to provide an assessment of the extent to which GESIP concerns have been addressed throughout GCRF at all levels of operation between 2016 and 2020. The conclusions are of key concern to GCRF (and similar funds), DPs and award holders in that the effective mainstreaming of GESIP issues across the fund is not only a matter of accountability but also one of development impact. UK law (2010, 2014) requires that ODA spending addresses a range of potential social inequalities[98] and can demonstrably lead to 'poverty alleviation' in ODA contexts.

While this issue is partially a 'compliance' concern, it also stands to reason that development impacts – as a result of UK funding – are likely to be more comprehensive and sustainable if GCRF stakeholders engage in GESIP mainstreaming activities. Ideally these activities would seek to surpass 'compliance' expectations and pave the way for a more aspirational focus on 'excellence'.

The conclusions below demonstrate that the GCRF ecosystem, as it currently stands, is moving positively towards an improved compliance culture in relation to ODA expectations on GESIP. Shifts in this direction are more evident with respect to GE concerns and, to a lesser extent, across SI/EDI concerns. Compliance concerns regarding the framing and addressing of 'poverty' are shown to be the least fulfilled and fairly problematic. The reasons for this mixed performance across the GESIP areas are outlined below, and although there are pockets of promising or best practice across all GESIP areas, there is still some way to go before GCRF can foreseeably demonstrate a shift from a culture of ODA compliance towards a culture of excellence in addressing GESIP concerns.

The conclusions demonstrate that some of the recommendations of the Tetra Tech 'Review of Approaches to Gender Equality' report (2020) (see section 1, Box 2) and EDI reviews (2019) have been gaining momentum.[99] For example, the positive trajectory of growth leading towards comprehensive systems, policies, expertise and MEL systems for GESIP-related compliance is demonstrating opportunities for improvement and consolidation (Tetra Tech recommendations 1–3). Gaining traction on the fourth recommendation of the Tetra Tech report will also be particularly challenging, given challenges noted around the strategic development and maintenance of GESIP-related expertise, capacity building and monitoring systems.

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[98] Age, disability, gender, relationship status, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

[99] **Recommendation 1**: BEIS should develop a clear, coherent approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion at the ODA portfolio level.
Recommendation 2: BEIS should institute a systematic approach to learning, clearly differentiating between internal and external functions at key stages in the fund management cycle.
Recommendation 3: BEIS should develop a fund level approach to gender equality, diversity and inclusion that is tailored to each of the funds.
Recommendation 4: BEIS should ensure there is dedicated senior management capacity, sufficient resourcing and clear accountabilities at all levels to design, implement, monitor and adapt the approach.

Overall, the conclusions show a number of ongoing gaps and challenges that suggest that GCRF could have been in a better place with respect to mainstreaming of GESIP concerns had more proactive attention been paid to fairly fundamental coordination, facilitation, monitoring and learning functions (i.e. the 'broken trails'). The metaphor of a 'broken trail' is used frequently to identify where specific attention is required. This term has variable meanings in the report, but 'broken trails' can refer to the unfulfilment of accountability measures being in place or acted upon (conclusions 1 and 3), the limited capture of quality MEL compliance data (conclusions 2 and 3) and gaps in compliance guidance between higher-level ODA commitments and award holders (conclusions 2 and 3). This 'broken trail' is particularly notable at the interface between DPs and award holders and in the limited dialogue and accountability measures enacted beyond the proposal stage.

4.1 Gender equality: conclusion, improvement opportunities, and ongoing gaps and challenges

Conclusion 1: The mainstreaming of GE concerns across GCRF is moving at a gradual pace and is being supported by a variety of mechanisms from the DP level through to awards – although strategic steers at both levels are mostly uncoordinated, leading to a 'broken trail' of communication and accountability between these two levels of activity. At the DP level, there is strong evidence showing that gender mainstreaming at the level of strategies, policies and processes has been taking a foothold since 2018/2019, and that there is a gradual but ad hoc uptake of policies and understanding concerning gender-responsive expertise. As a result, while progress is gradual, GCRF is broadly 'on track' at the DP level in terms of mainstreaming gender compliance concerns – but could move in a faster and more coordinated way while also facilitating horizontal learning, with the added benefit of celebrating 'excellence' as much as 'compliance' results with award holders.

