

# GCRF Process Evaluation Report, Stage 1b

## Four Nations GCRF QR/Block Grant Funding Process Evaluation

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## Disclaimer

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## List of acronyms

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
ARMA	Association of Research Managers and Administrators
ARUA	African Research Universities Alliance
BEIS	Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy
Co-I	Co-Investigator
Co-PI	Co-Principal Investigator
DfENI	Department for Economy, Northern Ireland
DFID	Department for International Development
DMEL	Data, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
DP	Delivery Partner
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FEC	Full Economic Costs
FLAIR	Future Africa Leaders' Programme
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund
GESIP	Gender, Social Inclusion and Poverty
GNI	Gross National Income
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council Wales
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HMG	Her Majesty's Government
HR	Human Resources
IO	Institutional Officer
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IO	Institutional Officer
IPP	International Partnerships Programme
IR	Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy
KII	Key Informant Interview
LMIC	Low-to-Middle-Income Country
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation

MEQ	Main Evaluation Question
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PI	Principal Investigator
QR	Quality-related Research
R&D	Research and Development
R&I	Research and Innovation
REF	Research Excellence Framework
REG	Research Excellence Grant
RMT	Research Management Team
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
ToC	Theory of Change
TM	Team Member
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research and Innovation
UKRSA	UK Research Staff Association
UN	United Nations
VfM	Value for Money

# Executive Summary

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) is a £1.5 billion fund overseen by the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). GCRF supports pioneering research and innovation that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. The GCRF evaluation examines the fund’s Theory of Change (ToC), from activities to impacts, over a five-year period running from 2020 to 2025. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b, which examines GCRF’s large-scale strategic initiatives (2021–22). It focuses on the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant funding, a GCRF ‘signature investment’, aimed to underpin and complement project-based GCRF grants.

The 2017 Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) Rapid Review led to a decisive shift in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding. This included the introduction of three-year institutional strategies and rigorous processes for monitoring making the funding stream more focused and strategic. The funding stream has gone beyond ensuring official development assistance (ODA) compliance towards ‘ODA research excellence’. Overall, the investment through GCRF QR/block grants has made progress towards meeting the GCRF strategic objectives and desired result, although funding cuts have impeded potential areas of expected outcome as well as the sustainability of achievements made.

## GCRF evaluation

The purpose of GCRF’s evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact. The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the life of the fund. The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. This report focuses on Stage 1b (2021–22), involving six process evaluations of GCRF’s signature investments, including the GCRF QR/block grants. It seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question: *How are GCRF’s signature Investments working, and what have they achieved?*

## Overview of the GCRF funding through the Four Nations Funding Bodies

Since 2016–17, four UK funding bodies have distributed GCRF allocations to Higher Education

Institutions (HEIs). This aim of the funding is to complement project-based GCRF grants allocated by delivery partners (DPs).<sup>1</sup> The funding is allocated to HEIs as block grants made to institutions, in contrast to project grants, which are awarded on a competitive basis to individual researchers. The four funding bodies are: (1) Department for Economy, Northern Ireland (DfENI); (2) Higher Education Funding Council Wales (HEFCW); (3) Research England; and (4) the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Allocations are made to each nation on the basis of ‘standard shares’, i.e. shares of total UK Research Council funding. These are then allocated to HEIs according to the overall quality

<sup>1</sup> Funding Bodies GCRF Strategies proposal, December 2017.

of their research.<sup>2</sup> There is slight variation for how this takes place in each nation.

In 2017, ICAI published its review of GCRF.<sup>3</sup> The report was critical of the funding stream's ODA compliance processes. It found that allocations made by the funding bodies without HEIs submitting proposals for ODA-eligible research or being assessed for potential impact and processes. It also found a lack of transparency in how funding was spent. Following the ICAI review in 2017, measures and processes were put in place, which Section 3 (Findings) delves into in further detail.

### Evaluation findings

#### **The 2017 ICAI Rapid Review led to a change in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding, with the introduction of three-year institutional strategies and rigorous systems of monitoring and reporting. (EQ 1)**

Following the ICAI review, GCRF funding through the funding bodies has been granted to HEIs only if their three-year institutional strategies were assessed as ODA-compliant. The strategies enabled HEIs to reflect on coherence and the place of funding within their overall institutional strategy. It was evident that funding bodies and HEIs had a clear, shared vision for the QR/block grant funding stream. In addition, funding bodies put in place reporting requirements to ensure funding was being used effectively.

Strategy development and processes introduced supported HEIs to move beyond ODA compliance towards attaining ODA research and innovation (R&I) excellence<sup>4</sup>. The principles of equitable partnerships are evident in HEI strategies and are supported with targeted programming. GCRF priorities, including gender responsiveness, poverty and social inclusion, are embedded and well-recognised components of this funding stream, addressed at project design, during activities and at dissemination.

In all four nations, GCRF institutional officers (IOs) and principal investigators (PIs) utilised existing support networks to coordinate with

colleagues in other institutions. The three devolved nations' funding bodies (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) were able, to varying degrees, to offer specific support to their cohort.

#### **There is a shared recognition across stakeholders of the existence of capacity gaps in effectively supporting GCRF research, alongside a recognition of the potential this funding has to bridge these gaps. Structures and processes to strengthen R&I capacity have taken place at three levels – individual, institutional and across institutions. (EQ 2)**

At the individual level, the primary beneficiaries were UK early career researchers (ECRs), who were able to gain hands-on experience and widen their networks. Individual low-to-middle-income country (LMIC) partners had opportunities to strengthen technical research skills, with more limited evidence of opportunities for strengthening their capacity to engage in the broader funding ecosystem.

At the institutional level, UK HEIs used this experience to strengthen capacity and infrastructure for managing ODA grants. Evidence suggests that capacity development implemented within LMICs at the institutional level has been less comprehensive than that within UK HEIs often focused at the individual researcher level.

Across institutions, there is strong evidence that UK universities have utilised this stream of funding as an effective mechanism to collaborate and share learning. While there is concrete evidence to support an understanding of capacity strengthening across HEIs in the UK, there is less evidence for how this is happening within LMICs.

In terms of fairness considerations for capacity building, evidence suggests there is a potential for investments to perpetuate an advantage to developing countries or organisations that already have credible institutions rather than directing investment toward poorer partners where capacity building may be most needed.

<sup>2</sup> UKRI (2022) 'Strategic Priorities Fund'. <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/our-main-funds/strategic-priorities-fund>

<sup>3</sup> ICAI (2017) Global Challenges Research Fund: A rapid review. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Please refer to section 2.1 for more on the conceptual framing of ODA Excellence.

**The tight timelines for decisions, planning, implementation and impact constrained HEIs' scope and ambition. (EQ 3)**

Tight timelines for the annual funding cycle and delays to confirming annual allocations caused uncertainty and constrained HEIs in terms of the scope and ambition of their activities. Where HEIs were selective about the types of projects they funded, they were still able to direct the funding efficiently, largely through pump priming and full economic costs (FEC) work.

There was broad agreement that the funding was proportionate and manageable in terms of size, and that it was appropriate to achieving the three-year strategy objectives. HEIs with smaller allocations sometimes found the administrative burden of reporting too great for the amount of funding.

Despite feeling that the QR/block grant stream emphasised equity more effectively than previous projects, respondents questioned the fairness of some funding mechanisms, especially the use of a reimbursement model for LMIC partners. Another issue raised as a barrier to fairness was the administrative burden placed on LMIC partner institutions in meeting UK due diligence and financial requirements.

**In spite of the challenges in time frame, there is strong evidence of achievements at the 'results' level as well as progress towards short-term outcomes against GCRF's ToC. (EQ 4)**

Funding through GCRF QR/block grants has led to the development of relationships between UK-based HEIs and those in LMICs, as well as co-teaching and collaborative research activities. It has also contributed to enhanced capabilities for HEI stakeholders in the UK and partner countries. A key success of this funding stream is the way in which it has broadened the pool of researchers and institutions, particularly those who have not worked within ODA or who saw their work as relevant to development issues.

The funding cuts have had a devastating impact on expected results and outcomes. In many cases, projects were either cancelled or reduced in scope. HEI stakeholders felt that the work was cut in its infancy or that its potential legacy or impact was jeopardised. Damage to relationships

and reputation, both resulting from the cuts, was cited by a wide range of stakeholders. However, there is evidence of HEIs working in ways to shield their partners from the impact of the cuts.

**Capacity strengthening through the funding stream, quality of partnerships established, professional networks, and flexibility of the funding were seen as key enablers for overcoming barriers within the context. (EQ 5)**

Risks in the research environment were seen as the key barriers to achieving desired outcomes. The time frame for allocation and disbursement of grants had implications for HEIs' ability to plan and deliver within the expected period. It also placed limitations on their ability to build meaningful equitable partnerships. Due diligence was often more complex and time-consuming to support than expected, both for UK HEIs to manage and for LMIC partners to support. It was often cited as a barrier to establishing equitable partnerships.

Risks in the political environment were cited as another barrier that researchers faced. This included political and economic crisis as well as difficulties in navigating political alignments and sensitivities within communities.

**The GCRF QR/block grants funding stream is seen as unique for its flexibility – enabling HEIs to meet institutional needs and complement project funding. It has also enabled HEIs to pivot and adapt plans to changing circumstances, such as the pandemic and funding cuts. It also had notable success in promoting interdisciplinarity work and equitable partnerships between UK and LMIC institutions. (EQ 6)**

The explicit focus on ODA – including its emphasis on interdisciplinarity, equitable partnerships and challenge-led focus – was cited as unique by a wide number of stakeholders.

The flexibility of the QR/block grants was seen as distinct, as they enabled HEIs to pivot and adapt plans to changing circumstances, such as the pandemic and funding cuts. It also complemented project funding by giving agency to HEIs to allocate funding according to research needs in areas such as pump priming, capacity building and/or meeting the FEC.

The pandemic has impacted HEIs in a number of ways, including disruptions, delays and cancellation of projects. HEIs adapted by transitioning to online working, although this was not without its challenges. The transition also led to more work being undertaken by LMIC partners. Some HEIs felt this led to greater equitability in the partnership; however, evidence for the extent to which this was achieved is mixed.

Overall, HEIs were able to adapt and respond effectively due to the flexibility of the funding stream. There is also evidence of HEIs reallocating their funding to respond specifically to the pandemic, such as research into the impacts of Covid-19 in LMICs.

### **Conclusions, lessons and recommendations. (EQ 7)**

The 2017 ICAI Rapid Review led to a decisive shift in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding. This resulted in the introduction of three-year institutional strategies and rigorous processes for monitoring and reporting, making the funding stream more focused and strategic. The funding stream has gone beyond ensuring ODA compliance towards 'ODA research excellence'. However, there are structural challenges within the fund that constrain the investment from fully realising 'ODA excellence'. Overall, the investment through GCRF QR/block grants has made progress towards meeting GCRF strategic objectives and desired results. It also demonstrates how funding has complemented project-based grants allocated by DPs, though the intended synergy could be made more explicit. While progress is being made, funding cuts have impeded potential areas of expected outcome as well as the sustainability of achievements made.

#### **EQ 7**

**Lesson 1:** There is value in a QR/block grant funding model with specific criteria attached to the spend, including to complement project-based grants.

**Recommendation 1:** Consider including a similar QR/block grant with ODA criteria attached in any future challenge-based fund.

**Lesson 2:** The flexibility that the GCRF QR/block grants in the strategy design and allocation

enabled HEIs to meet their specific institutional needs and priorities. However, this has resulted in a divergent number of activities, making it difficult to understand the full impact of the investment.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop a ToC for this funding stream in a future fund, as a means of providing flexibility ('bottom up') while maximising impact ('top down'). The ToC would serve as a guide for funding bodies and HEIs to articulate their contribution towards outcomes and impact, including the intended synergy between QR/block grants and project-based grants.

**Lesson 3:** The coordination and sharing of learnings within and across HEIs in the UK was a highly valued aspect of this funding stream. However, this is less evident in LMIC settings.

**Recommendation 3:** Consider resourcing requirements at the funding body level to include capacity to support cross-institutional learning in a strategic manner and in a way that also benefits LMIC partners.

**Lesson 4:** The time frame was a key barrier to achieving outcomes. This included a short turnaround time for strategy development and establishing partnerships. In addition, the annual funding cycle and the tight timelines for annual decisions about allocation, limited the time available for implementation.

**Recommendation 4:** Include a 'year zero' to allow HEIs time to establish meaningful partnerships and co-develop the strategy. In addition, guarantee allocation of funding for the three years, increasing the time to deliver and contribute towards impact.

# 1 Introduction

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) evaluation examines the fund's Theory of Change (ToC), from activities to impacts, over a five-year period running from 2020 to 2025. The evaluation is structured into three stages owing to the complex nature of the fund. This report is part of the second stage of the evaluation, Stage 1b, which examines GCRF's large-scale strategic GCRF initiatives. It focuses on the Four Nations GCRF Quality-related Research (QR)/Block Grants Funding, a GCRF 'signature investment', aimed to underpin and complement project-based GCRF grants allocated by other delivery partners (DPs).

## 1.1 Overview

**GCRF is a £1.5 billion fund announced by the United Kingdom (UK) government in late 2015, an unprecedented investment into pioneering research that addresses the challenges faced by developing countries.** GCRF forms part of the UK's official development assistance (ODA) commitment and aims to contribute to the achievement of the UK's 2015 aid strategy's goals.

GCRF aims to harness UK science in the search for solutions to 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 implemented by 17 of the UK's R&I funders, which commission R&I as DPs.

GCRF's ToC sets out GCRF's expected impact, to emerge over a 10-year period:

*'Widespread use and adoption of GCRF-supported research-based solutions and technological innovations enables stakeholders in LMICs [low-to-middle-income countries] to make progress at scale towards addressing complex development challenges. These efforts 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. These improvements will be sustained into the future by enduring equitable research and innovation partnerships between the UK and LMICs, and enhanced capabilities for challenge-oriented research and innovation in all regions'.*

The GCRF strategy sets out three objectives to support this impact:

- Promote challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, including the participation of researchers who may not previously have considered the applicability of their work to development issues.
- Strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers.
- Provide an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

Through these objectives, GCRF aims to contribute to realising the ambitions of the UK aid strategy and to making practical progress on the global effort to address the United Nations' sustainable development goals (SDGs). As a secondary objective, GCRF also aims to build the position and role of the UK R&I sector as global leaders in addressing global development challenges. GCRF's ToC and the ambitions set out in its strategy provide the overall framing for the evaluation to assess progress.

### **GCRF's evaluation, Stage 1b: Understanding GCRF's processes and early results**

**The purpose of GCRF's evaluation is to assess the extent to which GCRF has contributed to its objectives and impact.** The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the life of the fund (see Annex 1). The evaluation is conducted over five years and across three stages. The evaluation started in 2020, when GCRF was in the final year of its first phase of five years (2016–20). Stage 1a (2020–21) examined the foundations for achieving development across the fund, addressed through four modules: management; relevance and coherence; fairness; and gender, social inclusion and poverty (GESIP).

Stage 1b began in April 2021, with six process evaluations of GCRF's 'signature investments' – large-scale programmes that aim to deliver on GCRF's strategic objectives and where there has been considerable investment into programme management processes to promote excellent ODA R&I with development impact. A fund-wide survey and a value for money (VfM) assessment were also conducted in this phase.

This stage seeks to answer the overarching evaluation question (EQ):

#### ***How well are GCRF's signature investments working, and what have they achieved?***

##### **Box 1. What is a 'programme' in GCRF?**

In the GCRF context, programmes are designed and managed by GCRF's DPs. They involve the allocation of an amount of funding for the commissioning of a specific portfolio of grants. A set of specific objectives guides commissioning of projects to contribute to GCRF's goals. Programmes often specify ways of working, e.g. in partnership with institutions in low and middle-income countries, through interdisciplinary work and involving stakeholder engagement. Research topics and countries are not usually specified although, in the innovation programmes, development challenges and geographies are framed and awards are commissioned to respond to these. The 'signature programmes' involve more hands-on management of the portfolio by the funder than other calls, in order to optimise the portfolio's development impact potential. This programme management includes elements such as policies and frameworks that have to be met, such as gender, equity and inclusion, detailed monitoring and reporting, cohort linkages, support for skills building from the programme level, and links to wider networks of collaborators and research users.

This report focuses on the process evaluation of the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant funding.<sup>5</sup> The initiative aimed to underpin and complement project-based GCRF grants allocated by other DPs.

<sup>5</sup> During this phase, six process evaluations of signature investments were carried out, including: GROW (UKRI); Interdisciplinary Hubs (UKRI); Future Africa Leaders' Programme (FLAIR) (Royal Society); International Partnerships Programme (IPP) (UK Research Staff Association (UKRSA)); Challenge Leaders and portfolios (United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI)); and the Four Nations Funding Bodies' awards to UK higher education institutions (HEIs).

## Overview of the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant funding

Since 2016-17, four UK funding bodies have distributed GCRF allocations to HEIs. The aim of this funding is to complement project-based GCRF grants allocated by DPs.<sup>6</sup> The funding is allocated to HEIs as block grants made to institutions, in contrast to project grants, which are awarded on a competitive basis to individual researchers. The four funding bodies are: (1) Department for Economy, Northern Ireland (DfENI); (2) Higher Education Funding Council Wales (HEFCW); (3) Research England; and (4) the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

Allocations are made to each nation on the basis of 'standard shares', i.e. shares of total UK Research Council funding. These are then allocated to HEIs according to the overall quality of their research.<sup>7</sup> In England and Scotland, the funding is allocated through the main formula-based fund for research – known as 'Quality-related Research' (QR) in England and the Research Excellence Grant (REG) in Scotland – which takes into account how well HEIs score on the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In Wales and Northern Ireland, funding is awarded in proportion to the universities' research council grant income. Moreover, Wales applies a minimum threshold whereby funding is only provided to institutions that receive an allocation of at least £50,000 using the pro-rata (proportion) formula.<sup>8</sup>

In 2017, the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) published its review of GCRF.<sup>9</sup> The report was critical of the funding streams' ODA compliance<sup>10</sup> processes. It found that allocations made by the funding bodies without HEIs submitting proposals for ODA-eligible research or being assessed for potential impact. It also found that processes lacked transparency and only seven out of its sample of 28 HEIs could account for their grants, as they had been combined with funding from other sources.

Following the ICAI review in 2017, GCRF funding through the funding bodies was granted to HEIs only if they provided three-year institutional strategies assessed as ODA-compliant. Other measures and processes were put in place, which the next section delves into in further detail. Overall, GCRF QR/block grants could be used to support activities such as (i) capacity and capacity building; (ii) mono-disciplinary, interdisciplinary and collaborative research; (iii) generating impact from research both within and beyond the sector; (iv) meeting the full economic costs (FEC)<sup>11</sup> of eligible research funded by other DPs; (v) rapid response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need; and (vi) pump priming activities to underpin GCRF and Newton bids to other funders.

<sup>6</sup> Funding Bodies GCRF Strategies proposal, December 2017.