At the award level, however – while there are discrete and promising pockets of activity with respect to developing systems and creating mechanisms for MEL – the overall gains are fragmented, uncoordinated and largely driven by award holders themselves. In addition, moments for award holders to engage in formal accountability procedures are few, and are largely concentrated at the proposal and panel review stage. As a result, significant attention is required at the award level to align with progress at the DP level.

4.1.1 Promising results

Several promising results exist regarding the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming in the strategies and systems of DPs and award holders. There is clearly evidence of traction in this area at the DP level as of 2018 and 2019, when UKRI (unilaterally) introduced Gender Equality Statements and the Gender Equality Act Compliance Procedure. The development of a Gender Equality Toolkit by Edinburgh University is a particularly promising venture that can be either scaled outwards or carefully duplicated to ensure common gender mainstreaming denominators. There are signs that this process is already under way, in the form of informal cascading and collecting learning processes at the DP and award level – but these approaches are largely dependent on infrequently available spaces for sharing as well as on the inclinations of energised groups of individuals.

There are also several positive results regarding the interpretation of compliance guidance with respect to the mainstreaming of gender-responsive expertise across the GCRF system. At the award level there exists a strong predisposition for teams to understand and appreciate

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the importance of gender diversity in teaming arrangements. While there is also a fairly simplistic approach focused on 'team parity' in most awards, a small number of awards are moving towards excellence in seeking to understand the highly variable gender-specific barriers and enablers that some individuals face in the GCRF system. For example, some research Hubs have proved able to access 'gender champions' as well as mandated gender experts in Executive Advisory Boards.

For MEL systems, there exist pockets of horizontal learning which are shown to be the dominant mechanism for diffusion. While promising MEL guidance exists (UKSA, UKRI), and while there is good momentum to take forward the onboarding of the Research ODA (RODA) monitoring tools across DPs, it is also recognised that 'no one size fits all' (UK parliamentary response to the Newton Fund Review, 2020). The ongoing use of the BEIS GE marker is another promising practice – although some issues remain with respect to data capture and the lack of differentiation between gender-responsive teaming arrangements and research content/methods. In terms of accountability, there is a positive story in relation to the maintenance and improvement of gender-responsive reflections at the proposal and panel review stage, where DPs and award holders intersect most systematically.

4.1.2 Ongoing gaps and challenges

The ongoing gaps in relation to the development and preservation of strategies, policies and systems for promoting GE can be located at both the DP and award level. Both levels of activity demonstrate a notable degree of fragmentation and lack of coordination in terms of understanding and addressing gender-related compliance concerns, leading to significant variability in the way gender mainstreaming strategies are conceived and promoted. At the award level, familiarity on expectations for gender mainstreaming in relation to ODA compliance remain embryonic and, as a result, award holders use their own initiative and framing in developing relevant strategies and systems. The form and function of these approaches are, for the most part, dependent on the predisposed interests and experience of award teams rather than on formal or informal guidance from DPs.

A number of key coordination gaps for promoting and retaining appropriate gender expertise across the GCRF ecosystem can also be located at the DP and award level, but these are primarily evident at the award level. Award holders are largely aware of the need for obtaining team parity, but this awareness is almost exclusively generated internally among award holders, particularly among awards focused on the social sciences and humanities. In addition, very few awards demonstrate a sophisticated capacity building approach in growing gender expertise in practice, while fewer still capture such approaches in formal commitments.

With respect to gender-responsive MEL systems at the DP level, the main ongoing gap relates to a lack of systematic coordination and the facilitation of shared learning spaces. At the award level, the main gaps are the limited familiarity of ODA expectations regarding reporting and an often idiosyncratic and simplistic understanding of the nature of gender-responsive MEL. These findings echo those recently presented in a 'Review of Approaches to Gender Equality' (Tetra Tech, 2020) in that 'internal organisational initiatives' tend to drive commitments to GE, while 'comprehensive monitoring frameworks or implementation plans' are generally underdeveloped. Overall, well-resourced knowledge management roles are largely absent across DPs and award holders.

There is also a lack of formal accountability procedures in relation to ODA compliance on GE commitments beyond the proposal and panel review stage: the majority of award holders are unfamiliar with the need to develop Gender Equality Statements and are rarely engaged by DPs on their performance if they do send gender-related monitoring metrics up the

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management chain. Given the constraints in these systems, it is also understandable that gaps exist with respect to the gender-responsive framing of communication and dissemination approaches. Efforts in this regard are confined to 'including women and girls' in consultation processes and audience profiles, with little to no strategic or tactical awareness of when, why and how to mainstream gender-responsive elements in communications and outputs.

4.2 Poverty alleviation: conclusion, improvement opportunities, and ongoing gaps and challenges

Conclusion 2: There is limited evidence of a coherent framing for poverty or 'poverty alleviation' guiding GCRF, its DPs and award holders. Under the umbrella of the SDGs, poverty is implicitly and simplistically assumed to be core to all R&I activities undertaken through GCRF, although there is a wide range of framing and understanding of poverty-related terminology across the system. As a result, there is continuing evidence of a 'broken trail' in the capture and dissemination of the poverty dimensions of GCRF-supported research alongside a strong indication of under-reporting of poverty results and outcomes. Consequently, there is a considerable opportunity for GCRF to revamp and energise activities at all levels to understand multiple definitions of poverty and to facilitate all GCRF stakeholders to move beyond a simplistic presumption of automatic ODA compliance towards a framing that facilitates collective learning. The latter approach requires a platform and facilitation space for DPs and award holders to share their understanding of how research eventually contributes to poverty alleviation, and to frame this contribution into a broader narrative that GCRF will be accountable for.

4.2.1 Promising results

There is some fragmented evidence to suggest that some DPs have taken steps to define expectations on the framing and understanding of poverty in funding calls (UKRI and ESRC), delivery plans (ESRC, RAEng) or as part of communication material (RAEng, UKSA). The Gender Equality Toolkit, developed at the University of Edinburgh, also provided explicit guidance on the connections between poverty and gender inequality. In terms of developing appropriate MEL systems to capture GCRF contributions to poverty, the upcoming redesign of the RODA system is promising. The evidence also shows that a considerable number of workshops, briefings, seminars and webinars are being undertaken among DPs and award holders that may offer shared insights on how poverty is being addressed.

4.2.2 Ongoing gaps and challenges

There is limited detailed guidance at the DP level or award level for understanding how poverty is framed and understood in GCRF, and associated ODA compliance expectations are fairly simplistic. This is partly the result of the International Development Acts (2002, 2014) not including any requirements in this regard. As a result, the interpretation of the framing of poverty has been left open to individual award teams, many of whom understand their research to be automatically relevant to poverty alleviation, given that their activities are being undertaken in ODA-listed countries (specific LMICs). Furthermore, topic modelling evidence points towards a potential bias in the framing of poverty in terms of econometric or income-based categories, although feedback from respondents generally revealed a more complex picture in which terms such as 'vulnerability', 'well-being', 'risk' and 'inequality' were routinely featured.

There are also limited expectations regarding the development and capacity building of poverty-specific expertise across DPs and award holders. Both the documentation and the feedback from key respondents suggest that understandings of poverty expertise are largely assumed as implicit, given the nature of award holder experience and the context in which awards are being implemented.

With respect to MEL systems that cater explicitly for the framing of poverty in GCRF, the evidence reveals a problematic picture. Given the variability afforded to DPs and award holders in framing and understanding their approaches to poverty, it follows that associated MEL metrics and contribution stories are highly variable. No evidence in the document analysis or from DP or award-level key informants indicated a coherent system or mechanism to either unpack the concept of poverty or to register the pathways to impact in relation to award objectives. As a result, the ability to map how GCRF is contributing to pro-poor outcomes in ODA contexts is severely constrained. Without any systematic knowledge management oversight from GCRF or DPs, learning and elevating findings into a broader contribution story on poverty alleviation (which could include interlinkages between gender and SI/EDI) are constrained.