<sup>7</sup> UKRI (2022) 'Strategic Priorities Fund'. <https://www.ukri.org/what-we-offer/our-main-funds/strategic-priorities-fund>

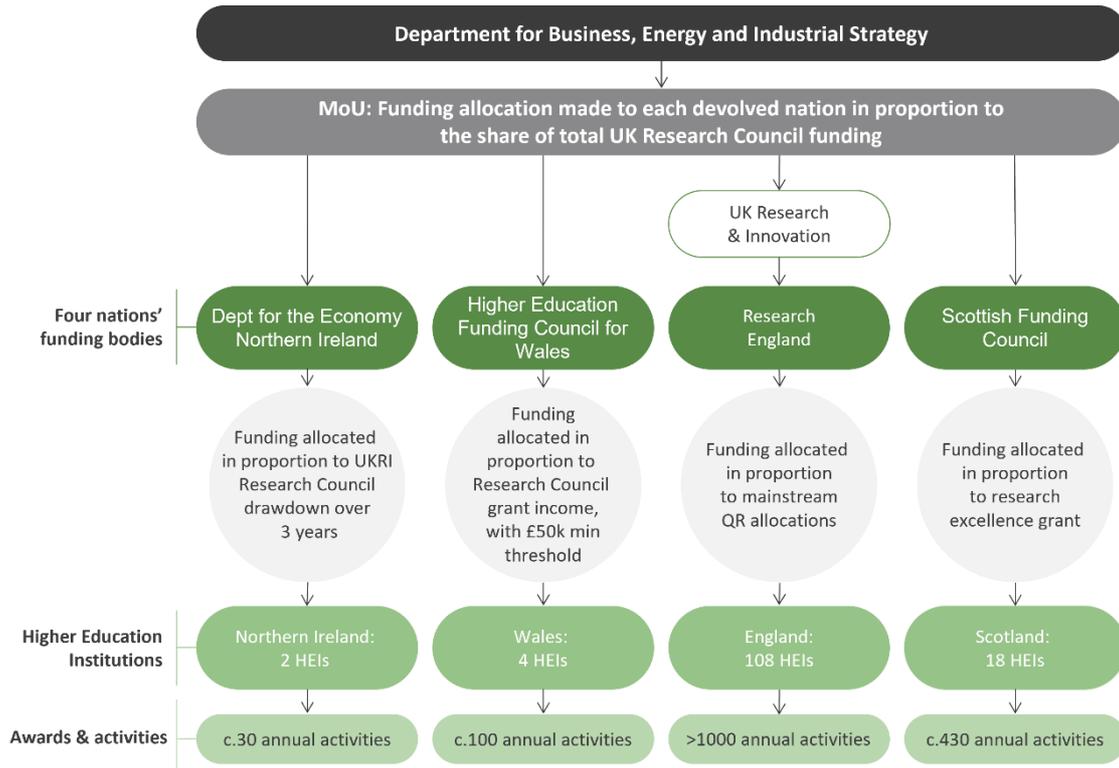
<sup>8</sup> HEFCW (2018) 'W18/02HE: Global Challenges Research Fund: Institutional three-year strategies'. <https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/en/publications/circulars/w18-02he-global-challenges-research-fund-institutional-three-year-strategies/>

<sup>9</sup> ICAI (2017) Global Challenges Research Fund: A rapid review. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> OECD defines ODA compliant research activities as follows: "Research includes financing by the official sector, whether in the donor country or elsewhere, of research into the problems of developing countries. This may be either (i) undertaken by an agency or institution whose main purpose is to promote the economic growth or welfare of developing countries, or (ii) commissioned or approved, and financed or part-financed, by an official body from a general purpose institution with the specific aim of promoting the economic growth or welfare of developing countries. Research undertaken as part of the formulation of aid programmes in central or local government departments or aid agencies is considered as an administrative cost." OECD (2018) in [https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/STAT\(2018\)9/FINAL/en/pdf](https://one.oecd.org/document/DCD/DAC/STAT(2018)9/FINAL/en/pdf)

<sup>11</sup> FEC is the additional funding required to cover the 'full' cost of research as research grants awarded are usually no more than 80%. This could include salary costs or other associated overheads. For more detail: <https://www.ukri.org/councils/epsrc/guidance-for-applicants/costs-you-can-apply-for/principles-of-full-economic-costing-fec/#contents-list>

Figure 1: Delivery architecture of the Four Nations funding bodies GCRF QR/Block Grants



## 1.2 Aims and scope of the Four Nations process evaluation

The Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant funding process evaluation is focused on main evaluation question (MEQ) 2: *How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?* More specifically, it aims to understand how the signature investment is working and what it has achieved in terms of early results (effectiveness). This has involved gathering data from the funding bodies themselves in each of the four nations and a sample of HEIs in receipt of funding as well as LMIC institutional partners.

We reviewed ODA R&I management processes, including: scoping and framing of initiative for relevance and coherence; ToC and shared vision; commissioning and selection of portfolios, and awards within portfolios, to deliver against challenge areas; risk factors identified and mitigated; hands-on portfolio management; flexibility to respond to events and emergencies; addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working; promoting coherence between portfolios; facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy; and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and regular reporting.

The evaluation sets out a series of sub-evaluation questions (sub-EQs) and criteria that aim to capture processes and structures that we would expect to see in an ODA challenge fund such as GCRF, building on the findings from Stage 1 (see below). The time frame for this evaluation begins with the introduction of the three-year strategies in 2018–19 and goes through to the end of 2020–21.

### Evaluation users

Our evaluation design is grounded in a utilisation focus. This requires having clarity on who the different stakeholders of the evaluation are at the start of the evaluation, as well as how and when they want to use the findings. The evaluation is designed in such a way that it engages

stakeholders at the most appropriate moments in the process. Ultimately, a utilisation-focused evaluation should be judged on its utility and actual use.

The primary users of the evaluation are the various teams: the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), including the Science Technology Innovation Analysis Team; the wider ODA team in Swindon and London offices, including the Research Management Team (RMT); the Data, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (DMEL) Team and Programme Management Office; and the DPs involved in the delivery of GCRF.

The next section sets out some key changes in the strategic and policy context for GCRF and how they have impacted on the evaluation through 2021–22.

### 1.3 Strategic and policy context

**The first years of GCRF's evaluation, 2020–22, have seen significant changes in the strategic, policy and economic context of GCRF. These include a new Her Majesty's Government (HMG) policy framework that integrates defence and foreign policy, including ODA, and significant budget cuts for 2021–22 as a result of a reduction in the UK's ODA commitment from 0.7% of gross national income (GNI) to 0.5%, following the budget impacts of the UK government's large-scale response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2021, the policy decision was made to wind down GCRF by 2025, with implications for the evaluation.**

**The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy (IR), published in March 2021,<sup>12</sup> sets out the broader UK policy vision for foreign policy, including ODA, to 2030.** This vision includes an increased commitment to security and resilience in the context of UK national interests in collaboration with other nations. The review had an explicit focus on defence, homeland security and the application of science and technology to grow the UK's cyber power. Although it emphasises a focus on multilateral solutions, the IR does not focus in detail on international development, the strategy for which has not yet been published at the time of writing but which is due in 2022. It nevertheless now guides the work of the new Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) (formed in August 2020 by merging the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID)) and that of all ODA-spending departments, including BEIS, which funds GCRF.

As an outcome of the IR, a new strategic framework outlines the government's national security and international foreign policy objectives. The framework includes four dimensions: sustaining strategic advantage through science and technology; shaping the open international order of the future; strengthening security and defence at home and overseas; and building resilience at home and overseas, prioritising efforts to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss.<sup>13</sup>

Science and technology are central to achieving the policy objectives, with a focus on emerging technologies in particular and the translation of innovation into practical applications, including in developing countries. In this sense GCRF continues to remain relevant. Further, the national Research and Development (R&D) roadmap outlines that ODA will continue 'to support R&D partnerships within developing countries sharing research expertise in support of

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<sup>12</sup> HMG (2021) Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/975077/Global\\_Britain\\_in\\_a\\_Competitive\\_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

the SDGs', with 'Science and Technology' remaining one of the UK's strategic priorities for ODA spending.<sup>14</sup>

**The review also sets out seven priorities for UK aid including supporting open societies and conflict resolution, humanitarian preparedness and girls' education, with climate change a high priority.** The review reiterates the UK's commitment to the SDGs and states that poverty reduction will remain central to the work of FCDO.

Geographically, the IR describes a pivot in the UK's interests towards the Indo-Pacific region, although Africa and other developing regions remain a priority. As an ODA fund with an emphasis on low and middle-income countries, GCRF's main focus has been on Africa and, to a lesser extent, Asia. The Indo-Pacific region has had less coverage. However, the breadth and diversity of GCRF should enable its continued relevance to this new geographical tilt.

**Alongside a new foreign policy and international development framework, the Covid-19 pandemic has significantly impacted on ODA spending and management, with resulting cuts to the GCRF budget in 2021–22.** 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. Reflecting the economic impact of the pandemic, the ODA commitment was reduced from 0.7% to 0.5 % of GNI as a temporary measure.<sup>15</sup> While the IR commits to 'spend 0.7% of GNI on development when the fiscal situation allows', the ODA reduction in 2021 resulted in spending cuts for ODA-spending government departments – including BEIS, with consequential cuts to GCRF and the budgets of its DPs.<sup>16</sup>

On 11 March 2021 United Kingdom Research and Innovation (UKRI) stated that the BEIS ODA allocation to UKRI 'has reduced significantly in planned ODA expenditure for FY21/22, leading to a £125m budget and a £120m gap between allocations and commitments'.<sup>17</sup> The implementation of these sudden budget reductions, which amounted to around 70% of committed spend, affected all GCRF's DPs and investments across the board, with grants being delayed, reprofiled or, in some cases, terminated. In March UKRI, as the largest DP involved in GCRF, stated that it would be unable to provide new GCRF funding beyond July 2021.

**September 2021 saw a return to a three-year Spending Review and an improved picture for GCRF after the turmoil of the coronavirus pandemic, although – in response to the new policy framework – the decision was made to wind down BEIS's ODA funds, GCRF and Newton by 2025.** Following this budget, BEIS's ODA allocation stabilised and some improvements were seen. Existing GCRF commitments are now able to be met until March 2025, which means that commissioned projects, including the large-scale flagship programmes, will be supported for the remainder of their terms to 2025. The cuts from 2020/21, however, will not be reimbursed, so projects are having to accommodate net budget reductions by reducing their scope.

The policy decision to wind the fund down by early 2025 means that spending in 2022–23 is on a declining trajectory, from £124 million in 2022–23 to £77.9 million in 2023–24 and £14.6 million in the final year, 2024–25. These circumstances represent a curtailment in the original

<sup>14</sup> HMG (2020) UK Research and Development Roadmap.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/896799/UK\\_Research\\_and\\_Development\\_Roadmap.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896799/UK_Research_and_Development_Roadmap.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Dickson, A. (2020) 'Spending Review: Reducing the 0.7% aid commitment'. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/spending-review-reducing-the-aid-commitment/>

<sup>16</sup> HMG (2021) Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/975077/Global\\_Britain\\_in\\_a\\_Competitive\\_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age- the Integrated Review of Security Defence Development and Foreign Policy.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> UKRI (2021) 'UKRI Official Development Assistance letter 11 March 2021'. <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/ukri-oda-letter-11-march-2021/>

ambition envisioned for GCRF in its ToC, which was to maintain investment in development R&I over a 10-year period.<sup>18</sup> The assumption at the time the ToC was developed (2017–18) was that there would be a second, impact-oriented, phase of GCRF from 2021 to 2025. In this phase, it was expected that many of the larger awards (notably UKRI's Interdisciplinary Hubs) and other investments would shift focus on to impact activities. With the winding down of the fund, these investments will now not take place, with implications for the achievement of GCRF's midterm outcomes and impact.

Effectively only two years of R&I activity remain, as in the final year programmes will be focused on finalising outputs. Award teams – and, potentially, partnerships – will disband and move on. BEIS has decided, nevertheless, that the evaluation will continue to track GCRF up to its close in March 2025. For Stage 1b, the evaluation has been adjusted to take these challenges into account, with specific EQs focusing on the impacts of Covid-19 and budget reductions. For future phases, the evaluation is in the process of being refocused to reflect the winding down of the fund and the need to capture lessons and document GCRF's accomplishments and legacy for LMICs and the UK.

## 1.4 Structure of the report

The structure for this report is as follows:

**Section 1** provides an introduction to the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant funding and provides an overview of the process evaluation. It sets out the context of the wider evaluation process as well as situating it within the strategic and policy context for this specific evaluation.

**Section 2** describes the approach and methodology, including EQs and criteria, as well as the data collection instruments, sampling approach and analysis.

**Section 3** presents the findings against EQs 1–6.

**Section 4** provides conclusions, lessons and high-level recommendations for the design of similar initiatives.

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<sup>18</sup> BEIS (2019) 'Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): Foundation Stage Evaluation'.  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-foundation-stage-evaluation>

## 2 Approach and methodology

The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund. For Stage 1b, we developed an evaluation framework to assess how well ‘ODA excellence’ has been supported in the signature investments, drawing on the findings from Stage 1a, GCRF’s ToC and the literature on challenge funds. This section provides an overview of our approach and the EQs and criteria that the process evaluation aims to answer. It also summarises the data collection method, sampling, data analysis and our key strengths and limitations.

### 2.1 Overview of approach

**The overall GCRF evaluation takes a theory-based design, tracking the GCRF ToC over the projected 10 years of the fund (see the Inception Report 2020 for more detail).** The Stage 1b process evaluations (together with the survey and VfM assessment) provide an opportunity to test the early stages of the GCRF ToC and its assumptions, to understand how the signature investments have integrated the key processes and strategies proposed in the ToC into their programmes in order to optimise the ODA excellence and impact potential of their awards.

Stage 1b of the GCRF evaluation focuses on MEQ2: *How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?* While the focus is on process, the evaluation also seeks to capture insights on context, causal mechanisms and early-stage outcomes.

#### Conceptual framing of ‘ODA research excellence’ in GCRF

From April to June 2021, the evaluation completed a scoping phase to finalise the approach and method for Stage 1b. To deliver on its ambitions, GCRF goes beyond considering research excellence alone, to promoting challenge-led, excellent research with impact. This incorporates a wider understanding of what GCRF as an ODA fund should strive towards, which we term as ‘ODA research and innovation excellence’.

However, in Stage 1a the evaluation found that some investments in the portfolio are more aligned with ODA challenge-led R&I than others. The evaluation concluded that approaching GCRF more explicitly as an ODA R&I challenge fund would provide more insights into ‘what good looks like’ for GCRF’s performance (see Box 2).

#### **Box 2. Findings from Stage 1a, 2020–21**

The process evaluations build on the findings from Stage 1a. The Stage 1a Management Review and Synthesis Report on the integration of relevance, fairness, gender, poverty and social inclusion on GCRF were published in February 2022.<sup>19</sup> Overall, the Stage 1a

<sup>19</sup> BEIS (2022) ‘Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): Stage 1a evaluation’. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-stage-1a-evaluation>

evaluation found that GCRF is making clear progress in terms of establishing the foundations for development impact – becoming relevant, coherent, well-targeted, fair, gender sensitive and socially inclusive. Strengths were seen especially in the ‘signature investments’ such as IPP, GROW, Interdisciplinary Hubs and FLAIR. However, inherent challenges in the fund’s size and complicated delivery architecture meant that progress has been varied across the portfolio, and important gaps remain, especially around managing for development impact and how poverty is addressed. The evaluation recommended that GCRF do the following:

- **Establish a more consistent challenge fund identity, with the cultures, shared ownership and management structures to support this.** A challenge fund identity and associated processes were seen most strongly in the signature investments, with the need to explore this in more depth in Stage 1b process evaluations through specific criteria.
- **Establish quality standards for ‘ODA R&I excellence’ to optimise the combination of excellent research and innovation with development impact.** The synthesis identified an unresolved tension that at times privileged conventional research excellence and took a lower, compliance approach to the fundamentals of development impact. The need to integrate and promote both dimensions of excellence in ODA R&I was brought into the Stage 1b process evaluation framework in order to understand in more depth whether this had been achieved in the signature investments.
- **Establish a collective, fund-wide monitoring and learning process that supports learning between BEIS, the DPs and award holders to support adaptive management at different levels.** This is a fund-wide challenge but was also brought into the process evaluation framework in order to investigate the extent to which monitoring and learning were supported in the signature programmes.

A consistent request from BEIS has been for the evaluation to illustrate ‘what good looks like’ for a challenge fund such as GCRF. Therefore, to better frame GCRF’s ambitions from the challenge fund perspective, and to define the key characteristics of a fund of this nature, we conducted a rapid scan of the literature for challenge funds in international development and mission-oriented R&I (see the Stage 1b Approach Paper, 2021 in Annex 4).

Building on this review, the GCRF ToC and the findings from Stage 1a, a **single overarching evaluation framework** was developed for all six process evaluations and the fund-wide survey (set out in Section 2.2). The evaluation framework in Section 2.2 sets out the EQs and the combined criteria for assessing ODA excellence in design and delivery of GCRF’s signature investments. The specific features of each signature investment will be captured via tailored criteria within the evaluation framework (see Section 2.2 for the full evaluation matrix).

### Summary of the evaluation method

The detailed methodology is set out in subsequent sections. In summary, the evaluation has examined the EQs through an iterative three-step approach:

1. **Examining the programme level to achieve a broad overview of the signature investment and its processes**, informed by a document review and analysis of the programme-specific subset of survey data.
2. **A deeper, qualitative dive into a sample of awards from within each investment to gain deeper insights into processes and early results from the programme**, informed

by key informant interviews (KIIs) and triangulated with specific documentation from each award.

3. **A holistic assessment of the overall programme**, examining the extent to which the programmatic approach has enabled the awards to work as a portfolio that is more than the 'sum of the parts'.

Triangulation was the main approach to strengthen the evidence across all three levels:

- **Examples and triangulation within interviews:** Triangulation was applied within interviews to explore issues from different angles and elicit examples to support reports of achievements. These examples were then cross-checked with other data sources.
- **Triangulation between stakeholder types in both quantitative and qualitative data collection:** DP programme managers, award holders and partners, increasing the number of different perspectives on a project/programme.
- **Triangulation between interview data, survey data, award and programme monitoring information and other documentary sources:** This included project annual reports, reporting through ResearchFish and programme review documentation that helped us to validate stakeholder testimony about processes and project achievements.

## 2.2 Evaluation questions and criteria

All Stage 1b process evaluations utilise a single overarching evaluation framework, which draws on the GCRF ToC outcomes and assumptions as well as insights from the literature on challenge funds and mission-oriented R&I in international development (see Annex 1). The overarching EQ has been broken down in the evaluation framework into seven EQs and associated criteria to support the assessment of the ODA R&I processes.

These EQs were updated from the original Terms of Reference to reflect the findings of the Stage 1b evaluation, a rapid literature review of challenge funds. The EQs were also adapted to reflect the structural and contextual changes around Covid-19 and an overall reduction in ODA funding that affected GCRF in 2021–22.

Table 1: below sets out the detailed evaluation framework. Through detailed criteria EQs 1–2 we examine the structures and processes that we would expect to find in a challenge fund to deliver ODA R&I with impact. EQ 3 examines the extent to which processes and structures have been efficient and timely and fair to partners; EQ 4 looks at the evidence for what has been achieved and emerging outcomes; EQ 5 explores the unique features of the signature programmes that have enabled them to overcome barriers in the thematic and geographical contexts; EQ 6 aims to establish the uniqueness and additionality of GCRF funding. Finally EQ 7 captures lessons for future funds.

**Table 1: Evaluation matrix**

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
<p>EQ 1. To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research and innovation with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?</p>	<p>1a. ODA R&amp;I management (at programme and award levels):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence</li> <li>▪ ToC and shared vision</li> <li>▪ Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge</li> <li>▪ Risk factors identified and mitigated</li> <li>▪ Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort building, aggregate-level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>▪ Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>▪ Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>▪ Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>▪ Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>▪ M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> </ul> <p>1b. ODA R&amp;I excellence in design and implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>▪ Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>▪ Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach</li> <li>▪ Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes</li> <li>▪ Inclusiveness addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>▪ Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>▪ Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> <li>▪ Positioning for use in design and delivery (‘fit for purpose’ engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Data sources:</b></p> <p>KIIs with stakeholders at four funding bodies, GCRF institutional officers (iOs), GCRF teams and principal investigators (PIs) at HEIs, and informed LMIC partners.</p> <p>Documents at funding body level.</p> <p>Documents at HEI level, including three-year strategies, annual reports and case studies.</p> <p><b>Methods:</b></p> <p>Document reviews</p> <p>KIIs with four funding bodies</p> <p>KIIs with GCRF IOs</p> <p>KIIs with GCRF team members</p> <p>KIIs with PIs/co-principal investigators (co-PIs) at HEIs</p> <p>KIIs with partners in LMICs</p>
<p>EQ 2. To what extent are structures and processes in place</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear ToC for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes</li> </ul>	

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analysis/understanding of local R&amp;I ecosystems and capacity needs</li> <li>▪ Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&amp;I infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Fairness considerations integrated</li> </ul>	
EQ 3. To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented: are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Efficiency and timeliness of processes</li> <li>▪ Efficiency and coherence</li> <li>▪ Fairness for partners</li> </ul>	
EQ 4. To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes/impacts, and what evidence exists of these? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples</li> <li>▪ Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress</li> <li>▪ Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)</li> </ul>	
EQ 5. What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maturity of the field</li> <li>○ Research capacity strengthening</li> <li>○ Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research)</li> <li>○ Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves)</li> <li>○ Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)</li> <li>○ Examples of success factors e.g. the necessary factors proposed in the GCRF ToC for navigating barriers/facilitators</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

EQ	Criteria	Data sources and methods for all EQs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Networks, credible evidence/innovation and new capabilities mobilised to amplify change</li> <li>○ Iterative engagement by GCRF programmes and projects, responding to opportunities to amplify change</li> <li>○ Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model</li> </ul>	
<p>EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted</li> <li>▪ Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality, etc. (as defined in the VfM rubric)</li> <li>▪ Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding</li> <li>▪ Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for</li> </ul>	
<p>EQ 7. What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of signature investments?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Specific insights and lessons from the initiative that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from, success factors, reasons why</li> <li>▪ Capture also specific areas for improvement in the initiative, areas of underperformance and reasons why</li> </ul>	

## 2.3 Selection and sampling

This section outlines the sampling strategy for data collection. We sought to maintain a degree of parity and comparability across all four nations. We aimed for a sample of 10% of the 132 HEIs funded in the three financial years between 2018 and 2021, although an exact and equal weightage across all four nations was not possible, due to the size of Research England. The sample was drawn using stratified random sampling. Firstly, the grants between 2018 and 2021 were sorted by level of total funding across the three years. These were then divided by a third and grouped according to level of funding (high, medium and low). In Research England, the 10 HEIs with commended strategies were identified, and in Scotland its two largest institutions were grouped separately before they were sorted.

Table 2: Sample of HEIs

Four Nations funding bodies	No. of HEIs	%	Funding levels		
			<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
<b>DfENI</b>	1	50%		Ulster University	
<b>HEFCW</b>	1	25%			Aberystwyth University
<b>Research England</b>	9	8%	Royal College of Music (CS)	University of Lincoln (CS)	London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (CS)
			Royal Central School of Speech and Drama <sup>20</sup>	University of Northumbria at Newcastle	The University of Manchester
			Edge Hill University	Liverpool John Moores <sup>21</sup>	University of Southampton
<b>SFC</b>	4	22%	Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	Highlands and Islands	Edinburgh University (L)
					Dundee
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11%</b>			

## 2.4 Data collection and overview of the evidence base

The Four Nations process evaluation is informed both by secondary data and by KIIs with selected stakeholders. The team reviewed a total of 170 documents; these included funding bodies' reporting, funding bodies' communications and guidance to universities, HEIs' three-year strategies and updates, HEI consolidated reports and annual reporting, and case studies. The team also interviewed the four managers at the funding body level. At the HEI level, we interviewed the GCRF Institutional Officer (IO) at each university, as these were individuals who had the lead responsibility to liaise with funding bodies and act as the focal point for the block grants. Depending on the size of the grant, we also spoke to internal members to triangulate the reports from the GCRF IOs. We also spoke to at least one PI and LMIC partner,

<sup>20</sup> Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the University of Lincoln were selected, using stratified random sampling, to replace London Business School due to non-responsiveness during the data collection phase.

<sup>21</sup> Liverpool John Moores University was selected, using stratified random sampling, to replace the University of the West of England due to non-responsiveness during the data collection phase.

depending on the size of the institution, to seek perspectives at the activity level and also to triangulate our findings. A table of our key informants against the target is provided in Table 3:.

While there was no survey of the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant evaluation, as there was no known population at the activity (i.e. award) level, we have incorporated questions from the survey for the process evaluations into our KII guides.

In interviews, owing to the number of criteria to cover, we sought a balance in the questions asked of key informants across a large range of areas. Therefore, not all key informants were asked questions related to all processes or criteria. Instead, we targeted areas that informants were most able to comment on, with the aim of achieving reasonable coverage of the issues in scope across the interviews as a whole.

Table 3: Key informants

Key informants	Target	Achieved
Four Nations Funding Bodies – QR/Block grant managers	4	4
HEI GCRF Institutional Officers (GCRF IOs)	15	15
HEI GCRF Internal Team Members (GCRF TMs)	22	13
HEI GCRF Principal Investigators (GCRF PIs)	0	12
LMIC partners	9	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>56</b>

## 2.5 Data analysis

For the Four Nations process evaluation, the team reviewed documents and secondary reporting data using the following process. Documentation was initially reviewed and categorised as data, context or evidence. All documents categorised as evidence were further coded in MaxQDA using a common codebook structured to reflect EQs.

For the KII data, we analysed the KIIs through the following process:

- First, interview notes were written up into a structured template linking back to the main themes' EQs and criteria.
- Interview write-ups were then coded using MaxQDA, using the evaluation criteria as the structural codes (see Annex 3b for codebook).
- Coded interview data was then extracted and analysed for patterns, including similarities and differences in responses by sub-groups of stakeholders.

The programme analysis template was the main tool used for integrating data from different sources and assessing confidence in the evidence. The analysed data was combined for each EQ, and evidence was triangulated to build the evidence base. We used established techniques from qualitative analysis: identifying and interpreting themes; developing explanations; translating emerging themes and explanations back to test against the source data; juxtaposing and exploring contradictory findings; and triangulating findings between the evidence sources to answer the EQs.

In the programme template, analytical narratives for each EQ were written up, and the supporting evidence was documented. Our confidence in the evidence was then rated (see Annex 3c). In our analysis of each EQ, we considered how confident we were in the strength of evidence underpinning our judgements. This is based on how strongly the evidence emerges from the individual sources as well as the degree of triangulation possible between the sources.

## 2.6 Strengths and limitations of our approach

Overall, our approach and sampling has worked well, enabling us to understand the structure and implementation of the Four Nations funding bodies investments. We reviewed a high number of documents and exceeded our target number of KIIs. The documentation provided good contextual information and insights into the rationale and strategic thinking behind the programme. It had enough granularity and project-level detail to triangulate information from KIIs. The interviews provided rich detail and included a good range of perspectives on the programme from different types of stakeholders. Interviewees were responsive and knowledgeable. Moreover, we used rubrics to indicate how confident we are in the strength of our evidence to ensure that our findings are robust.

The sampling was a challenge, as Research England funds significantly more HEIs than the other three nations, and it was necessary to include all four nations. The sample therefore gives a good, varied snapshot of the HEIs but is not representative in quantitative terms. In KIIs, it is sometimes a challenge to distinguish evidence about QR-GCRF from evidence about GCRF generally, particularly where it was used to support the full economic cost of ongoing activities. We were also unable to access all reports for the final year of the funding – 2020–21. We extended our deadline for data collection in order to incorporate the latest reporting. However, the consolidated reports for Scotland and Research England are not ready. In addition, some individual HEI reports are not available, due to clarifications sought from the funding bodies. Where there are gaps, we are relying on information gained through KIIs conducted earlier this year. However, there are limitations on the data available – particularly in relation to EQ 4, which looks at progress on outcomes and results.

## 3 Findings

This section sets out the findings against the seven EQs for the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grants, in order to answer the overarching evaluation question: *‘How well are GCRF’s investments working, and what have they achieved?’*

### 3.1 EQ 1: To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I, with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?

#### Box 3. EQ 1 summary

The 2017 ICAI Rapid Review led to a decisive shift in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding. GCRF funding through the funding bodies has since been granted to HEIs only if their three-year institutional strategies were assessed as ODA-compliant. The strategies enabled HEIs to reflect on coherence and the place of funding within their overall institutional strategy.

It was evident that funding bodies and HEIs had a clear, shared vision for the QR/block grant funding stream. In addition, funding bodies put in place reporting requirements to ensure funding was being used effectively. While this was thorough and gathered a lot of activity-level detail, it does not allow for an overall picture of how money was spent or of overall impacts.

Strategy development and processes introduced supported HEIs to move beyond ODA compliance towards attaining ODA R&I excellence. The principles of equitable partnerships are evident in HEI strategies, and are supported with targeted programming. GCRF priorities, including gender responsiveness, poverty and social inclusion, are embedded and well-recognised components of this funding stream, addressed at project design, during activities and at dissemination.

In all four nations, GCRF IOs and PIs utilised existing support networks to coordinate with colleagues in other institutions. The three devolved nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) funding bodies were able, to varying degrees, to offer specific support to their cohort.

EQ 1 is focused on the extent to which investments through the Four Nations funding bodies have supported excellent ODA R&I. Our approach to answering EQ 1 is to explore the structures and processes in place, using the ODA R&I criteria relevant to the Four Nations QR/block grants to document and discuss our findings. This section first considers the vision for the funding stream and the structures put in place to achieve this. It next explores the management of the funding. Finally, it examines the extent to which these structures and processes reflect and promote GCRF development considerations.

#### *Design: developing a vision and establishing structures*

##### 3.1.1 Scoping and framing of initiative for relevance and coherence

**The Four Nations GCRF QR/block grant comprises a diverse set of programmes and activities that as a whole address each of the three key strategic objectives laid out for the UK**

**Strategy for GCRF.**<sup>22</sup> Initiated in 2016–17, this investment is intended to complement project-based GCRF grants. While there is no overarching ToC for the funding stream, HEIs have allocated funding to meet their institutional strategic goals. This flexibility has allowed HEIs to broaden the scope of funding beyond that of core research project issues to include delivering support to the research environment, including capacity building. Broadly, this positioning has allowed institutions to generate impact across the range of GCRF projects and grants they hold, as well as creating wider impacts for ODA international research activity and institutions as a whole.

**A lack of processes that would ensure ODA compliance was seen as a key weakness of this funding stream in the 2017 ICAI Rapid Review, leading to a decisive shift in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding.**<sup>23</sup> As a result of the 2017 ICAI Rapid Review (outlined above in Section 1.3), starting from the academic year 2018/19 GCRF QR/block grant funding was granted to HEIs only if they provided three-year institutional strategies assessed as ODA-compliant. The institutionalisation of this requirement marked some distinct changes in the operationalisation of this funding stream. For example, while the initial years saw this funding used almost exclusively toward meeting FEC, this was expanded to include a greater range of activities, including capacity building and pump priming.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, robust monitoring and reporting processes were put in place which required institutions to report closely on all spend, in order to ensure ODA compliance, alongside the progress of meeting institutional objectives laid out within HEI-level strategies.

### 3.1.2 ToC and shared vision

**There is strong evidence across all levels of stakeholders to indicate the existence of a shared vision for the aims and objectives for this stream of funding.** Despite there being no ToC for this funding stream, key informants at all stakeholder groups identified three main themes running through the GCRF QR/block grant funding objectives: an adherence to ODA compliance; the need to ensure work is challenge-led and directly aligned to the benefit of Development Assistance Committee (DAC) partner countries; and a focus on the forging of collaborative relationships that could support strengthening capacity across the sector.

**Consistently, stakeholders noted the primacy of this funding’s alignment to ODA objectives.**<sup>25</sup> Of interest here is the level of moral obligation to uphold prioritisation of ODA objectives alongside well-recognised GCRF priorities, expressed across stakeholders.<sup>26</sup> Underpinning these goals, respondents commonly identified the establishment of equitable high-quality partnerships as the key mechanism for driving challenge lead work.<sup>27</sup>

*‘First of all, it’s not research funding but primarily international aid. So if you get that in your head I find that really helpful. There’s a moral obligation to make sure this is aiding an international country – this has to be the starting point. It’s got to be excellent research that does that. I think that makes it*

<sup>22</sup> These include: (i) promote challenge-led disciplinary and interdisciplinary research, including the participation of researchers who may not previously have considered the applicability of their work to development issues; (ii) strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership with excellent UK research and researchers; (iii) provide an agile response to emergencies where there is an urgent research need.

<sup>23</sup> ICAI (2017) Global Challenges Research Fund: A rapid review. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> ‘Pump priming’ refers to activities that can be used to underpin GCRF and Newton bids to other funders, including relationship building. Funding body GCRF allocations may be used to enable pump priming that will lay the ground for future ODA activity to promote economic development and welfare of developing countries. For more detail see: Funding Bodies GCRF Strategies Proposal, December 2017.

<sup>25</sup> FN3, FN14, FN15, FN18, FN24, FN40, FN43, FN55, FN58, FN59

<sup>26</sup> For example FN9, FN24, FN43

<sup>27</sup> FN8, FN24, FN30, FN33, FN47, FN57

*distinctive. It's got to be a very closely defined problem – it can't just be good partnership research. Of course, it needs elements of equitable partnership – it needs to go beyond a normal relationship between researchers across borders.'* (GCRF IO)

Equally, respondents observed the potential block funding more generally held to support the growth of capacity amongst both UK and DAC country partners (see Section 3.2).

### **Management: implementing processes to support delivery**

#### **3.1.3 Commissioning and selection of strategies to deliver against challenge**

**Developed in consultation between BEIS and the four funding bodies, HEI strategy requirements represent a collective understanding of what constitutes ODA/GCRF compliance and how this can be monitored and evaluated within a core funding model.** As noted above, the three-year strategies were introduced following the 2017 ICAI review, to ensure ODA compliance across HEI DPs. Through an iterative process between BEIS and funding bodies, requirements and guidance for HEI strategies were set out and finalised in 2018. Funding body respondents note that these structures were developed through close collaboration among all parties. Guidance is relatively consistent across each devolved nation, with some differences in the use of terminology and contextual details specific to each nation. In brief, it includes underlying principles of GCRF, guidance on understanding ODA compliance, expectations for three-year strategies, monitoring and reporting processes, and detailed instructions on how to complete a standardised strategy template.<sup>28</sup>

**In the case of each of the funding bodies, strategies were reviewed through a rigorous process to ensure ODA compliance, coherence, and alignment to GCRF priorities. This supported HEIs to move beyond ODA compliance towards attaining ODA R&I excellence.** Following the introduction of HEI strategy guidance in 2018, the three-year strategy became requisite for receiving future GCRF QR/block grant allocations. Strategy development occurred through an iterative process between HEIs and funding bodies. Critically, as explored further below, this rigorous stage of strategy development supported HEIs to move beyond ODA compliance toward attaining ODA R&I excellence. This development process was additionally supported and assessed through a centralised GCRF advisory body, noted as valuable by some of the funding body leads. Evidence indicates that these processes were similar across each funding body. The exception here is Research England, comprised of over 100 HEIs, in this case strategy assessment was outsourced to an external third party.

**Stakeholders across HEIs in all four nations voiced a strong appreciation for the flexibility in the strategy design to meet their specific institutional needs and priorities.** Evidence indicates that the HEIs with less ODA experience and in receipt of smaller allocations took a targeted approach designed to strengthen partnerships, expand networks and lay the groundwork for future funding.<sup>29</sup> HEIs with higher levels of ODA-related experience and higher levels of funding were able to take a more multidimensional approach.<sup>30</sup> These HEIs were able to leverage existing infrastructure and expertise.

*'The flexibility of a not a "one size fits all" approach made a huge difference – too often in higher education it's a "one size fit all" approach that is*

<sup>28</sup> Docs: 1, 2

<sup>29</sup> FN8, FN11, FN24, FN54

<sup>30</sup> FN 5, FN26, FN32, FN35

*designed for big multi-faculty universities – not designed for institutions such as ours. One thing GCRF allowed, because it was scaled dependent on amount of QR, it allowed an awful lot of work to happen on the ground with partners that just made a big difference to people’s lives.’ (GCRF TM)*

Other HEIs highlighted the potential this funding model held as a means to overcome institution-specific challenges and engage in the sector in ways that would have otherwise not been possible.

*‘The funding model is different to other HEIs. [...] Pump priming activities, for example, there would have been no other money for that – there are no coffers – they have a very lean business model. QR-GCRF allowed them to make a wider contribution.’ (GCRF TM)*

**While stakeholders – from both funding body and HEI team leadership – felt that the strategy process enabled an articulation of a clear vision for the processes and expected outcomes of the GCRF block grants, it was also evident that the time frame for doing so posed significant challenges.** For instance, the choice of a three-year strategy did not align well with the annual allocation of funding used in this stream (see Section 3.3 for more detail). In addition, several respondents across HEI nations and funding levels expressed difficulties in producing a strategy of such strategic weight in the time allotted for this activity.<sup>31</sup> This was true both for HEIs with less ODA experience and those well versed in ODA work.

*‘It can be quite difficult to spend a large sum of money effectively quickly. [We had] a matter of weeks to come up with something which would commit several million pounds of funding over three years.’ (GCRF TM)*

Other respondents highlighted a disconnect in GCRF priorities focused on increased input from DAC partner countries and the limited time frame allotted to design strategies. Namely, several key informants noted here that if equitable partnership was key, then processes should be designed in such a way to allow partners opportunity to participate actively in this process (see Section 3.3).<sup>32</sup>

### **3.1.4 Hands-on portfolio management (including promoting coherence)**

**At the funding body level, limited staff time was allocated to managing the funding stream, and in the case of Research England, this was not sufficient to address the needs of a very large portfolio of HEIs.** Ongoing management of the portfolio was largely confined to handling the annual allocations and annual reporting processes. In England, the process of monitoring 108 HEIs took up to 9 months, as it was largely undertaken by one staff member, on 0.6 full-time equivalent (FTE).

**The three devolved nation funding bodies (i.e. Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) were also able to offer more practical support to ensuring coherence, including towards ODA excellence, in some cases.<sup>33</sup> Devolved nations reported an existing informal network between their HEIs, used for coordination and support, which also functioned for the**

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<sup>31</sup> FN2, FN19, FN29, FN53

<sup>32</sup> FN1, FN19, FN29, FN30, FN47

<sup>33</sup> FN1, FN2, FN3, FN4

**QR/block grant.**<sup>34</sup> There were also processes in place at funding body level to promote coordination across the portfolio of HEIs within each devolved nation, with an emphasis on avoiding duplicating research. In Scotland, the distribution of Scottish GCRF activity across LMICs was monitored and shared with institutions, to encourage sharing of intelligence and to inform planning (e.g. with a view to avoiding research being overly concentrated and/or placing undue burden on particular LMICs), indicating progress towards ODA excellence.<sup>35</sup> The devolved nation funding bodies also coordinated with each other to ensure a coherent approach – and to share learning.<sup>36</sup> Research England ensured they kept in touch with other funding bodies, to try to ensure consistency, but did not have the staff capacity to support their HEIs beyond this. GCRF IOs and other professional services staff in England reported instead using the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA)<sup>37</sup> network for peer support and learning with establishing and administering the funding stream.<sup>38</sup>

*‘Especially at the beginning of the three-year strategy, it was the first time when universities were asked to do it, so there was quite a lot of confusion and questions. It was useful for me when I started [in 2018] to participate in that kind of [ARMA] meeting, because I had actually a lot of questions related how to the processes are run in institutions similar to ours.’ (GCRF IO)*

**A range of structures and processes were employed at HEI level to promote coherence across their portfolio of QR activities and to ensure their QR portfolio fitted into their broader work as an institution.** This started at strategy development stage (see Section 3.1.3). HEIs reported including a range of stakeholders from across their institutions to consult on the three-year strategy and ensure it was coherent with broader work being done.<sup>39</sup> **Mid and high-level-funded HEIs reported establishing steering or oversight committees.** These were drawn from senior research leads, research management and academics with relevant thematic expertise. This was to ensure ongoing coherence with their institutional work.<sup>40</sup> **HEIs also designated specific people within the research management office to oversee and implement processes.** Two high-funding-level HEIs used a portion of the QR allocation to hire dedicated research staff. The importance of this was recognised by PIs, as well as IOs themselves.<sup>41</sup> HEIs also designated specific people within the research management office to oversee and implement processes. Some hired new staff specifically to manage this funding stream.<sup>42</sup>

*‘That was the role of the working group – making sure our use of QR-GCRF was relevant to the strategy, and that if the strategy was evolving, our use was evolving with it.’ (GCRF IO)*

**HEIs also described a range of processes for ensuring coherence and strategic direction within their portfolio.** Specialist institutions found this came organically through their existing

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<sup>34</sup> FN1, FN2, FN3

<sup>35</sup> FN1, FN19

<sup>37</sup> ARMA is the UK’s professional association for research leadership, management and administration with a network of members from higher-education institutions, research funders and charities across the UK.