4.3 Social inclusion/equality, diversity and inclusion: conclusion, improvement opportunities, and ongoing gaps and challenges

Conclusion 3: The mainstreaming of SI/EDI compliance concerns is fragmented at both the DP and award holder level, although there are promising signs of downward diffusion of EDI language and concepts in a good number of DPs and awards. Nevertheless, most award holders are not familiar with formal ODA compliance in relation to SI/EDI, and the majority of efforts and thinking is dependent on the idiosyncrasies of the award subject matter and the unique specialities or interests of award team members. As a result, and in line with preceding conclusions, there is evidence of a 'broken trail' of managerial guidance and accountability with respect to the mainstreaming of SI/EDI issues across GCRF.

Nevertheless, awards largely acknowledge the role that unequal power relations have in affecting team and partner relations. This awareness is often simplistically couched in terms of support for early career researchers in the 'Global South' rather than in any comprehensive strategic approach, which is in turn not informed by any overarching guidance from DPs. Finally, systems for framing and reviewing disability concerns – and, to a much lesser extent, LGBTQIA+ concerns – are notable among only a small handful of DP and award holders. Consequently, progress on the mainstreaming of SI/EDI compliance concerns is somewhat behind that of gender compliance mainstreaming concerns – particularly at the award level – while a small number of DPs and awards are actively endeavouring to innovate for 'excellence', rather than 'compliance', in SI/EDI mainstreaming.

4.3.1 Promising results

Despite some shortfalls on the promotion of strategies, policies and processes for ensuring ODA compliance on SI/EDI issues, there is, nonetheless, good momentum at the DP level in this regard. The Delivery and Strategic Plans of UKRI offer a solid foundation through which to continue to embed strategic approaches to for SI/EDI mainstreaming, while a number of ad hoc activities among other DPs – RAEng, BA, MRC and Innovate UK in particular – give good

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examples of organisational ToCs or other internal policies and statements to address top-level framing of how to promote SI/EDI.

As stated above, while this momentum is still beginning to formally trickle down at the award level – demonstrated in the growing familiarity of 'EDI' terminology across most award holders – there are pockets of activity that can be reviewed and amplified for more systemic learning and knowledge management purposes. For this purpose, a rough distinction can be made between social science or humanities-oriented awards as opposed to the physical or applied sciences, where the former have a noticeably greater tendency to address SI/EDI concerns in the strategic framing of awards. However, even only a small number of social science awards move beyond the application of a single social axis lens (e.g. caste, class, ethnicity or disability) in research content. As a consequence, a small cadre of awards does present a comprehensive intersectional approach in their research ambitions and activities and are thereby demonstrating 'excellence' rather than 'compliance' in terms of ODA compliance.

There are also a few relatively advanced award holders that take a comprehensive 'bi-directional' learning and capacity building approach with respect to building relevant SI/EDI expertise. While such awards are few, they can be seen to be at the vanguard of potential learning opportunities to address SI/EDI issues in teaming arrangements and associated support structures, as these award holders conceive of SI/EDI compliance beyond addressing early career researchers per se. At the DP level, UKRI's EDI External Advisory Committee, Innovate UK's Energy and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion team and MRC's network of employees designated as 'equality champions' are particularly promising.

With respect to SI/EDI-sensitive MEL systems at the DP level, UKRI's annual diversity review is promising in that this provides a common mechanism to map and disseminate SI/EDI data in GCRF (ESRC, AHRC, MRC NERC, BBSRC and STFC are known participants). Other positive findings are noted with respect to AHRC, MRC and Innovate UK, each of which engage with their own independent annual EDI monitoring mechanisms.

4.3.2 Ongoing gaps and challenges

While there are promising results emerging at the DP level since 2018/19 with regard to the mainstreaming of SI/EDI issues across GCRF, these efforts lack guidance at a challenge level and are not yet coherent across DPs, leading to the development of a divergent range of strategies, policies and systems for ensuring ODA compliance on SI/EDI. Guidance is not only fragmented at the DP level, but actions to drive more active engagement from awards have been limited, resulting in award holders often applying their own framing and understanding of SI/EDI compliance criteria – almost always in the proposal and/or panel review processes. This has meant that the framing of SI/EDI at award level has largely been driven by the nature of the award in question and by the associated team as the awards continue into the implementation stages.

There are also gaps in the framing of polices and systems from both DPs and awards to address potential discrimination on the grounds of disability and gender identity (LGBTQIA+) as well as in guidance to promote these social dimensions in appropriate research content. Guidance on the framing of gender identity dimensions is particularly absent across GCRF in this regard.

In terms of MEL systems, there is limited evidence that guidelines from DPs relating to the reporting or dissemination of SI/EDI issues have been made systematically available to award holders beyond the ad hoc dispensation of requests for EDI statements. In addition, at the award level there is no tracking mechanism for capturing or compressing SI/EDI monitoring data into indices or a single index. In particular, the lack of a mechanism for capturing the

depth and breadth of uptake on LGBTQIA+ concerns in teaming arrangements or research content represents a gap for MEL systems between the DPs and award holders. Finally, it should be noted that the scope and reach of the disability marker in the BEIS tracker has overlooked up to 25% awards for assessment purposes and, like the gender marker in the BEIS tracker, it does not address concerns for both disability-responsive teams and research content.

4.4 GESIP-sensitive Covid-19 responses: conclusion, improvement opportunities, and ongoing gaps and challenges

Conclusion 4: GESIP was only one factor in determining an individual award's response to the challenges faced because of Covid-19. Explicit general guidance, either by the GCRF or by DPs, with respect to the gender, social inclusion and poverty dimensions was not found or reported. Given the uncertainties and unpredictability of the pandemic, it is hardly surprising that written guidance has not been issued. The absence of guidance does not mean that dialogue and more formal guidance between some award holders and some DPs or Hubs is non-existent: evidence from the award holder review suggests that GESIP-related dialogue was prominent, but largely driven by the interests of award holders (primarily in relation to methodological adaptations).

4.4.1 Promising results

DPs and awards are demonstrating some adaptive management lessons in responding to Covid-19, although these potentially innovative research methods and approaches have been developed primarily among award holders. Importantly, a Covid-19 'lens' thereby introduces a space where GCRF, DPs and award holders can begin to better understand the interlinkages between gender, poverty and SI/EDI. In effect, this constitutes an opportunity to consolidate cross-cutting lessons across GCRF in the form of a series of Covid-19 case studies that can be made accessible and/or tailored for groups of award holders.

4.4.2 Ongoing gaps and challenges

Given the novelty of the Covid-19 experience, it is difficult to determine the roles and responsibilities of the GCRF in relation to DPs and award holders with respect to Covid-19 adaptation processes. Nevertheless, there is good evidence to suggest that there has been little concerted effort across the GCRF, DPs and awards to synthesise lessons around Covid-19 adaptation measures. Award holders have noted that DPs could have been more proactive in filtering relevant information, or more aware of the need to facilitate dialogue between awards that might be well placed to share Covid-19-specific learning with each other. Rather, the focus of GCRF and DPs has reportedly been managerial in nature, in that support has largely been oriented to costed and non-costed extension discussions.

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5 Recommendations

This section sets out recommendations designed to support GCRF move from a culture of ODA compliance towards a culture of excellence in addressing GESIP concerns. The four interlinked recommendations work to consolidate and strengthen the progress made to date to mainstream GE and address systematically the SI and poverty dimensions of ODA-supported research.

They build on the review of GE approaches in the GCRF, its guiding principles and its ToC. The recommendations are framed to inform the development of the GCRF's Gender, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and optimise interlinkages between gender, SI and poverty alleviation – the overarching goal of the SDGs.