<sup>38</sup> FN9, FN20, FN22, FN23, FN24, FN25, FN26, FN43, FN51

<sup>39</sup> FN5, FN9, FN22. Docs: 13, 16

<sup>40</sup> FN9, FN11, FN12, FN19, FN20, A21, FN29, FN32.

<sup>41</sup> FN11, FN18, FN19, FN20, A21, FN23, FN35, FN40, FN43, A54, FN61

<sup>42</sup> FN2, FN20, FN22. Doc: 16

mission such as a focus on global health or arts.<sup>43</sup> Others decided to work through a particular type of activity such as pump priming or partnership building.<sup>44</sup> Others, often medium to low-funded, concentrated on developing existing partnerships or working through an existing research institute within the HEI as a means to achieve coherence.<sup>45</sup> Others used GCRF priorities such as building criteria linked to SDGs and interdisciplinarity into calls, and putting in place processes to support development of research which addressed these areas.<sup>46</sup>

### 3.1.5 Positioning for use in design and delivery

**Embedded at strategy design level, HEIs have set in place rigorous processes that ensure that activities and programmes are ODA-eligible, adhere to GCRF priorities and progress towards ODA excellence.** Across HEIs there is evidence of systems of governance for assessing applications and monitoring progress and outcomes. While there is some variability in how these have been structured, evidence from HEI-level leadership and researchers indicates that these processes are operating robustly.<sup>47</sup> Commonly, applications are subject to both a strict set of criteria and judgement by a designated panel. Strict monitoring requirements, including line-by-line spend justifications, are subject to review by appointed HEI-level governance as well as at funding body level. Detailed reporting on impact and outcomes is also subject to review.

**There is strong evidence to indicate that HEIs have prioritised the establishment of processes to ensure activities are demand-driven and positioned to generate locally relevant impact.** It is evident that HEIs have put in place criteria requiring project proposals to demonstrate a clear demand for research within the context of their work.<sup>48</sup> Some HEIs require the inclusion of impact statements outlining user engagement strategies alongside proposed channels for dissemination of research outputs.<sup>49</sup>

*‘I think what was really important was that the notion that you had to demonstrate demand for research in a local context, this was part of the application process. And to then map how that demand translates to impact at the end. Feel this is quite enlightening for many academics.*

*‘It’s not just about a brilliant idea but needing to bring into conversation the demonstrable need with communities that academics may have had no contact with before. Hence the need for partnerships. So I think it’s probably made many colleagues understand the power of partnerships in the way they probably hadn’t before.’ (GCRF TM).*

**In addition, a strong emergent theme across respondents is the value of co-production of the research process with both partners and wider stakeholders, supported by the GCRF QR/block grants rather than one dictated by the funder or ‘northern’ objectives.** This is seen as a valuable step both in ensuring objectives are locally relevant and in the establishment of effective channels for user engagement. Aligned to the aims of this funding stream, stakeholders highlight this as a key component in nurturing equitable collaboration as well as

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<sup>43</sup> FN1, FN8, FN25, FN26, FN31

<sup>44</sup> FN5, FN11, FN19

<sup>45</sup> FN14, FN15, FN24, FN29

<sup>46</sup> FN5, FN37, FN43, FN61

<sup>47</sup> FN1, FN2, FN4, FN5, FN8, FN11, FN19, FN21, FN24, FN42, FN43

<sup>48</sup> FN19, FN36, FN43

<sup>49</sup> FN23, FN36, FN38, FN41, FN47, FN61

meeting broader GCRF priorities centred on fair engagement and a wider decolonialisation of research, which creates opportunities for global South partners to define objectives.

*‘GCRF funding/BEIS funding appears not as coherent/centrally managed – but actually that means that priorities in the LMICs are being addressed. The whole GCRF/Newton review that noted GCRF wasn’t coherent/no central strategy – actually UK government having a strategy is not the purpose of this, this is not addressing UK government priority. It’s addressing a development need overseas and I think that needs to be recognised. We need to trust our partners overseas a lot more about setting priorities.*

In addition to prioritisation of these processes at applicant level, respondents note that the flexible nature of this funding stream has supported the establishment of key activities here that often fall outside the scope of other funding allocations (see Sections 3.5 and 3.6).<sup>50</sup>

### 3.1.6 Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies: Covid-19 response

**The flexibility of the funding stream gave HEIs some capacity to respond effectively to changing circumstances, particularly the Covid-19 pandemic.** Funding bodies supported this by allowing space for HEIs to adapt the activities set out in their strategy. They did this by altering project implementation during Covid, reallocating annual funding to Covid response projects, and reallocating unused travel budgets to mitigate some impacts of the ODA cuts.<sup>51</sup> Common adaptations to project implementation included switching to remote working, changing the project focus to relate to Covid where appropriate, or changing the target area or population group studied.<sup>52</sup> Others chose to allocate funding specifically to Covid response (see Section 3.6 for more detail).<sup>53</sup>

**Funding bodies provided no-cost extensions, and altered reporting deadlines to try to ensure the processes in place remained reasonable in the context of the pandemic and of the cuts.**<sup>54</sup> **However, a lack of timeliness in offering this extension in reporting deadlines created some challenges for HEIs, shortening an already tight time frame.**<sup>55</sup> In addition, there was no possibility of extending the deadline for the budget to be spent – July 2021 remained the cut-off point at which any underspend would have to be repaid. This limited HEIs’ ability to respond to Covid and cuts.<sup>56</sup> In addition, there was a significant delay to the announcement of the final year allocation amounts – HEIs received this only in early February. Most HEIs mitigated by waiting, and then faced challenges in deploying resources effectively. One reported estimating the amount they expected, based on the formula and previous years’ experience, and starting work anyway. This left them with an overspend to absorb when the actual allocation was lower than they expected.

### 3.1.7 Risks addressed and mitigated

**Early on, particularly following the ICAI review, funding body stakeholders identified that the QR/block grant nature of the funding stream would make it difficult to understand whether**

<sup>50</sup> FN4, FN11, FN26, FN32, FN33

<sup>51</sup> FN4, FN14, FN16–17, FN21, FN19, FN22, FN36, FN38

<sup>52</sup> FN11, FN12, FN42, FN43, FN53, A54, FN56, FN61. FN20, FN55. Doc: 4

<sup>53</sup> FN1, FN12, FN18. Doc: 4

<sup>54</sup> FN1, FN21, FN47, FN55

<sup>55</sup> FN4, FN39, FN43

<sup>56</sup> FN4, FN20, FN39, FN58, FN59

**money was being used effectively, and to trace impacts.** The introduction of the three-year strategy helped funding bodies to clarify with HEIs how the money could be spent appropriately. Ensuring HEIs had a clear view of BEIS requirements also helped in this process.<sup>57</sup> One funding body gave this as the reason for establishing detailed reporting requirements (i.e. at activity level) to help track impacts in a granular way.

**HEIs identified risks associated with working in DAC list countries, linked to financial and administrative processes supporting research grants. GCRF IOs and PIs reported a range of additional or adapted/reinforced processes to mitigate these risks.** UK HEIs perceived a lack of capacity in some LMIC institutions for research and financial management, particularly in the case of unfamiliar partner organisations and institutions.<sup>58</sup> Mitigating measures included enhanced or more thorough due diligence,<sup>59</sup> use of risk registers,<sup>60</sup> investing in dedicated research management staff with expertise in international partnerships,<sup>61</sup> and adaptation of the funding mechanisms to disburse grants to LMIC partner HEIs. However, it is worth noting here that these measures also created challenges for HEIs (see Sections 3.3 and 3.5 for more detail).

*‘There were some concerns – but we worked with them, and worked out a payment schedule to minimise risk. There haven’t been any issues. [HEI]’s preferred approach is to pay retrospectively – but for smaller ones with less cash flow, we paid upfront. We would always process close financial controls – make sure finances weren’t being mismanaged.’ (GCRF PI)*

**GCRF IOs and PIs also identified risks specifically associated with conducting research in fragile or conflict-affected contexts and with vulnerable groups.** Enhanced ethics approval processes, safeguarding procedures and ‘do no harm’ analyses were introduced as mitigations.<sup>62</sup> Safeguarding processes were not a requirement for the QR funding until the introduction of the strategy in 2018. Funding bodies tried to ensure they were in place by making them a special condition of the grant. Two HEIs mentioned that working with overseas partners to assess and mitigate these risks was a core component of their research in volatile countries. PIs ensured there was enough flexibility to respond to changing circumstances, and adapted the projects accordingly (such as after the coup in Myanmar in 2021).<sup>63</sup>

### 3.1.8 M&E and regular reporting

**The reporting processes put in place for the QR/block grant gathered a lot of detail at activity level, and allowed GCRF IOs at HEI level to understand the progress and achievements projects had made.**<sup>64</sup> Some felt reporting to be onerous, in particular the detailed spreadsheet, but most understood this was necessary because of the ODA component.<sup>65</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Section 3.3.2 below. Most HEIs were able to use or adapt existing systems to facilitate the process.<sup>66</sup> A few GCRF IOs and PIs felt that

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<sup>57</sup> FN2, FN3

<sup>58</sup> FN5, FN30

<sup>59</sup> FN1, FN2, FN3, FN5, FN16-17, FN24, FN36, FN44. Doc: 11

<sup>60</sup> FN8, FN31, FN55. Docs: 80, 46, 59

<sup>61</sup> Docs: 17, 59, 11

<sup>62</sup> FN12, FN24, FN53, FN57. Docs: 59, 26

<sup>63</sup> FN44, FN53, FN60

<sup>64</sup> FN19, FN21, FN23, FN29, FN36, FN43, FN44, FN54, FN56, FN61

<sup>65</sup> FN8, FN11

<sup>66</sup> FN5, FN8, FN14, FN21, FN24, FN30, FN36

expectations were too high, especially at the beginning, in terms of the impact that could be made in a project with only a 5–6-month implementation period.<sup>67</sup>

*‘There was some tension because of the timelines involved. There were yearly allocations, and you have to report on impact. [...] Ultimate impact might be very significant – but in a year?’ (GCRF IO)*

**Although useful at HEI level, the M&E processes differed somewhat in each of the four nations. Consequently, the M&E does not readily support analysis at the funding stream level.** HEIs and funding bodies have all used different ways to categorise types of activity, challenge areas and SDGs. This makes it a challenge to track and understand the overall spend. At funding body level, the limited staff time available to analyse the activity-level data made producing meaningful consolidated reporting difficult, particularly for the larger portfolios. In particular, it is not completely clear what aspects of projects are funded by FEC. Reporting shows the amounts and proportion funded by QR and by other sources; however, it is not clear what aspects of the activity/project FEC contributed towards. This makes it difficult to understand the funding stream’s contribution to outcomes and impacts as well as the impact of funding cuts.

### ***GCRF development considerations: promoting fairness, inclusiveness and gender responsiveness***

#### **3.1.9 Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement**

**The principles of fair and equitable partnerships are evident in HEI strategies and supported with targeted programming.** Across HEIs, at all stakeholder groups including LMIC partners, the establishment of equitable partnerships was highlighted as a key aim. In ensuring this, applicants are required at proposal level to outline partner engagement plans, which are then assessed as a key component for eligibility of funding.<sup>68</sup>

*‘We were very much keeping in mind the extent to which it is an equal partnership, how far does it involve building up capacity of local actors. Always a key consideration – how much local partners had been involved in identifying challenges. Hesitant on projects that seemed overly colonial or imparting knowledge.’ (GCRF TM)*

HEIs delivered targeted capacity support to ensure that potential applicants held an accurate understanding of the aims of GCRF funding, such as the principles of equitable partnerships (i.e. ODA excellence) and ODA compliance. One example of targeted support is the **‘Ethical research with Low/Middle-Income Countries Toolkit’**<sup>69</sup> created by the University of Edinburgh. Recognising the unique challenges inherent in forging partnerships within this sector, this toolkit was designed to help researchers think about ethical issues that can exist throughout the life cycle of a global project.

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<sup>67</sup> FN25, FN26, FN29

<sup>68</sup> FN11, FN23, FN36, FN41

<sup>69</sup> GenderEd (2020) ‘Applying Gender Sensitive Situational Analysis to Your Project: Five Steps’. <https://www.gender.ed.ac.uk/gender-sensitive-research/gssa-fivesteps/>

**Stakeholders across all levels from each country identified the GCRF QR/block grant funding as distinct and valuable in supporting the establishment of equitable ways of working.**

Central to the development of equitable ways of working is the ability of LMIC partners to co-lead projects. In addition, the flexibility this stream provides award holders to work outside the scope of 'normal' funding to deliver targeted activities to both forge and nurture productive relationships.

*'The ability to create activities and perform activities that grants do not usually provide the time or the space to create, such as early, early exploratory research that would happen pre-grant. Collaboration to be built up, and the trust to be built up between UK partners and overseas partners again in a kind of programme phase again, you don't usually get the time and space for in grant funding.'* (GCRF Lead)

Respondents note that the execution of pump priming activities, including travel, were key to supporting researchers gain an understanding of contextual complexities and establishing levels of trust among partners.<sup>70</sup> In support of deepening existing partnerships, respondents highlight the benefits this flexible funding has provided in enabling researchers to pivot in response to partner needs.<sup>71</sup> In the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the flexibility to change course has been especially valuable (see Section 3.1.6).

**However, there were also evidence of structural challenges that hindered the development of new collaborative partnerships.** A common sentiment across stakeholders is the lack of sufficient time available at application stage and set-up of projects to engage in co-production processes as well as the amount of due diligence required. In addition, informants shared that despite their best attempts to forge an equitable pathway, it is not possible to ignore the fact that UK partners are ultimately the gatekeepers holding the purse (see Section 3.3.3 for more detail on fairness for partners).

### 3.1.10 Gender responsiveness and social inclusion addressed in design and delivery

**Evidence indicates that GCRF priorities, including gender responsiveness, poverty and social inclusion, are embedded and well-recognised components of this funding stream.**<sup>72</sup> Evidence shows that HEIs have woven GCRF priorities into their strategies alongside a system of governance for assessing applications and monitoring processes and outcomes to ensure both strict ODA eligibility and attention to GCRF priorities.<sup>73</sup> Ensuring that these priorities are firmly incorporated within projects, applicants are required to provide an outline of how their work will address these issues at design stage. Additionally, since 2019, projects must also report on their approach to gender responsiveness through the provision of Gender and Equality statements with each case study.

**HEIs have invested in the development of capacity building structures to support researchers to understand and effectively engage with these priorities. There is some evidence to indicate that this focus has led to broader institutional shifts.** There is a shared recognition that, while the incorporation of GCRF priorities is very much embedded into the ethos of many social science research endeavours, researchers based in other natural sciences are not as adept at navigating these issues. To support engagement, HEIs have developed a variety of

<sup>70</sup> FN12, FN29, FN36, FN38, FN43, FN44, FN69

<sup>71</sup> FN1, FN9, FN14, FN26, FN30, FN32, FN57

<sup>72</sup> FN15, FN30, FN43, FN44, FN53, FN61

<sup>73</sup> FN3, FN5, FN11, FN12, FN25, FN36, FN41, FN54

capacity building structures, including workshops and toolkits. For example, HEIs with lower levels of funding were able to offer workshops at proposal level advising applicants on how they can weave these priorities into project design. Higher-funded HEIs were often able to fund dedicated faculty roles to organise programming that could support researchers here. A key example of targeted support is the work done by Edinburgh University on the development of their '**Gender Toolkit**', created in response to a perceived lack of capacity on the part of researchers to engage in gender issues.<sup>74</sup> One key informant credits this work as influencing a university-wide shift.

*'Our lit review realised there wasn't a specific strand in research partnerships with LMIC about gender. A lot of work with development projects and gender, but not in research. Quite clear that researchers here were gender blind, so we really think we've been able to change perceptions on the importance of any kind of development project/work with LMICs addressing gender led by local partners at the start. I think there's been a culture change... which has been good.'* (GCRF IO)

**Evidence indicates that GCRF priorities, including GESIP, are being addressed at project design, during activities, and at dissemination.** Evidence gathered from both case studies and informant interviews indicates that both UK and LMIC researchers have been reflective about how GCRF priorities are incorporated across research questions, methods and processes. PIs and co-PIs, with social development backgrounds, noted that attention to these priorities was part of their overall research ethos and that these considerations were not extra tasks but, rather, were priorities inherent in everything they do.<sup>75</sup>

*'So, even in our mapping exercise we were looking at how to balance this. Do we have people with disabilities in our meetings, what does gender look like in terms of gender equity? Aiming to have balanced group especially within the validation workshops. With the Rejuvenate conversation, things inclusive – had interpreter, sign language translator. With case studies – always mindful of reaching most marginalised/unreachable in the identification of cases.'* (GCRF co-PI)

Similarly, researchers focused within natural science fields were also able to outline how gender was considered across the life cycle of the project.

### 3.2 EQ 2: To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?

#### Box 4. EQ 2 summary

There is a shared recognition across stakeholders of the existence of capacity gaps in effectively supporting broader GCRF research, alongside a recognition of the potential this funding has to

<sup>74</sup> GenderEd (2020) 'Applying Gender Sensitive Situational Analysis to Your Project: Five Steps'. <https://www.gender.ed.ac.uk/gender-sensitive-research/gssa-fivesteps/>

<sup>75</sup> FN16, FN25, FN38, FN41, FN47

bridge these gaps. Structures and processes to strengthen R&I capacity have taken place at three levels – individual, institutional and across institutions:

At the individual level, the primary beneficiaries were UK early career researchers (ECRs), who were able to gain hands-on experience and widen their networks. Individual LMIC partners had opportunities to strengthen technical research skills with more limited evidence of opportunities for strengthening their capacity to engage in the broader funding ecosystem.

At the institutional level, UK HEIs used this experience to strengthen capacity and infrastructure for managing ODA grants. Evidence suggests that capacity development implemented within LMICs at the institutional level has been less comprehensive than that within UK HEIs often focused at the individual researcher level.

Across institutions, there is strong evidence that UK universities have utilised this stream of funding as an effective mechanism to collaborate and share learning. While there is concrete evidence to support an understanding of capacity strengthening across HEIs in the UK, there is less evidence for how this is happening within LMICs.

In terms of fairness considerations for capacity building, evidence suggests there is a potential for investments to perpetuate an advantage to developing countries or organisations that already have credible institutions rather than directing investment toward poorer partners where capacity building may be most needed.

EQ 2 is focused on the structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and within the UK. Our approach to answering EQ 2 is to explore the structures and processes in place, using a set of criteria relevant to the funding stream and, where applicable, looking at the approach at the individual level, within and across institutions, to document and discuss our findings. These are provided below.

### 3.2.1 Clear strategy for how capacity development contributes to the desired outcomes

**There is a shared recognition across stakeholders of the existence of capacity gaps in effectively supporting broader GCRF research, alongside a recognition of the potential this funding has to bridge these gaps.** Within UK HEIs, respondents commonly noted there was still much to be learned in the development of both researcher capacity and the institutional infrastructure needed to work effectively with LMIC partners. Conversely, on the side of LMIC partners, a lack of administrative support and processes needed to execute due diligence were commonly recognised areas in need of strengthening. Critically, as outlined in Section 3.3.2, across both LMIC and UK stakeholders this funding stream itself is identified as a valuable mechanism in which to build capacity and gain this necessary learning.

#### *Approach at the individual level*

**The primary beneficiaries of capacity development within this funding stream were UK ECRs who, through engagement with pump priming projects, were able to gain hands-on experience and widen their networks in order to position themselves for future funding.**

Capacity development of ECRs was a central focus for UK HEIs across each of the four nations. This support was envisioned as a clear pathway both to augment the skill set of individual researchers to engage here and to grow a critical mass of researchers who could effectively navigate and lead with expertise within their individual institutions.<sup>76</sup> Programmes targeting ECRs were set up in different ways across UK HEIs, providing opportunities for collaboration,

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<sup>76</sup> FN22, FN23, FN33, FN40, FN61

networking and training, and support for future funding. Smaller HEIs with lower levels of funding channelled support through internally run workshop events and through the direct support of internal offices. Larger, higher-funded HEIs were often able to offer a more extensive array of workshops and events organised through dedicated GCRF faculty personnel and supported by targeted funding streams.

**There is strong evidence that individual LMIC partners had opportunities to strengthen technical research skills. However, evidence is more limited regarding opportunities for strengthening their capacity to engage in the broader funding ecosystem.** Capacity development in cooperation with LMIC partners is recognised as a core component of this funding stream. There was some variability in how capacity development took place. UK HEIs in receipt of larger amounts of funding were able to set up travel, fellowship and scholarship schemes whereby LMIC researchers were invited to UK HEIs to work and train. There is evidence across funding levels that technical capacity development for LMIC partners often took place on a case-by-case basis, executed at individual project level. Common across each funding level was the importance of the co-identification of capacity needs with LMIC partners.

*‘From our perspective, we could be quite blind to requirements for partners. So, need to develop this dialogue. [...] In terms of understanding needs, there was not really a framework in which to work from – very much a case-by-case basis. A lot was done through mobility – bringing people into UK and, equally, us going in-country to really get that dialogue going.’ (GCRF TM)*

Respondents highlighted the importance of the establishment of genuine equitable working research partnerships where needs could be co-identified at context level.<sup>77</sup> In terms of supporting LMIC researcher capacity to engage in the broader funding ecosystem, evidence suggests that in cases where co-production was embedded across the life cycle of projects, there was a greater opportunity for broader learning. This can be seen in cases where PIs and co-PIs worked together to co-develop proposals through to co-authorship and co-established channels for engagement with users.<sup>78</sup>

#### ***At the institutional level***

**UK HEIs used this experience to strengthen capacity and infrastructure for managing ODA grants including GCRF project-based funding allocated by DPs.** Respondents recognised a capacity gap for effectively executing development research with LMIC partners. Engagement with GCRF QR/block grant funding created an opportunity for UK HEIs to develop some of the processes and infrastructure needed, especially those centred on financial and administrative capabilities.

*‘Developing GCRF project is more complex than other projects – and we were fundamentally without capacities. There is not a snowball’s chance in hell that we would be able to build on the themes without QR. We needed dedicated capacity to generate projects and ideas. We succeeded in that’ (GCRF IO)*

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<sup>77</sup> FN18, FN36, FN38, FN41, FN47, FN57

<sup>78</sup> FN47, FN50, FN55

In terms of supporting researcher capacity to engage, to varying degrees UK HEIs have invested in the development of support structures within their institutions to expand the pool of researchers who can engage effectively. While HEIs in receipt of more modest allocations tended to channel support through existing internal structures, those with larger allocations were able to establish GCRF offices or hubs staffed with individuals dedicated to supporting delivery and overseeing capacity building initiatives. Respondents viewed this support as a valuable help in learning how to navigate uncharted territory.

*‘The application process – there was a central team looking after application processes, which was really good. They had somebody specific on GCRF with a background in working with ODA areas – we had D. who really understood challenges and barriers of the unique interactions we needed with these projects. [D] had a good understanding that it’s not like a typical pump priming, there are additional challenges – working in new environments, building new connections where there isn’t a clear infrastructure for research or finance.’ (GCRF PI)*

**Evidence suggests that capacity development implemented within LMICs at the institutional level has been less comprehensive than that within UK HEIs often focused at the individual researcher level.** There is a general consensus across respondents for space to develop capacity at the institutional LMIC level. Often, LMIC partners are seen as less equipped to navigate administrative processes related to due diligence and procurement when interacting with UK partners. However, there is limited evidence that targeted support to the development of processes and infrastructure at LMIC institutional level has occurred. Conversations with key informants suggest that capacity strengthening is more often focused at the individual researcher level, with institutional strengthening often centred on the provision of technical support and supplies.

#### *Across institutions*

**There is strong evidence that UK universities have utilised this funding stream as an effective mechanism to collaborate and share learning.** Given that resources for research funding are limited, this shift from an ethos of competition to collaboration was welcomed as a distinct feature of the GCRF QR/Block grant across key informants.

*‘Once GCRF came along, universities had an incentive to collaborate – they had earmarked money; they were not in competition for it. It’s been one of my great frustrations – that they haven’t worked together better prior to GCRF, despite the fact that there have been north-east HEIs active in the development research space. QR offered the opportunity to kick on from that.’ (GCRF PI)*

Funding body leads recognise the opportunity for the development of good practices for GCRF to influence the broader research sector, and have supported avenues for GCRF managers, team members and researchers to share practice and intelligence. Overall, stakeholders recognise this learning as valuable, and express appreciation for the community of practice that has developed.

*‘In terms of the impact of the [the funding stream] I would say the main unique impact has been this creation of ODA research expertise and a*

*community of practice and expertise, within not just our institutions but across the UK, who will talk to each other, all share best practice and all, you know, facilitate and, you know, a great deal of added impacts for ODA research activities across the UK.’ (GCRF Lead)*

**While there is concrete evidence to support an understanding of capacity strengthening across HEIs in the UK, there is less evidence for how this is happening within LMICs.** There are incidental examples of networking and collaborations across LMIC HEIs, but evidence that would suggest a more targeted approach has not been uncovered.

### 3.2.2 Fairness considerations in capacity development

**Evidence suggests the potential for investments to perpetuate an advantage to developing countries or organisations that already have credible institutions rather than directing investment toward poorer partners where capacity building may be most needed.**<sup>79</sup> This is consistent with our finding from Stage 1a that identifies a tension between the principle of ‘research excellence’ and the objective of ‘ODA research excellence’, including that of capacity building. In the case of GCRF QR/block grants, HEIs in possession of smaller allocations have cited the need to manage risk and the existence of additional time and cost as disincentives to forging collaborations with new partners. In the case of HEIs with larger allocations, lack of sufficient time for project set-up that would allow co-development of research objectives and design has been cited as a key barrier to the forging of meaningful new partnerships.

While this study has been able to find evidence indicating that a wide range of quality capacity strengthening activities are occurring within the UK research ecosystem and with LMIC partners, further questions remain re to what degree these barriers are impacting the ability of the GCRF QR/block grant funding stream to either mitigate wider inequalities, or even whether they are contributing to such inequalities.

## 3.3 EQ 3: To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented, are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?

### Box 5. EQ 3 summary

Tight timelines for the annual funding cycle and delays to confirming annual allocations caused uncertainty and constrained HEIs in terms of the scope and ambition of their activities. Where HEIs were selective about the types of projects they funded, they were still able to direct the funding efficiently, largely through pump priming and FEC work.

There was broad agreement that the funding was proportionate and manageable in terms of size, and that it was appropriate to achieving the three-year strategy objectives. HEIs with smaller allocations sometimes found the administrative burden of reporting too great for the amount of funding.

Despite feeling that the QR/block grant stream emphasised equity more effectively than previous projects, respondents questioned the fairness of some funding mechanisms, especially the use of a reimbursement model for LMIC partners. Another issue raised as a barrier to fairness was the

<sup>79</sup> ICAI (2017) Global Challenges Research Fund: A rapid review. <https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-GCRF-Review.pdf>

administrative burden placed on LMIC partner institutions in meeting UK due diligence and financial requirements.

EQ 3 is focused on the extent to which processes to support challenge-led research are efficiently implemented and whether they are proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders. Our approach to answering EQ 3 is to explore how processes were implemented, using a set of criteria relevant to the investment to document and discuss our findings. These are provided below.

### 3.3.1 Efficiency and timeliness of processes

**At design stage, HEIs in all four nations felt that there were very tight timelines for development and submission of the three-year strategy and for annual decisions about spending the allocations.** GCRF IOs and PIs felt that more time would have allowed for more reflection and more strategic spending.<sup>80</sup> This was a particular challenge in HEIs which had not previously worked much with DAC list countries. Administrative and financial systems needed to be established. This took time and delayed projects further.

*‘The university had not had experience of making advance payments in the global South, so there were quite a lot of processes to go through to get permission for this. Again, that meant the timescales were pushed back. But that has been hugely beneficial for GCRF projects that we have running now – they would not have been achievable at all had we not laid this groundwork with the QR-GCRF funding. Now we have processes in place, and it means we can do GCRF projects.’ (GCRF IO)*

**There is also strong evidence across all four nations that the timing of the annual funding cycle was an ongoing challenge. HEIs reported a lot of uncertainty caused by waiting for yearly allocations to be confirmed.** This meant that decisions about how to utilise the funding each year were often made very quickly, limiting how strategic HEIs could be in utilising their allocation;<sup>81</sup> this particularly affected smaller HEIs, with less cash flow, who were more risk-averse in beginning projects before their annual allocation was confirmed.<sup>82</sup> Some larger HEIs, with higher overall institutional cash flow, chose to underwrite the cost of activities they wanted to plan over more than one year.

**The short timeline from allocation to spending left only five or six months for project implementation. This restricted project implementation time significantly and reduced the scope of what could be achieved.** This also had an impact on what type of activities could reasonably be implemented and which uses of funds HEIs found to be efficient – largely FEC, pump priming or pilot study work, some kinds of capacity building, and building on existing partnerships.<sup>83</sup>

*‘Well, obviously if we had known from the outset that we would definitely have three years and there weren’t financial year cliff edges we could have [been] more productive with the way we used the money.’ (GCRF TM)*

<sup>80</sup> FN16, FN17, FN19, FN20, FN29, FN30, FN40

<sup>81</sup> FN1, FN19, FN20, FN21, FN39, FN42, FN43, FN53

<sup>82</sup> FN1, FN20, FN25, FN26, FN30

<sup>83</sup> FN22, FN23, FN24, FN30, FN31, FN33, FN40, FN42, FN43, FN44, FN48, FN50, FN53, FN56, FN61

**The requirement that funds be spent in the year in which they were allocated was identified as an additional challenge by HEIs.** They reported that the lack of flexibility was an issue when working in volatile or unpredictable contexts, when delays to research are common. This also made responding to Covid-related delays more difficult.<sup>84</sup> In some cases, this was mitigated by no-cost extensions; in others, even the extension did not allow sufficient time to ensure that funds were spent.<sup>85</sup>

**Despite these constraints, evidence shows that HEIs found ways to deploy their allocations efficiently, including through pump priming and FEC.** There were several successful examples of using the allocation for pump priming, which allowed HEIs to prepare, and successfully bid, for larger research grants. HEIs also reported that their work on the larger grant was then more targeted and efficient because they had taken time over the preparatory phase.<sup>86</sup> Using the funding for FEC allowed them to implement larger grants more smoothly and efficiently, especially as GCRF grants are seen as having a greater administrative burden (ODA compliance). Working through existing partnerships and research institutes was reported as an efficient use of funds by HEIs on medium and lower levels of QR funding.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.3.2 Proportionality

**GCRF IOs, UK PIs and co-PIs from HEIs at all funding levels agreed that the funding was broadly proportionate and manageable in terms of size, and that it was about the right amount over three years for what they had included in their strategies.** Stakeholders broadly understood and accepted that ODA funding requires additional scrutiny.<sup>88</sup>

*'I think it was proportionate – it's aid money so we were always conscious that it requires extra scrutiny, certainly need to make sure ODA compliance is always maintained. I thought the process of securing funding was proportionate, a sensible process.'* (GCRF IO)

**Opinions differed on the extent to which the administrative requirements were proportionate to the size of investment. This depended somewhat on the size of the allocation – where allocations were smaller than HEIs usually dealt with, they tended to find the administrative burden disproportionate.** High-funded institutions tended to find that the additional administrative burden was necessary, due to the ODA component, and were able to manage it fairly effectively.<sup>89</sup> Informants from lower-funded HEIs in England also tended to find the administrative burden proportionate.<sup>90</sup> Lower-funded HEIs in Scotland reported finding the administrative burden too great for the size of allocation received, as did one medium-funded HEI in England.<sup>91</sup> Due diligence processes, however, were mentioned by stakeholders as particularly time-consuming, and not always effective. This is discussed in more detail below in Section 3.5.1.

<sup>84</sup> FN31, FN53. Doc: 47

<sup>85</sup> FN38, FN50, FN53, FN61. Doc: 2

<sup>86</sup> FN30, FN33, FN44, FN48

<sup>87</sup> FN8, FN12, FN29, FN30, FN31, FN33, FN48, FN54

<sup>88</sup> FN2, FN3, FN5, FN9, FN30, FN31, FN32, FN37, FN39, FN45, FN48, FN49, FN50, FN54, FN57, FN61. Doc: 11

<sup>89</sup> FN12, FN19, FN36, FN32, FN41, FN61

<sup>90</sup> FN5, FN14, FN39, A54

<sup>91</sup> FN1, FN15, FN18, FN43

*'It was a bit of a sledgehammer to crack a walnut. So if we were sending £6k to do some fieldwork overseas, we had to get them to sign a giant contract.'* (GCRF IO)

### 3.3.3 Fairness for partners

**One area where respondents questioned fairness was in terms of the mechanisms used by HEIs to disburse funds to overseas partners.** UK PIs and GCRF IOs pointed out that having UK HEIs as the budget holder gives them disproportionate power over the partnership – and that this does not completely align with equitable partnership principles.<sup>92</sup>

*'If GCRF were driven purely based on principles of equity and fairness with partners in LMIC, they should allow them to apply directly for these funds. If you properly follow that logic, that's what you would do. I can understand there were other drivers, and issues around capacity to absorb and spend and manage funding. They probably thought UK institutions had more capacity.'* (GCRF PI)

**Another specific issue with funding was using a reimbursement model. Some HEIs asked partners to cover research and staffing costs upfront before being reimbursed.** This was a significant problem for low-resource institutions. Some HEIs managed to address this over the course of the three years; others did not. PIs in Scotland reported that they had to work hard to get HEI professional services staff to change their processes to address this issue.<sup>93</sup>

**Another issue raised as a barrier to fairness was the administrative burden placed on LMIC partner institutions in meeting UK due diligence and financial requirements.** Smaller institutions and organisations with less experience of working with UK or international funders found it especially challenging.<sup>94</sup> One GCRF IO also highlighted that this affected which LMIC partners were able to collaborate in applying for grants and which partners their UK HEI would choose to work with, i.e. the HEI worked disproportionately with more experienced, prestigious institutions in middle-income countries.

*'In hindsight, I know some universities have managed to make small amounts available to partners overseas for overheads. I think this would have helped to make it more fair. They were not aware of the significant administrative burden with these grants, so it would have been nice to be able to compensate partners for that.'* (GCRF IO)

**Two Scottish stakeholders highlighted the cuts as an equity issue – in that jobs had been promised, and projects started, and then these were removed** (see Section 3.4.3). LMIC institutions and organisations had no power over this process, and were not consulted.<sup>95</sup>

**Nonetheless, some aspects of the QR stream were found to be fair for LMIC partners. Both UK and LMIC stakeholders felt the QR/block grant stream emphasised equity more effectively than other projects they had experienced.** They felt that partnerships were more

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<sup>92</sup> FN19, FN25, FN26, FN30, FN32, FN47

<sup>93</sup> FN36, FN37, FN43, FN47, FN53

<sup>94</sup> FN5, FN23, FN39, FN40, FN43, FN61

<sup>95</sup> FN14, FN20

balanced and equitable.<sup>96</sup> They also emphasised that this stream had funded activity in LMICs that would not otherwise be funded – and went beyond the ‘usual suspects’.<sup>97</sup> Two particularly good examples were shared of HEIs working to make their financial processes as transparent as possible. One UK PI reported that their HEI specifically introduced a model at project level to ensure funding was fair, transparent and split fairly between the UK and their LMIC partner. The budget, milestones, and other components were set up with the LMIC partner’s input. One HEI had chosen to ringfence 50% of funding, which had to be spent in partner countries.

### 3.4 EQ 4: To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes/impacts, and what evidence exists of these?

- the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?

#### Box 6. EQ 4 summary

There is strong evidence of achievements at the ‘results’ level of the GCRF’s ToC, as well as progress towards ‘shorter-term outcomes’.

Funding through GCRF QR/block grants has led to the development of relationships between UK-based HEIs and those in LMICs, as well as co-teaching and collaborative research activities. It has also contributed to enhanced capabilities for HEI stakeholders in the UK and partner countries. A key success of this funding stream is in the way in which it has broadened the pool of researchers and institutions, particularly those who have not worked within ODA or who saw their work as relevant to development issues. The results also illustrate the way in which the QR/block grants have complemented project-based grants allocated by DPs.

The funding cuts have had a devastating impact on expected results and outcomes. In many cases, projects were either cancelled or reduced in scope. HEI stakeholders felt that the work was cut in infancy or its potential legacy or impact was jeopardised. Damage to relationships and reputation, both resulting from the cuts, was cited by a wide range of stakeholders. However, there is evidence of HEIs working in ways to shield their partners from the impact of the cuts.

EQ 4 explores the extent to which the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grants have met the desired results and outcomes/impacts. This section also looks at the impact of the funding cuts on the outcomes of the investment.

Before doing so, it is worth noting that it is difficult to analyse the funding stream as a whole, for several reasons: there is no overarching ToC for the funding stream, and individual HEIs report against their own strategic objectives. In addition, funding bodies have used different reporting templates and different ways of categorising information. Moreover, the sheer volume of activities funded by GCRF QR/block funding means that it is not possible to review and analyse all activities.

In order to answer this question, we mapped case studies submitted by HEIs and KIIs against GCRF’s ToC, triangulating them where possible. We focused on the final year to ensure that the data was the most current. Unfortunately, not all reporting for the final year (2020–21) was available at the time of the analysis, which places some limitations on our findings.

<sup>96</sup> FN33, FN37, FN44, FN48. Doc: 7

<sup>97</sup> FN8, FN31, FN45

Nonetheless, there is strong evidence to show that HEIs have made progress towards desired results and early outcomes.