5.1 Overview

Standardising the processes and practices for mainstreaming GEDI and addressing the poverty dimensions of research will support GCRF to demonstrate tangible progress towards its intended outcomes and impact. Progress since 2019, while inconsistent, has been relatively rapid. Now is the time to consolidate and amplify progress.

The GESIP audit's recommendations are made in the light of the changing context of ODA research and the proactive positive response of GCRF to the 'Review of Approaches to Gender Equality' (Tetra Tech, 2020). Actions to strengthen GCRF's approach to gender and SI include the setting up of a working group to develop a gender KPI, the further appointment of a senior social researcher to BEIS and the ongoing development of the GEDI strategy.

The recommendations are therefore framed to strengthen the interlinkages between poverty alleviation, gender and SI identified in the findings and conclusions of the audit. In doing so, these recommendations also build on the GCRF's key principles which, while inconsistently integrating GESIP, provide the overarching strategic direction towards ODA excellence and its ToC, which embeds a pro-poor focus, gender and SI dimension within it. Both the principles and the ToC are fundamental building blocks for designing and implementing a GESIP strategy grounded in the vision and operating context of the GCRF.

The recommendations were informed by discussions with the participants of the two learning workshops, held in January 2021. These workshops enabled the GESIP team to ground truth the findings and conclusions as well as to identify realistic and doable actions for enhancing GCRF's capacity to influence the integration of GESIP issues across its ecosystem throughout the funding cycle.

5.2 Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Embed GESIP in the GCRF principles

The ongoing development of the GEDI strategy offers the opportunity to review the narrative of GCRF's key principles (Challenge and Impact Focus, Interdisciplinary Research

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Excellence, Global Partnerships, Organisation and Leadership) in relation to the objective of making explicit the GESIP-related compliance expectations of the fund.

With respect to reframing the narrative of each of the four key principles, discussions can focus upon:

- **Challenge and Impact Focus:** Co-creation with DPs, challenge leaders and Hubs drawing on the lessons learned within GCRF to develop the new RODA system, enhancing the BEIS tracker tool, and a focus on award holder experiences in developing more nuanced GESIP impact measurement approaches – particularly in light of the withdrawal of Pathway to Impact Statements.
- **Interdisciplinary Research Excellence:** At the DP and award level, recognise and cater for the different situations and interests of humanities/social science disciplines as compared to physical/natural sciences with respect to the degree of experience and interest in mainstreaming GESIP expectations.
- **Global Partnerships:** At the award level, seek to shift the predominant narrative beyond that of 'team parity' and a focus on early career researchers towards a more strategic approach that recognises wider barriers and enablers for GESIP-responsive partnerships.
- **Organisation and Leadership:** In consultation with a spectrum of DPs and award holders, create a well communicated and easily accessible action plan for rolling out the new narrative across the GCRF ecosystem. The action plan should set timebound milestones and an end date for roll-out. See also Recommendation 4 (Open up learning spaces for GESIP that is facilitative and reflexive).

The process of reframing the key principles narrative should underpin and run in parallel with the development of the GEDI strategy. This will optimise cross-fertilisation between the two activities and build ownership across the whole GCRF ecosystem for the GEDI strategy.

Recommendation 2: Integrate a clear poverty perspective into the GEDI strategy

Poverty compliance guidance constitutes the weakest part of the GESIP compliance infrastructure across GCRF. By further clarifying GCRF's expectations and framing in relation to the interlinkages between poverty on the one hand and GE and SI/EDI on the other, a broader poverty impact narrative can be developed over time. This foundation provides an avenue for GCRF to assess both compliance and excellence.

While a critical interface will be at the call and in the proposal stage, clarity is needed as to how these interlinkages apply at all stages of the funding management cycle. In support of the ongoing development of the GEDI strategy, it is recommended that BEIS work with the fund to:

- identify poverty expertise from within the DPs and award holders (as well as externally) and set up a reference group to advise and inform the development of a poverty-sensitive strategy – while drawing on existing promising practice (see Edinburgh University Toolkit)
- develop a comprehensive pro-poor GEDI ToC nested under the overarching ToC, drawing on lessons from DPs' use of organisational ToCs. From this, produce an action and resourcing plan with monitorable milestones for rolling out and socialising the strategy
- nuance and update the definition of 'poverty alleviation' in a pro-poor GEDI ToC, thereby allowing researchers to invest in their own terminology and approach within those parameters

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- develop a monitoring framework for both learning and accountability that allows for the mapping of different pathways that would viably lead to 'poverty alleviation' (or clearly related concepts – such as 'well-being' or 'empowerment' – and which recognise the contributions of GE and SI/EDI in these pathways).

Recommendation 3: Standardise the MEL infrastructure and communication of GESIP expectations (and associated resource support) across GCRF and its funding cycles

Fundamental to consolidating and expanding the emerging and promising practices among some DPs in the way GESIP expectations are communicated is the standardisation of these expectations throughout the GCRF system. It is recommended that GCRF:

- strengthen and standardise activities at the pre-proposal stage designed to support researchers understand what both compliance and excellence look like in relation to GESIP mainstreaming. Actions can include fixed-rotation workshops around expectations and setting up a repository (a centrally procured and managed clearing house) for GESIP guidance materials (toolkits, recorded webinars, etc.)
- review the time frame of each funding cycle and extend the time between the call for proposals and the application deadline, to enable thoughtful and nuanced engagement with researchers on the approach and design of the proposal with respect to GESIP concerns
- extend the use of gender champions to include SI/EDI and poverty champions across the whole ecosystem, and introduce dedicated poverty and SI/EDI expertise into the review process and selection panels
- facilitate access to GESIP expertise and knowledge repositories after a proposal has been accepted during – and after – an inception period for funded research
- embed a GESIP focus in the redesign of the RODA system and strengthen associated reporting capacity – particularly at the award level. GCRF could also work with DPs to increase the accuracy, visibility and – where possible –complexity of disability and LGBTQIA+ data categories in the BEIS tracker and ResearchFish platform
- explore ways of encouraging DPs to develop harmonised formats for identifying and tracking pathways to impact that explicitly identify how the research will contribute to the 'achievement of the SDGs, enhancing people's wellbeing, improving equality for people of all genders, promoting social inclusion, economic development and environmental sustainability in developing countries' *(GCRF ToC).*

Recommendation 4: Open up learning spaces for GESIP that is facilitative and reflexive as part of an increased emphasis on GESIP-oriented knowledge management for both compliance and excellence

Building on observed and growing communities of practice and horizontal learning mechanisms, GCRF can work with DPs and award holders to identify entry points and actions for developing a GESIP focus within GCRF's knowledge management system. This recommendation supports recommendation 2 of the Tetra Tech (2020) 'Approaches to Gender Equality Review' – 'BEIS should institute a systematic approach to learning, clearly differentiating between internal and external functions at key stages in the fund management cycle'. A more GESIP-focused knowledge management system will serve to better coordinate actions for capturing and disseminating GESIP-specific lessons on compliance and excellence.

To build this system, GCRF should:

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- consider the development of a specific GESIP knowledge management strategy – that is referenced in the upcoming GCRF GEDI strategy – that standardises the varied stocks and flows of GESIP-related compliance approaches across DPs and award holders
- sensitise knowledge managers under an emerging overarching learning approach to the specific GESIP-related information needs and requirements of different DPs and award holders
- institute a reflexive and reflective learning approach for GESIP by facilitating a process of bringing together cohorts of projects – both GESIP-focused and non-GESIP-focused – to think through challenges and issues relating to mainstreaming issues in both research management and research content
- extend and celebrate the use of case studies from DPs and award holders that capture GESIP-related lessons and practices across the GCRF ecosystem – particularly those that focus on excellence rather than compliance
- work more closely with DPs and award holders to create and facilitate both online and offline spaces that build on peer-led horizontal learning exchanges already in existence.

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