### 3.4.1 Results and outcomes against GCRF's ToC; examples of how these have been met; and expected progress.

**There is strong evidence of achievements at the 'results' level of the GCRF's ToC.**<sup>98</sup> This is to be expected from an investment that has completed less than five years, particularly where stakeholders were starting from the beginning, e.g. pump priming relationships. Some examples are provided below:

- Results: Sustainable global R&I partnerships established across geographies and disciplines.**<sup>99</sup> There is evidence that funding through GCRF QR/block grants has led to the development of relationships between UK-based HEIs and those in LMICs, as well as co-teaching and collaborative research activities. There is also evidence of partnerships established regionally, both in the UK and in LMIC contexts. For example, one HEI reported working with regional organisations such as the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) as part of their strategy post-GCRF. In the UK, an example is the formation of the north-east cross-university hub for global challenges research. While this was not solely due to the block grants, the funding stream has complemented project-based funding to contribute to building this community:

*'It's a really exciting result of QR – we were already a small group doing well, doing good research. QR enabled us to build on that – and massively expanded [the] staffing base in that area.'* (GCRF PI)

- Results: Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (skills and infrastructure) for R&I established in the UK, partner countries and regions.**<sup>100</sup> There is strong evidence that the QR/block grants have contributed to enhanced capabilities for HEI stakeholders in the UK and partner countries. This often served to complement or strengthen the capacity gaps required to deliver GCRF project-based funding (see more in EQ 2). **A key success of this funding stream is its ability to broaden the participation of new actors,**<sup>101</sup> **particularly those who have not worked within ODA or who did not see their work as relevant to a development issues** (a key GCRF objective).<sup>102</sup> For example, a GCRF TM provided examples of their Social Work colleagues who had only worked in Scotland prior to the block grants. In addition, a GCRF IO from an HEI (in receipt of high-level funding) said that they had tracked around 50 people working in LMIC countries and there were now around 400.

*'It opened the eyes of colleagues to how their research has applications in global South – gave them a sense of additionality – it did more than I thought it was going to. For example, engineering solutions in the Sahel – the core technical work is [the] same but use and applications are different.'*

<sup>98</sup> Barr, J. et al. (2018) GCRF Evaluation Foundation Stage. [https://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GCRF\\_Evaluation\\_Foundation\\_Stage\\_Final\\_Report\\_compressed-1-1.pdf](https://www.itad.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/GCRF_Evaluation_Foundation_Stage_Final_Report_compressed-1-1.pdf)

<sup>99</sup> FN11, FN15, FN16, FN17, FN19, FN22, FN23, FN24, FN25, FN 26, FN29, FN32, FN33, FN37, FN43, FN44, FN49, FN61

<sup>100</sup> FN1, FN11, FN12, FN15, FN18, FN19, FN20, FN21, FN24, FN25, FN26, FN29, FN30, FN32, FN33, FN37, FN40, FN47, FN56, FN58, FN59

<sup>101</sup> FN9, FN11, FN12, FN15, FN19, FN32, FN58, FN59

<sup>102</sup> BEIS (2017) UK Strategy for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF).

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/623825/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623825/global-challenges-research-fund-gcrf-strategy.pdf)

*More people see the relevance of their work [to development challenges] – that can drive their own international agenda – it's a virtuous circle' (GCRF TM)*

- **Results: High-quality interdisciplinary research and cross-sectoral innovation provides new insights and knowledge for translation into policies, practices, products and services.**<sup>103</sup> There is a high volume of papers and publications, as evidenced by informant interviews and document reviews, within the three years of funding. This is consistent with a key finding from Stage 1a.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.4.2 Expected results

**There is also evidence that the investment is making progress towards 'shorter-term outcomes', with evidence of 'R&I into use' on a number of projects.** There is evidence of projects such as the following: 'Mobilising stakeholder networks across public, business and civil society stakeholders and local communities' (*GCRF ToC – R&I into use*); 'Demonstration and testing of innovations in technologies, products and services tested to proof-of-concept, and/or convincing evidence of effectiveness, and positioned for scaling in LMICs' (*GCRF ToC – R&I into use*), 'Collaborative problem-solving and co-production of evidence-based policy applications' (*GCRF ToC – R&I into use*). However, it is important to note that findings, at the short-term outcome level, will need to be verified by external stakeholders, such as beneficiaries or decision makers. As this was outside the scope of the process evaluation, these cases are illustrative of progress made and of expected results. The issue, as mentioned earlier, is the challenge to analyse the achievements across the four nations, due to the volume of activities and differences in reporting methods.

### 3.4.3 Impact of and adaptation to funding cuts

**The funding cuts have had a devastating impact on expected results and outcomes. In many cases, projects were either cancelled or reduced in scope.**<sup>105</sup> HEI stakeholders felt that the work was cut in infancy or, where it had progressed further, its potential legacy or impact was jeopardised.<sup>106</sup> The funding stream was cut at the end of the three-year strategy period, with no funding made available after 2020–21. Communications from BEIS stating its position on the ODA Settlement cited the potential limited research impact of the funding stream.<sup>107</sup> Some projects had only started in 2018 with the development of the strategy, and the potential of projects had not been realised when the cuts were announced. One GCRF IO said that their university had planned to use QR as a stepping stone to ensure future opportunities, but that this has now come to an abrupt end. In several cases, either final products were not produced or dissemination did not take place. The cuts had a disruptive impact on HEIs, and it was evident from several interviews that HEIs had not expected to lose funding in the midst of the funding cycle.

*'Never before would a research project have lost money during a project. And for that to happen was devastating for our partnerships with overseas*

<sup>103</sup> FN1, FN5, FN14, FN19, FN30, FN37, FN39, FN43, FN55. Docs: 14, 83, 87, 94, 99, 102, 103, 106

<sup>104</sup> Vogel, I. et al. (2022) Stage 1a: Synthesis Report of evidence on integration of relevance, fairness, gender, poverty and social inclusion in funded activities. <https://www.newton-gcrf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/gcrf-evaluation-1a-synthesis-report.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> FN11, FN15, FN20, FN24, FN30, FN36, FN37, FN43, FN45, FN47, FN49 FN57, A58, A59. Doc: 98

<sup>106</sup> FN8, FN11, FN14, FN25, FN26, FN29, FN47. Doc: 98

<sup>107</sup> BEIS ODA R&D Update. 'Comms Lines – BEIS R&D ODA Settlement and Delivery Partner Allocations.'

*countries, it's hard to describe [...] It's how not to do budget cuts [...] you know, it's horrendous.'* (GCRF IO)

**There were reports of job losses in the UK and in LMICs, which also raises questions about the extent to which the capacity and relationships built through the GCRF QR/block grants can be sustained.**<sup>108</sup> Several informants spoke about the uncertainty caused by the funding cuts, and some mentioned the time spent scenario-planning for how to proceed. There were also a number of reports of job losses in LMICs due to the funding cuts, which stakeholders felt was damaging to their relationships, also raising questions about the sustainability of partnerships formed.

*'[The cuts] caused irreparable damage in some cases to relationships with international partners because they thought they were getting a project and had recruited staff and then that money just got pulled out from underneath them. A very difficult situation to be in.'* (GCRF IO)

Informants spoke about the loss of capacity resulting from the job losses and that, while the funding stream enabled HEIs to develop systems and processes to engage in ODA funding, it was felt that the loss of trained personnel was significant. For example, one HEI reported a loss of 60% of their grant funding and so had expected a similar cut to their QR/block grants. They had not anticipated a complete cut to the funding stream:

*'I mean, they are just throwing out all the expertise, all the staff, everything we've done for the last three years. It ended it all with no thought for continuity.'* (GCRF IO)

**Damage to relationships and reputation, both resulting from the cuts, was cited by a wide range of stakeholders.**<sup>109</sup> **However, there is evidence of HEIs working in ways to shield their partners from the impact of the cuts.**<sup>110</sup> Some informants felt that the cuts had undermined the scope to pursue further collaborations with LMIC partners; one PI said that the cuts had made potential partners wary about working with UK.

However, there is also evidence of HEIs working to protect their partners from the impact of the cuts. A number of LMIC partners we spoke to were not aware of the impact of the cuts. There were also instances of LMIC partners who were aware of the cuts but felt that their partners had managed the communications effectively. One PI shared that their project was reduced by 50%. They took the decision to make cuts internally:

*'The [project] was cut in half [...] It really put pressure on the UK team, who took cuts internally and lost an RA [Research Assistant] and PM [Project Manager] from the team. I personally had to pick up a ton of workload [...] because we were trying to hold to the original GCRF principle of equitable partnership, and not let cuts affect our partners.'* (GCRF PI)

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<sup>108</sup> FN3, FN14, FN20, FN25, FN26, FN30, FN57

<sup>109</sup> FN1, FN14, FN18, FN19, FN 21, FN25, FN26, FN29, FN30, FN47, FN57

<sup>110</sup> FN21, FN37, FN45, FN49, FN50

**Where possible, HEIs adapted to funding cuts by reprofiling budgets.<sup>111</sup> There were also examples of support from HEIs to fund gaps to some extent in order to keep the work going.<sup>112</sup>** Stakeholders mentioned reprofiling budgets to use underspends that were budgeted for travel. There was mention of government support in one HEI in Scotland as well as additional funding by SFC. Some universities underwrote staff salaries or research programmes.

### 3.5 EQ 5: What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)

#### Box 7. EQ 5 summary

Risks in the research environment were seen as the key barriers to achieving desired outcomes. The time frame for allocation and disbursement of grants had implications for HEIs' ability to plan and deliver within the expected period. It also placed limitations on their ability to build meaningful equitable partnerships. Due diligence was often more complex and time-consuming to support than expected, both for UK HEIs to manage and for LMIC partners to support. It was often cited as a barrier to establishing equitable partnerships.

Risks in the political environment were cited as another barrier that researchers faced. This included political and economic crisis as well as difficulties in navigating political alignment and sensitivities within communities.

The enablers that helped HEIs overcome these barriers included the support networks developed within and across HEIs, previous experience or the opportunity to develop this experience through the capacity strengthening support available through the grant funding, and the quality of partnerships established. The flexibility the funding provides was also cited as a key enabler for overcoming barriers in the context.

EQ 5 is interested in the features of the Four Nations Funding Bodies that have made a difference in overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes. Our approach to answering EQ 5 is to look at the key barriers emerging from our findings and explore evidence of specific features (i.e. 'enablers') to overcome these barriers. Our findings are documented and discussed below.

#### 3.5.1 Risk in the research environment

**There were several risks reported within the research environment, one relating to the time frame for disbursement and annual allocations of grants, which was widely cited as a key barrier affecting planning and implementation.<sup>113</sup>** There is strong evidence across HEIs of delays and uncertainty caused by the annual funding cycle. This has been covered in more detail in previous sections (see Section 3.3).

**In a similar vein, the operating time frame of the funding mechanism was also seen as misaligned with the needs and reality of working with LMIC partners.<sup>114</sup>** Informants across

<sup>111</sup> FN9, FN11, FN14, FN21, FN22, FN23, FN25, FN26, FN29, FN44. Doc: 14

<sup>112</sup> FN9, FN11, FN15, FN18, FN29, FN48, FN57. Doc: 83

<sup>113</sup> FN1, FN15, FN16, FN17, FN19, FN20, FN21, FN36, FN39, FN40, FN42, FN43. Doc: 3

<sup>114</sup> FN5, FN12, FN19, FN33, FN36, FN38, FN39, FN43, FN53, FN55

different stakeholder groups – including IOs, TMs, PIs and LMIC partners – talked about the time it takes to establish relationships, collaborate on the design and implementation of projects and reach an agreement (see Section 3.3). However, the deadlines for working with LMICs were no different to mainstream funding. While the building of relationships was made easier by pump priming grants, this became more of a challenge when travel was restricted. There were also examples of delays whereby an agreement was reached at the proposal stage only to be revisited at a later stage. The very nature of working in partnership requires time, which was further exacerbated by the distance. More time, some HEIs said, would have allowed them to disburse more through southern partners. In addition to the time to set up the partnerships, there were also reports of the time to implement, due to logistical issues such as the transportation and shipment of equipment across continents.

**Due diligence was often more complex and time-consuming to support than expected both for UK HEIs to manage and LMIC partners to support. It was often cited as a barrier to establishing equitable partnerships.**<sup>115</sup> While the QR/block grant allocation has provided support to HEIs to navigate the ODA operational environment, the requirements were seen as challenging. One stakeholder questioned the practicality and feasibility of requiring the same level of evidence for working in the UK to working with LMICs:

*‘In terms of receipts or showing that you’ve tested the market before you’ve employed somebody to help deliver research project.’ (GCRF TM)*

An IO also questioned the requirements as they felt they were unlikely to enforce a contract with an LMIC partner, as going to court was not going to be cost-efficient. Some HEIs were encouraged to partner with established non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or HEIs, which resulted in missed opportunities to work with potential partners (see Section 3.2.3). The due diligence processes also raised broader questions about the principle of equitable partnerships, as the mechanisms show that the partners are not applying for funding together but, rather, working as gatekeepers to the funding.

*‘Maybe this is a more philosophical question. But if you’re trying to generally work in partnership with the university in Kenya, for example, but you’re essentially dispersing the funding on behalf of the UK funder and you as the partner university are doing kind of quality assurance and thinking about these sort of issues, then it does, I think, make the partnership more difficult to be a true equitable partnership.’ (GCRF TM)*

### 3.5.2 Risk in the political environment

**Risk in the political environment was cited mainly by PIs and Co-PIs, who were at the forefront of research in LMIC contexts.**<sup>116</sup> Those from the UK spoke about challenges they faced when working with local communities to identify and unpack how groups are politically aligned. Having experienced and trusted partners within these countries was seen as a key enabler for navigating the political landscape (see Section 3.5.3 below). Other examples of risks in the political environment included internal conflicts and coups that took place while they were carrying out their research. As a result, PIs and co-PIs had to alter their plans and withdraw from badly affected regions. Another example was the impact of the economic crisis

<sup>115</sup> FN1, FN4, FN5, FN12, FN18, FN19, FN20, FN21, FN24, FN35, FN40, FN43; FN53. Doc: 3

<sup>116</sup> FN16, FN17, FN36, FN38, FN47, FN53, FN55, FN56, FN61

on LMIC countries. In one case, the partner institution was losing staff due to emigration because of the crisis and also faced challenges accessing equipment, particularly where the research faculty was dependent on imports.

### 3.5.3 Enablers and examples of success factors

**Access to support networks within and between HEIs was cited as a key enabler for overcoming some of the barriers discussed in the previous section.**<sup>117</sup> At the funding body level, it is evident that the four nations valued the opportunities to discuss issues and share learnings (see Section 3.1.4). HEIs refer to **networks convened by the funding bodies** themselves, such as in Scotland, or through **wider professional bodies** such as ARMA. This was cited as particularly helpful when looking at how best to address operational challenges when working in LMIC settings, such as human resources (HR), contracting, or regulatory requirements. We spoke to a Director from ARMA who said that GCRF-related events, including those focused on QR/block grants, were generally oversubscribed. Events and workshops were also organised by the research councils.

Informants also referred to the **forums to share and discuss issues and learnings within their university**. This included, for instance, reaching out to colleagues with experience in a specific geographic area to understand how they navigated the political landscape. In some cases, they were not aware that colleagues in their HEI worked in a similar area. In addition, advisory boards were created to oversee the GCRF QR/block grants, to provide strategic learnership and create linkages between departments and staff (see Sections 3.1.3 and 3.2).

*‘What you don’t want to happen at this point is for that board just to stop meeting, because you know its value hasn’t only been in reviewing applications or reviewing progress towards the strategy [...] it has much wider benefits than that.’ (GCRF TM)*

**Prior experience in ODA research was seen as an enabler for overcoming barriers, but informants also emphasised the value of capacity strengthening support, available through the QR/block grants, to gain or bring in the necessary experience.**<sup>118</sup> Researchers with years of experience working with certain communities knew people or entry points, which served as a foundation for the research projects. Some had well-established relationships between HEIs in the UK and LMICs. In one instance, the institutional relationship dated back more than a quarter of a century. Some HEIs established relationships with universities with which they had had previous engagement, which they cited as supporting the development of trust (see Section 3.2.3). Where researchers had less experience, HEIs were said to play an active role in linking them up with those that had the expertise, so that they could have a more contextualised and in-depth understanding of the context they were working in (see Section 3.2).

**Quality of partnerships was also seen to be an enabler, particularly to support HEIs from the north navigate the political context in which they were working.**<sup>119</sup> In one example, partners enabled researchers, through their networks with the government, to access refugee settlements in Uganda that, ordinarily, northern researchers would not have access to. There were other similar examples of how partners were embedded within communities and that

<sup>117</sup> FN1, FN4, FN5, FN12, FN15, FN21, FN36, FN37, FN38, FN43, FN61. Docs: 75, 80

<sup>118</sup> FN19, FN36, FN40, FN41, FN20. Docs: 96, 99

<sup>119</sup> FN5, FN18, FN36, FN38, FN47, FN53

helped enable trust and access. In some cases, this was key for continuing the work during the pandemic.

**The flexibility afforded to HEIs through the GCRF QR/block grants was also seen as a key enabler to overcoming barriers.**<sup>120</sup> It allowed HEIs to adapt their approach and allocations to changing circumstances without needing to seek the approval of the funder. The allocations could be spent according to HEIs' strategic priorities. For instance, the block grants provided the support required for the competitive GCRF research funding. In one example, an HEI was successful in winning around 20 GCRF research funds. Informants from the university attributed this to QR/block grants that allowed them to navigate the overhead requirements, including due diligence to carry out the research. It also provided funding towards building collaborative partnerships, particularly where relationships were nascent or had not existed before.

### 3.6 EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding?

- **How signature investments have adapted their approach in response to Covid-19**

#### Box 8. EQ 6 summary

The explicit focus on ODA – including its emphasis on interdisciplinarity, equitable partnerships and challenge-led focus – was cited as unique by a wide number of stakeholders.

The flexibility of the QR/block grants was seen as distinct, as they enabled HEIs to pivot and adapt plans to changing circumstances, such as the pandemic and funding cuts. It also complemented project funding by giving agency to HEIs to allocate funding according to research needs in areas such as pump priming, capacity building and/or meeting the FEC.

The pandemic has impacted HEIs in a number of ways including disruptions, delays and cancellation of projects. HEIs adapted by transitioning to online working although this was not without its challenges. The transition also led to more work being undertaken by LMIC partners. Some HEIs felt this led to greater equitability in the partnership; however, evidence for the extent to which this was achieved is mixed.

Overall, HEIs were able to adapt and respond effectively due to the flexibility of the funding stream.<sup>121</sup> There is also evidence of HEIs reallocating their funding to respond specifically to the pandemic, such as research into the impacts of Covid-19 in LMIC.

EQ 6 is focused on the added value or uniqueness of GCRF QR/block grants, and of GCRF more broadly. Our approach to answering EQ 6 is to look at the 'uniqueness' of GCRF and the extent to which it can be substituted. Our findings are documented and discussed below.

#### 3.6.1 Uniqueness of GCRF and extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted

**The explicit focus on ODA using formula funding was cited as unique by a large number of stakeholders.**<sup>122</sup> It has enabled the creation of ODA research expertise through capacity

<sup>120</sup> FN12, FN16, FN17, FN39, FN30, FN36, FN47, FN54, FN55. Doc: 11

<sup>121</sup> FN1, FN4, FN8, FN14, FN16, FN17, FN24, FN49, FN55, FN57, FN58, FN59. Docs: 27, 42, 82, 97, 98

<sup>122</sup> FN1, FN2, FN16, FN17, FN19, FN40, FN4, FN9, FN11, FN32, FN43, FN56, FN61

strengthening that then led to or supported other GCRF and ODA-funded research (see Section 3.2), complementing project-based funding. Informants spoke about how it made them or their colleagues think differently about their work in a way that was sensitive to local contexts and needs and to making a difference to people's lives.<sup>123</sup>

**The key principles of GCRF – including an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, equitable partnerships and challenge-led focus – were seen as distinct.**<sup>124</sup> Funding in these areas was otherwise thought to be limited. Informants valued the concept of working in partnership with colleagues in the LMIC to address global challenges. It was also seen as unusual for funding to be given directly to international partners or to be led by a PI based in the global South. The interdisciplinarity of the funding had also enabled HEIs and researchers to work in ways they had not done before. There were frequent reports of more joined-up ways of working and of increased collaboration across HEIs.

*'GCRF has helped researchers to think out of the box – through a multi- and interdisciplinary programme, it has been encouraging for cross-faculty work. Usually there are lots of politics – faculties don't often talk to each other but GCRF brought them together, looking at challenges of working across partnerships.'* (GCRF IO)

**The flexibility of the QR/block grants was seen as unique.**<sup>125</sup> Funding of this kind – that gave HEIs control over their strategy and allocation – was seen as uncommon. The flexibility it provided was described as a valued component of the funding and one that was generally not available from other sources. It allowed HEIs to remain agile without having to seek the approval of the funder or renegotiate a contract. Their ability **to pivot and adapt accordingly to the research needs** was apparent when responding to the pandemic and funding cuts (see Section 3.6.3 and 3.4 for more detail).

*'Usually, when you win a project grant and you get your offer letter, it's quite clearly stipulated what you have to spend that money on. You can't move it between activities – you have to stick to the plan. QR didn't have that limitation; it allowed us to really freely manoeuvre the funding in line with what the research needed. That was really positive; it's not something we normally encounter.'* (GCRF IO)

The flexibility **to fund e.g. pump priming activities** was also seen as a distinct feature of GCRF QR/block grants; informants said it was not easy to get funding for such activities.<sup>126</sup> There was strong evidence suggesting that projects would not have taken place had it not been for the small allocations to build relationships or pilot data collection.

*'Conversely, there are advantages to have it as a QR stream, because we can use it to fund things that wouldn't get funded – smaller projects at early stages, relationship building. A regular GCRF grant probably wouldn't have*

<sup>123</sup> FN16, FN17, FN19, FN40, FN56, FN61

<sup>124</sup> FN1, FN9, FN11, FN12, FN16, FN17, FN19, FN24, FN25, FN26, FN29, FN30, FN33, FN40, FN53, FN57, FN61

<sup>125</sup> FN1, FN4, FN11, FN16, FN17, FN21, FN23, FN24, FN26, FN29, FN32, FN38, FN40, FN54, FN55, FN61. Doc: 83

<sup>126</sup> FN16, FN17, FN41, FN5, FN9, FN37, FN39, FN43

*funded that – so it gave us the opportunity to do things that we could build other activities on.’ (IO)*

Moreover, the **capacity building provided through the QR/block grants** was also cited as distinct.<sup>127</sup> It enabled processes and systems within HEIs to be set up for managing ODA grants as well as providing people to gain experience in the research and management of such grants (see Section 3.2.1). It was evident that the **funding had brought new actors who would not have ordinarily applied their research to an ODA context** (see Section 3.4.1).<sup>128</sup> One HEI, in receipt of high-level of QR/block funding, said that GCRF investment gave them the confidence to invest their own resources in order to build internal capacity, expand the pool with ODA expertise, and support the scale-up of existing work.

The **flexibility to allocate towards meeting FEC** of other GCRF funding was also seen as a distinct and valued part of QR/block grant funding.<sup>129</sup> Some stakeholders said the funding allowed them to get involved in projects knowing that they could cover the associated costs of overheads. An HEI involved in one of GCRF’s Research Hubs said that they would not have been able to do so had it not been for GCRF QR/block grants.

**The profile and scale of funding of QR/block grants, and of GCRF more broadly, were seen as distinct.**<sup>130</sup> It was clear from the evidence that GCRF was a major contributor to the research funding landscape. With its size and profile, it was able to mobilise stakeholders in ways that smaller and more focused funding would not be able to do.

*‘With GCRF, when you have a programme at that scale [...] a programme with a narrow, well-defined remit as GRCF does, linked in to the SDGs, you have the ability to mobilise a community of people in a way that a small, discipline-specific funding programme which, while useful, doesn’t have that rallying call. There was a great deal of excitement about GCRF. It was able to bring new people to the table.’ (GCRF IO)*

However, while the large size of GCRF is seen as instrumental in how to galvanise HEIs and research communities, informants were keen to impress the point that smaller pots of funding through the QR/block grants were equally valued and vital.

*‘For a small institution, that’s really struggling to keep the show on the road, that has been a hugely helpful thing. And there’s been some projects that I could not have sustained [...] those government block sources are [...] modest amounts but useful for tactically surviving from day to day or week to week or month to month. Amidst the uncertainty of that bigger picture.’ (GCRF IO)*

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<sup>127</sup> FN11, FN29, FN39, FN40, FN43. Doc: 84

<sup>128</sup> FN14, FN40, FN58, FN59

<sup>129</sup> FN2, FN14, FN23, FN61

<sup>130</sup> FN5, FN11, FN12, FN14, FN16, FN17, FN41, FN61

### 3.6.2 Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources

**A wide range of informants stated that there was no equivalent or alternative funding to GCRF.**<sup>131</sup> A number said that some of their research would not have happened at all. There is some evidence of HEIs speaking to each other through networks established through the funding (see Section 3.1.4) to discuss where they could go to continue funding similar work, but the options are limited.

*‘That’s our concern – there are no direct replacements.’ (GCRF IO)*

**There is evidence of some HEIs pursuing other funding options, although these are not at the same scale or do not share similar principles such as equitable partnerships.**<sup>132</sup> Some of the alternatives mentioned include: other research councils; the Newton Fund; the National Institute of Health Research; trusts and foundations (specifically the Wellcome Trust and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation); the private sector; FCDO; national funding available in LMICs; Horizon Europe; and other bilateral and multilateral aid agencies.

*‘There are other funders – there’s the Wellcome Trust, and the big US trusts and funders – but they’re not at GCRF scale – this was the kind of scale that changed institutional behaviour in terms of how development research was approached, and the scale at which institutions did that research.’ (GCRF IO)*

In some instances, HEIs were reported to have stepped in where projects have experienced cuts (see Section 3.4.3), though some reported that their university is unable to absorb the costs to continue funding projects. One informant said that they were waiting for GCRF to come back.

### 3.6.3 Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19

**The pandemic impacted HEIs in a number of ways, including disruptions, delays and cancellation of projects.**<sup>133</sup> The pandemic resulted in travel restrictions and lockdowns, which inevitably led to delays. This particularly affected data collection, although evidence suggests that it created uncertainty about planning new projects or issuing new internal calls. Faculties also began teaching online, which took some of the focus away from research projects. There were also examples of planned research and symposiums that were cancelled.

**HEIs adapted by transitioning to online working, although this was not without its challenges.**<sup>134</sup> In some cases online working led to a wider level of engagement, as it opened access to participants who may not have otherwise been invited, due to the cost of travel. There were several examples of how this has worked well. However, informants also reported challenges to assuring the quality of data, as researchers were unable to go into the field. For instance, one LMIC partner said that mobile interviews were an issue, particularly when interviewing women who had less access to phones, and it was also unclear who may have

<sup>131</sup> FN3, FN4, FN8, FN9, FN12, FN23, FN24, FN25, FN26, FN31, FN39, FN42, FN43, FN44, FN54, FN56, FN61. Docs: 78, 83

<sup>132</sup> FN1, FN2, FN5, FN9, FN11, FN18, FN25, FN26, FN30, FN36, FN38, FN42, FN43, FN57, FN61. Doc: 70

<sup>133</sup> FN5, FN8, FN16, FN17, FN18, FN23, FN25, FN29, FN30, FN31, FN43, FN47, FN48, FN53, FN58, FN59, FN61. Docs: 4, 18, 61, 69, 82, 83, 84, 86, 87

<sup>134</sup> FN8, FN18, FN25, A26, FN30, FN32, FN33, FN36, FN42, FN43, FN45, FN48, FN50, FN53, A54, FN55, FN56, FN57. Docs: 4, 61, 62, 85, 86, 97, 87, 98

been present with them while they were interviewed. Aside from the research itself, HEIs spoke about the difficulties of building partnerships, generating ideas and collaborating online.

*‘Some partnerships have been put on hold – you can’t build trust or a rapport from scratch on Zoom. Our plans in 2022 are to be back travelling again. No doubt that Zoom and teams will stay a part – it cuts down travel. We have an internal forum about this – somebody used the term – “the Covid gap” – how do you fill the crack back in? We are looking at what we do to reset – are there things to close the gap more quickly?’ (GCRF TM)*

**The transition also led to more work being undertaken by LMIC partners. Some HEIs suggest this led to greater equitability in the partnership; however, evidence for the extent to which this was achieved is mixed.**<sup>135</sup> As UK-based researchers were unable to travel as originally planned, HEIs had to rely on LMIC partners to carry out the work. A wide range of UK-based stakeholders saw this in a positive light, in that it helped address the power imbalance between traditional north–south research partnerships.

*‘I think Covid accelerated this because we simply couldn’t travel, so we had to trust partners more and, you know, surprise surprise, the work still happened. It was probably better. And what I hope doesn’t happen [...] that people like me don’t become the embodiment of expertise again.’ (GCRF TM)*

It is evident that there was greater reliance on LMIC partners for carrying out the research. However, some cases suggest that, while LMIC partners took on a greater role in the data collection, the supervision of the process and analysis of data continued to be led by UK-based PIs. This raises questions about the extent to which remote working has enhanced equitability.

**Overall, HEIs were able to adapt and respond effectively, due to the flexibility of the funding stream.**<sup>136</sup> **There is also evidence of HEIs reallocating their funding to respond specifically to the pandemic, such as research into the impacts of Covid-19 in LMICs.**<sup>137</sup> HEIs adapted by responding reflectively by reprofiling their annual funding to Covid response projects, reallocating funds from travel to support remote data collection, and utilising the no-cost extensions provided by the funding bodies (for more detail, see Section 3.1.6). There were several examples where HEIs had reallocated their funding towards Covid-responsive research, including innovative projects such as: the production of a prototype air respirator; supporting policy making such as supporting LMIC partners studying the impact of regional organisations’ (including the African Union) response to Covid-19; creation of networks, such as one to enable the sharing of knowledge among epidemiologists in LMIC countries; and community-based research to support campaigns about the pandemic.

135 FN18, FN19, FN24, FN25, FN26, FN30, FN36, FN37, FN42, FN43, FN53, FN54, FN55, FN56, FN58, FN59. Docs: 27, 41, 62, 82, 83, 87, 98

136 FN1, FN4, FN8, FN14, FN16, FN17, FN24, FN49, FN55, FN57, FN58, FN59. Docs: 27, 42, 82, 97, 98

137 FN1, FN15, FN18, FN25, FN26, FN45, FN61. Docs: 16, 39, 82, 83, 84

## 4 Conclusions

By drawing on the findings from this process evaluation, this section aims to answer the MEQ *'How well are GCRF investments working, and what have they achieved?'* within the context of the Four Nations GCRF QR/block grants.

**The 2017 ICAI Rapid Review led to a decisive shift in the direction of GCRF QR/block grant funding. This resulted in the introduction of three-year institutional strategies and rigorous processes for monitoring and reporting, making the funding stream more focused and strategic.** The strategies enabled HEIs to align their institutional priorities to GCRF objectives, allowing them to broaden the scope of funding beyond that of core research project issues in order to meet their specific institutional needs and priorities. In addition, embedded within the strategy design, there is evidence of HEIs setting in place robust processes to ensure activities are ODA-eligible and that they reflect GCRF priorities and promote coherence across their portfolio. While processes at the funding level and within HEIs are rigorous, there remains a concern about the limited staff time allocated to managing the funding stream at the funding body level, particularly for those with a large portfolio of HEIs.

**The funding stream has gone beyond ensuring ODA compliance towards 'ODA research excellence', which was changing institutional behaviour towards the way in which development research is approached.** There is strong evidence to indicate that HEIs have prioritised the establishment of processes to ensure that activities are demand-driven and positioned to generate locally relevant impact. HEIs in the UK and LMICs were collaborating and co-producing research. There is evidence of GCRF priorities, including fairness and GESIP, being addressed in project design, implementation and dissemination. Some informants saw the application of GCRF principles and objectives to this funding stream as distinct and one that changed institutional behaviour in terms of the way in which research was approached in development.

**However, there are structural challenges within the fund that constrain the investment from fully realising 'ODA excellence'.** While UK and LMIC HEIs are looking to work equitably, it is difficult to ignore that the UK partners are allocated the funding and are ultimately the gatekeepers. Similarly, capacity building of LMIC partners did not include the development of structures and processes to manage ODA grants. Unlike their UK counterparts, therefore, they have not increased the likelihood of receiving further ODA funds directly in the near future. The limited time frame for GCRF QR/block grant recipients to develop strategies, combined with the due diligence requirements, increases the likelihood of UK HEIs working with more familiar or established institutions rather than forming new links with partners who need support to manage processes.

**Overall, investment through GCRF QR/block grants has made progress towards meeting GCRF strategic objectives and desired results. Funding has complemented project-based grants allocated by DPs, although the intended synergy could be made more explicit. While progress is being made, funding cuts have impeded potential areas of expected outcome as well as the sustainability of achievements made.** A key achievement of this funding stream is the way in which it has broadened the pool of new researchers and HEIs who would not previously have seen their work as relevant in a development context. This has occurred in a variety of ways, including the promotion of interdisciplinary work, capacity building for

researchers and HEIs, and pump priming activities to build partnerships or lay the groundwork for research. There is evidence of HEIs that utilised the funding stream to gain experience of managing and conducting ODA research and then went on to secure larger GCRF competitive funds. There is also a high volume of papers and publications emerging from this research funded by the GCRF QR/block grants. There is also evidence of progress being made towards shorter-term outcomes, though this will need to be further verified through external stakeholders.

These findings demonstrate how funding has been used to complement project grants, particularly in the areas of capacity building or pump priming. However, it is not always clear what the intended synergies were, if any, in some of the funded activities, such as mono- or interdisciplinary research. Equally, it is also unclear how FEC-related activities were used or how they contributed to outcomes and impact. Overall, while there is evidence of achievements, the funding cuts have hampered progress, with the cancellation and reduction in scope of projects. This affects the potential legacy as well as the sustainability of progress made.

**A key challenge for this funding stream is capturing the extent of its impact, given the sheer volume of divergent activities supported.** One of the main reasons cited in the decision to cut funding to GCRF QR/block grants in 2021–22 related to questions about the extent of its research impact. There is inevitably tension here between providing flexibility to institutions to meet their needs and priorities (i.e. ‘bottom up’) with the challenges this presents to understand the full impact of the investments at a higher level (i.e. ‘top down’ approach). The evidence from this study demonstrates the value of allocations, irrespective of size, and the flexibility they provide. However, this is to be weighed together with how best to manage for development impact.

#### 4.1 Lessons and recommendations to inform improvements in the future delivery of signature investments and promote learning across GCRF (EQ 7)

##### Box 9. EQ 7 summary

**Lesson 1:** There is value in a QR/block grant funding model with specific criteria attached to the spend including to complement project-based grants.

**Recommendation 1:** Consider including a similar QR/block grant with ODA criteria attached in any future challenge-based fund.

**Lessons 2:** The flexibility that the GCRF QR/block grants in strategy design and allocation enabled HEIs to meet their specific institutional needs and priorities. However, this has resulted in a divergent number of activities, making it difficult to understand the full impact of the investment.

**Recommendation 2:** Develop a ToC for this funding stream in a future fund, as a means of providing flexibility (‘bottom-up’) while maximising impact (‘top-down’). The ToC would serve as a guide for funding bodies and HEIs to articulate their contribution towards outcomes and impact, including the intended synergy between QR/block grants and project-based grants.

**Lesson 3:** The coordination and sharing of learnings within and across HEIs in the UK was a highly valued aspect of this funding stream. However, this is less evident in LMIC settings.

**Recommendation 3: Consider resourcing requirements at the funding body level to include capacity to support cross-institutional learning in a strategic manner and in a way that also benefits LMIC partners.**

**Lesson 4:** The time frame was a key barrier for achieving outcomes. This included a short turnaround time for strategy development and establishing partnerships. In addition, the annual funding cycle and the tight timelines for annual decisions about allocation, limited the time available for implementation.

**Recommendation 4: Include a ‘year zero’ to allow HEIs time to establish meaningful partnership and co-develop the strategy. In addition, guarantee allocation of funding for the three years, thereby, increasing the time to deliver and contribute towards impact.**

EQ 7 looks at lessons that can inform future delivery of similar signature investments and promote learning across GCRF. It also provides recommendations taking into account the lessons from this initiative.

**Lesson 1: There is value in a QR/block grant funding model with specific criteria attached to the spend, including to complement project-based grants.** The requirement to meet GCRF priorities focused HEIs’ attention and resources on ODA excellence while giving them the flexibility to use the funding according to their broader context and strategic priorities. In particular the model supported smaller HEIs, and those with less experience of ODA research, to establish relationships and develop their capacity. This in turn broadened the range of actors involved in challenge-based development research, and diversified the research portfolio. It also enabled some HEIs to engage in larger competitive project-based grants knowing that there was funding available that could contribute to FEC.

- **Recommendation 1: Consider including a similar QR/block grant with ODA criteria attached in any future challenge-based fund.**

**Lesson 2: The flexibility that the GCRF QR/block grants in strategy design and allocation enabled HEIs to meet their specific institutional needs and priorities. However, this has resulted in a diverse range of activities, making it difficult to understand the full impact of the investment.** This flexibility was highly valued by stakeholders as it gave HEIs agency to allocate funding according to research needs in areas such as pump priming, bridging capacity gaps and in meeting FEC. The flexibility also contributed to the inclusion of actors who would not otherwise have engaged in ODA research. It also allowed HEIs to pivot and adapt plans to changing circumstances, such as the pandemic and funding cuts. However, the flexibility has also resulted in a large volume of diverse activities, making it difficult to analyse at a higher level. The lack of ToC for this funding stream and the reporting differences between the funding bodies compound this challenge. This means that it is difficult to understand the full impact of the investment, which has partly contributed to the funding being cut in 2021–22.

- **Recommendation 2: Develop a ToC for this funding stream in a future fund, as a means of providing flexibility (‘bottom up’) while maximising impact (‘top down’). The ToC would serve as a guide for funding bodies and HEIs to articulate their contribution towards outcomes and impact, including the intended synergy between QR/block grants and project-based grants.**

**Lesson 3: The coordination and sharing of learnings within and across HEIs in the UK was a highly valued aspect of this funding stream. However, this is less evident in LMIC settings.** GCRF QR/block grants shifted HEIs from working in competition to working in collaboration. Stakeholders appreciated the community of practice developed as a result of GCRF QR/block grants. In some devolved nations, such as Scotland, the funding body has convened or initiated

learning across their cohort. This has been more difficult to do in England, due to the number of HEIs. Here, professional networks and organisations such as ARMA have stepped into the gap. This is a missed opportunity for ensuring learning is supported in a strategic manner that supports the overall funding objectives. There is also limited evidence of capacity strengthening, or of lesson sharing within and across HEIs in LMICs.

- **Recommendation 3: Consider resourcing requirements at the funding body level to include capacity to support cross-institutional learning in a strategic manner and in a way that also benefits LMIC partners.**

**Lesson 4: The time frame was a key barrier for achieving outcomes. This included a short turnaround time for strategy development and establishing of partnerships. In addition, the annual funding cycle and the tight timelines for annual decisions about allocation, limited the time available for implementation.** Stakeholders emphasised the difficulty of producing a strategy in the time allotted. In addition, the tight time frame did not allow for HEIs to develop partnerships in LMIC contexts, particularly where these relationships were new. This resulted in HEIs approaching existing partners in countries or HEIs. There was also a misalignment between the annual funding cycle and the three-year strategy. The uncertainty caused by this process limited the scope and ambition of projects. It also limited the time that projects had for implementation (5–6 month period) and to demonstrate impact within this period.

- **Recommendation 4: Include a 'year zero' to allow HEIs time to establish meaningful partnerships and co-develop the strategy. In addition, guarantee allocation of funding for the three years, thereby, increasing the time to deliver and contribute towards impact.**

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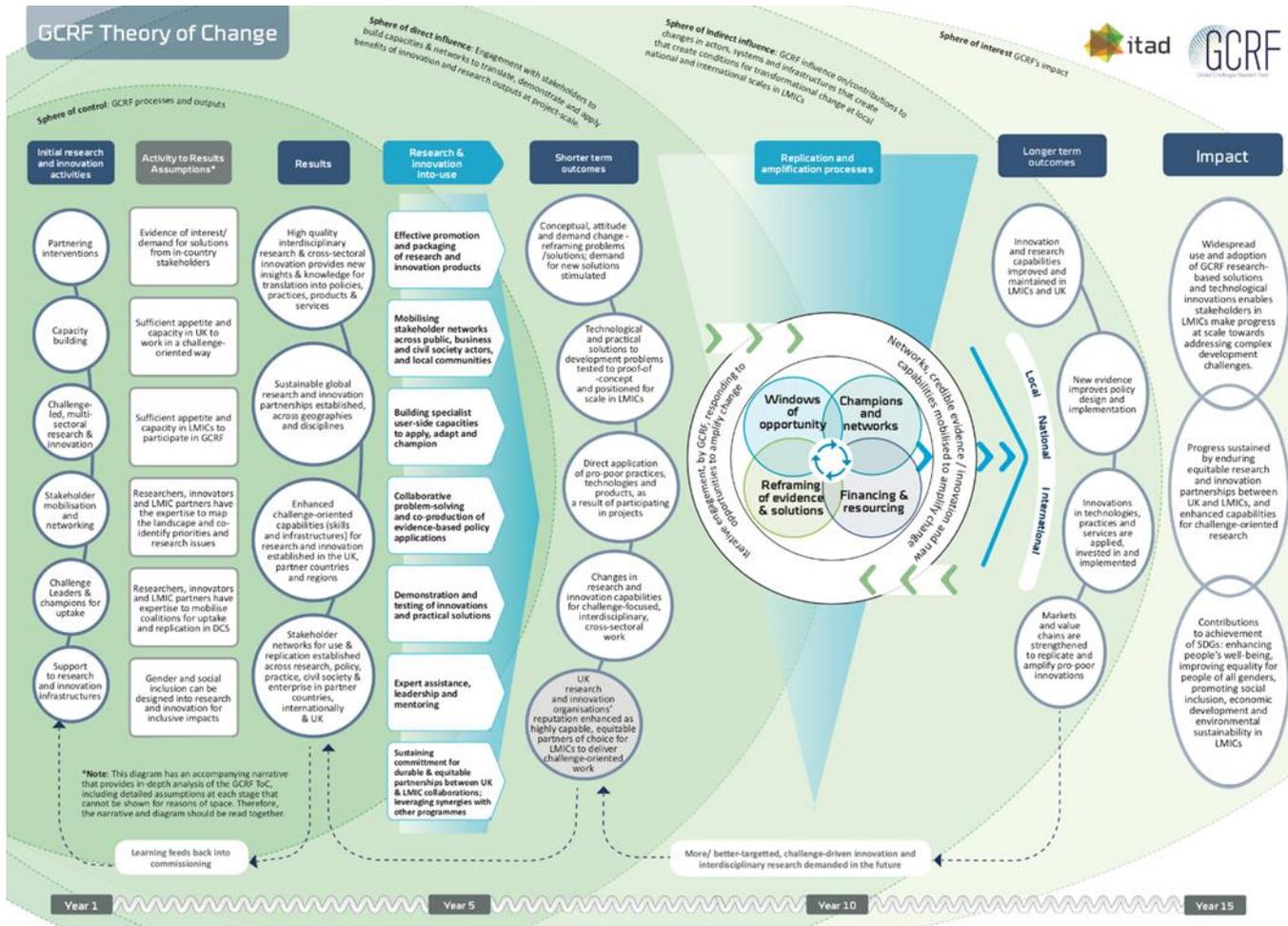
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# Annex 1: GCRF Theory of Change



## Annex 2: Research tools

### Annex 2a: KII topic guide

#### Instructions

Topic guides will need to be contextualised for individual stakeholders.

- **Build your own topic guide:** You should select questions from here and contextualise them to the Process Evaluation specific area.
- **This template should also be used as the KII Write-Up Template** – save a copy of each template with the name of the KI, and save in your folders.
- **Consent:** Please give respondents the introduction and ensure that you have gained explicit consent.

#### Topic guide

<b>Programme/Award</b>	
<b>Interviewee name</b>	
<b>Position and organisation</b>	
<b>Interviewer name</b>	
<b>Date of interview</b>	

#### Introduction

##### Background:

- We are evaluators from Itad, RAND Europe and NIRAS-LTS – a UK-based consortium of research organisations with specialisms in evaluation.
- We have been commissioned by BEIS to carry out an evaluation of GCRF.
- The purpose of this interview is to understand [adapt as relevant].
- The interview will last around 45–60 minutes.

#### Consent

- As this is an independent evaluation, all interviews are confidential, anonymised and non-attributable. Everything you tell us will be confidential, and your name will not be used in any of our reports. We may use quotes from the interview in our reporting, but all quotes will be non-attributable.
- Do you have any questions about the research, or concerns you would like to raise before we start?
- Do you consent to be interviewed on this basis? [Y/N]

Updated 03.02.2021

**Recording consent [only if you choose to record]:**

- We would also like to record the interview to facilitate note-taking and later analysis. The recording would not be accessed by anyone beyond our team and would be deleted following analysis.
- Do you consent to being recorded on this basis? [Y/N]

<b>TOPIC:</b>			
<b>1. Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes</b>			
	<b>SUB-TOPIC</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS FOR CRITERIA</b>
1	Selection and set-up processes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Could you tell us a little about your role within [name of programme]?</li> <li>2. Why was [insert name of signature investment here] set up and what are its goals?</li> <li>3. How was the ToC developed and who was involved?</li> <li>4. How was the scope of the call defined and who was involved?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Were priorities developed based on existing research and stakeholder needs? If so, how?</li> <li>b. How was coherence?</li> </ol> </li> <li>5. What were the eligibility criteria for applicants? Were any particular applicant groups targeted?</li> <li>6. What were the timelines for application? How long were calls issued for?</li> <li>7. How are proposals evaluated?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Who is involved in the evaluation process and how are they selected?</li> <li>b. What are the criteria for selection?</li> <li>c. How long does the evaluation process take and what were the demands on different groups?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence</li> <li>• ToC and shared vision</li> <li>• Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge</li> <li>• Framing of eligibility of applicants and target groups</li> <li>• What gender and poverty dimensions were integrated in the call</li> <li>• The process of identifying the gender and poverty dimensions, e.g. access to experts</li> <li>• Was there a fund-specific gender equality commitment outlined at the outset or were any gender/inclusion dimensions integrated with the call's objectives? [Translates into dedicated resources]</li> </ul>
RESPONSES HERE:			

<p>2</p>	<p>Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)</p>	<p>1. How are specific development considerations built into the process of call development and proposal evaluation? For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Gender responsiveness</li> <li>b. Poverty and social inclusion</li> <li>c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness</li> <li>d. Relevance to local needs</li> <li>e. Coherence with the wider portfolio (in the programme, in GCRF, elsewhere)</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>• Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>• Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes, e.g. gender in context analysis</li> <li>• Gender balance/composition of the evaluation team</li> <li>• Inclusion of 'gender experts' as part of the evaluation team and in the design of the calls for proposal?</li> <li>• Target for women applicants?</li> <li>• Evaluation criteria – gender equality scoring</li> <li>• Gender balance in the research team?</li> <li>• Gender expertise in the team?</li> <li>• Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>• Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>• GESI considered in stakeholder engagement and dissemination design</li> </ul>
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RESPONSES HERE:			
3	Management of the programme and awards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you manage your portfolio to ensure it is coherent and take advantage of synergies where they exist?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How do you coordinate and interact with other parts of GCRF?</li> <li>b. How do you make your portfolio work together, both within the programme itself and within GCRF?</li> <li>c. What opportunities are there for networking between award holders?</li> <li>d. How do you support interdisciplinary research?</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. How do you manage the award/programme to ensure that development considerations are integrated into delivery in an ongoing way?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Gender responsiveness</li> <li>b. Poverty and social inclusion</li> <li>c. Equitable partnerships and wider fairness</li> <li>d. Relevance to local needs</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. How do you manage and adapt to changing circumstances?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What did you do to manage COVID-19?</li> <li>b. What did you do to manage the funding cuts?</li> <li>c. Are there any other circumstances in which you have had to be agile? Do awards have flexibility to change in response to circumstances once they have started?</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. How, if at all, do you consider the potential negative consequences of the award/programme?               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What are the potential risks and how do you mitigate them?</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building, aggregate-level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>• Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>• Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>• Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>• Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach</li> <li>• Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>• Guidelines/capacity building on the integration of gender analysis into research/innovation cycle</li> <li>• Engagement with gender experts</li> <li>• M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> <li>• Programme level - how are they monitoring gender, e.g. track applicants, track minorities and how much grant was sought, how much grant was awarded, female researchers tend to ask for less funding and get less</li> </ul>

		<p>b. How do you ensure you do no harm?</p> <p>5. What are your monitoring and evaluation processes?</p> <p>a. How do you ensure the information helps inform learning and improvement, within awards, within the programme, across GCRF?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Do they have a gender equality strategy, how are they tracking that, systems and monitoring across awards?</li></ul>
<p>RESPONSES HERE:</p>			

4	Capacity development	<p>1. How is capacity strengthening delivered in the programme?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you assess capacity needs? For LMIC partners and for UK partners.</li> <li>○ How do you ensure capacity strengthening is supported?</li> <li>○ How do you assess it?</li> <li>○ At which levels does capacity strengthening occur (in both directions)?</li> <li>○ How are fairness considerations included in your capacity strengthening?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clear Theory of Change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes</li> <li>● Including capacity development for UK partners as well as LMIC partners</li> <li>● Analysis/understanding of local R&amp;I ecosystems and capacity needs</li> <li>● Gender and inclusion analysis of capacity needs, both LMIC and UK</li> <li>● Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&amp;I infrastructure</li> <li>● Fairness considerations integrated</li> <li>● Tracking of GESIP and Fairness aspects</li> </ul>
RESPONSES HERE:			

5	Engagement	<p>How do you ensure the work you support is well positioned for use?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are your engagement and dissemination strategies?</li> <li>How do you build and maintain relationships with potential users of research?</li> <li>How much happens at the programme level and how much is left to award holders?</li> <li>Is Gender and inclusion factored into the development of engagement strategies?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> <li>Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)</li> </ol>
RESPONSES HERE:			

<b>TOPIC:</b> <b>2. Efficiency, proportionality and VFM of processes to support challenge-led research</b>			
	SUB-TOPIC	QUESTIONS	PROMPTS
1	Efficiency, proportionality of processes  Fairness for partners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To what extent are processes efficient and proportionate? Why/why not?</li> <li>To what extent do processes promote VfM and cost-effectiveness? How/how not?</li> <li>To what extent are processes fair for LMIC partners? Why/why not?</li> </ol>	Efficiency and timeliness of processes  Fairness for partners  Processes promote a focus on GESIP

RESPONSES HERE:

<b>TOPIC:</b>			
<b>3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts</b>			
	<b>SUB-TOPIC</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1	Key outcomes and achievements	<p>What have been the key achievements and outcomes of the programme?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. How well do these align with your ToC and vision for the programme?</li> <li>b. Have there been any unintended or unexpected outcomes (positive or negative)?</li> </ol> <p>2. What impact has Covid-19 and the funding cuts had on your ability to achieve these outcomes?</p> <p>3. Beyond Covid-19 and the funding cuts, what have been the barriers to delivering on your intended outcomes? For example:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Risks in the research environment (organisation, support for research)</li> <li>ii. Risks in the political environment (underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of issues)</li> <li>iii. Risks in the data environment (data availability and agreements)</li> </ol> <p>4. What factors have helped overcome barriers and achieve the intended outcomes? For example:</p>	<p>Results and outcomes from programme ToCs</p> <p>Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress</p> <p>Unintended outcomes (positive and negative)</p> <p>GESIP-related outcomes</p> <p>Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maturity of the field</li> <li>• Research capacity strengthening</li> <li>• Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research)</li> <li>• Risks in political environment (i.e. underdeveloped policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves)</li> <li>• Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Organisational capacity (support from IPP, own institution)</li> <li>ii. Wider networks</li> </ul>	<p>Other features and factors, e.g. a focus on GESIP, scoping demand, flexibility in the budgeting model</p> <p>Enablers or challenges in applying GESIP guidance to your innovation or research?</p>
RESPONSES:			

<b>TOPIC:</b>			
<b>4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding</b>			
	<b>Sub-topic</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1		<p>Given the Covid-19 impacts AND funding cuts, to what extent do you think GCRF funding can be substituted?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What alternative sources of funding exist for this award/programme?</li> <li>2. What aspects/interventions within the award/programme relied on GCRF funding? Are there alternatives?</li> <li>3. What are the next steps for the award/programme, e.g. will you be pursuing a new funding strategy?</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extent to which GCRF funding can be substituted</li> <li>• Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (in VfM rubric)</li> <li>• Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding/response to Covid-19</li> </ul>

RESPONSES HERE:

<b>Topic</b>			
<b>5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments &amp; promote learning across GCRF</b>			
	<b>SUB-TOPIC</b>	<b>QUESTIONS</b>	<b>PROMPTS</b>
1	Lessons for award holders  Lessons for funders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What have been the key lessons learned for you as award holder/programme manager?</li> <li>2. What improvements could future ODA project/programmes make?</li> </ol>	
RESPONSES HERE:			

## Annex 2b: Common codebook – Stage 1b

\*Note: VfM-specific data needs are mapped in blue against this framework to show where these fit, but also to flag a request for looking at **resource allocation to southern partners and rationale for this** [sub-code 2.2: ‘fairness to partners’].

PARENT CODE	SUB-CODE	DEFINITION/DESCRIPTION
<b>1. Structures and processes in place to support challenge-led research with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes</b>	1.1 Selection and set-up processes	Presence of and description of the ToC/vision for the programme; information on how the call was defined and who was involved, and on how projects were selected and the review process (and who was part of that)
	1.2 Design and Implementation processes (ODA research excellence)	The ways in which, and the extent to which, development considerations are built into calls and proposals (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs) <i>(VfM: allocation of resources to LMIC partners)</i>
	1.3 Management of the programme and awards	Any synergies or approaches to identifying synergies across the programme, or GCRF portfolio (coherence); management processes to ensure that development needs are met, reviewed and integrated (gender responsiveness, poverty, social inclusion, equitable partnerships; relevance and local needs); approach and flexibility of management processes in changing circumstances or with changing research/stakeholder priorities; any considerations of negative impacts of the research/process; monitoring and evaluation processes
	1.4 Capacity development	Approach to capacity strengthening – understanding capacity strengthening needs (and for who), and the extent to which, and how, capacity is being considered or approached; and what

		considerations are driving capacity strengthening (needs of LMIC/UK researchers)
	1.5 Engagement for delivering research	Approach to engagement with local researchers or other projects/programmes operating in the context, and with non-research stakeholders (coherence)
	1.6 Engagement with users	Any engagement with intended users of the research; stakeholder identification; targeting to user needs; dissemination strategies (for uptake)
<b>2. Efficiency, proportionality and VfM of processes to support challenge-led research</b>		
	2.1 Efficiency, proportionality of processes	Whether processes are efficient and whether they are (dis)proportionate to the scale/scope of funding or ambitions. Any reflections on whether the processes are cost-effective (or not)
	2.2 Fairness for partners	Processes that support (or not) LMIC partners VfM: allocation of resources to LMIC partners and rationale for this
<b>3. Early progress towards desired outcomes/impacts</b>		
	3.1 Key intended outcomes and achievements	Intended (ToC) results and outcomes (VfM: research knowledge-into-results)
	3.2 Key unintended outcomes and achievements	Unintended results and outcomes (VfM: research knowledge-into-results)
	3.3 Impact of Covid-19	Effects of the pandemic on delivery and results from the programme
	3.4 Impact of funding cuts	Effects of the spending review funding cuts on delivery and results from the programme
	3.5 Barriers within the context	Risks: in internal/institutional support for research; data availability; political environment and awareness of the challenge/issues; the need for research capacity strengthening (VfM: risks – identification and management)

	3.6 Enabling factors	Factors helping to overcome barriers and deliver outcomes e.g. research capacity; programme support; wider networks
<b>4. Significance and uniqueness of GCRF funding</b>	4.1 Alternative sources of funding	Other funding bodies, or programmes, supporting similar research
	4.2 Aspects unique to GCRF funding	What can't be replaced, e.g. in terms of funding scope or scale (VfM: 'additionality')
	4.3 Changes to funding strategy	Reflections on where funding may come from in the future to progress the research or support new research (if not GCRF)
<b>5. Lessons to inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments &amp; promote learning across GCRF</b>	5.1 Lessons for award holders	Capturing any key lessons learned and improvements for future awards
	5.2 Lessons for funders	Capturing any key lessons learned and improvements for future programmes

## Annex 2c: Assessment rubrics for EQs 1–4

Table 4: Rubric for EQ 1

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p><b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the programme is meeting a few of the management criteria but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped and unlikely to effectively support challenge-led R&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the programme is meeting several of the management criteria but, overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the programme is meeting most of the management criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&amp;I.</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the programme is meeting almost all of the management criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting challenge-led R&amp;I and put the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&amp;I for development impact.</p>

Table 5: Rubric for EQ 2

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p><b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the capacity strengthening criteria but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped and unlikely to support effective R&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the capacity strengthening criteria but, overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to support effective R&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support R&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK.</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the capacity strengthening criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting R&amp;I capacity strengthening in LMICs and the UK, and put the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.</p>

Table 6: Rubric for EQ 3

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p><b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that award processes are efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but, overall, structures and processes are nascent or underdeveloped to meet the criteria.</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that award processes are meeting the criteria – efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money – but, overall, structures and processes require further strengthening to meet the criteria effectively.</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria and that, overall, structures and processes effectively support efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners.</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria and that, overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners, and put the award at the leading edge of practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.</p>

Table 7: Rubric for EQ 4

Evidence of alignment/misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award			
<p><b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the award has made some progress to its ToC but, overall, progress is at an early stage (reflect on whether this is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the award is progressing along its ToC and meeting early milestones, but further efforts are needed to build up progress to meet as anticipated in the ToC and to ensure that it is well supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated and adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19, and that progress is well supported (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why).</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC, is meeting milestones and adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19, and that progress is well supported and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.</p>

Updated 03.02.2021

### **Annex 2d: Award write-up**

No award level write ups were used in the Four Nations process evaluation. See below for programme level write ups.

## Annex 2e: Programme write-up

Programme write-ups were set out at the funding body level – one for SFC Council, one for Research England, and one for DfENI and HEFCW together.

# PROGRAMME INFORMATION

<b>Programme name / Funding Call name</b>
<b>If applicable, any unique BEIS ID for the programme</b>
<b>Programme Manager name</b>
<b>Delivery Partner</b>
<b>Additional info on Prog Management (if required)</b>
<b>Start - end dates</b>
<b>Focus country / region</b>
<b>Total budget</b>
<b>Types of award funded (e.g. research grant, training grant, fellowship, networking grant)</b>
<b>Summary of Programme</b> <i>Brief (1 paragraph) summary of programme and key objectives, including countries of focus and intended impacts</i>

## CASE INFORMATION

<b>List of documents and award write-ups reviewed for this case</b>
<b>Unique IDs of interviewees (from central interview log – column A)</b>
<b>Any data or methodological limitations? (E.g. only one interview conducted; suspicion of bias in interviews; key document gaps)</b>

Overview of the programme and portfolio features and stats

- **Objectives of the programme**
- **Timeline for the programme**
- **Portfolio analysis –how many awards, value of awards, spread across challenge areas, spread of countries**
- **Judgement on the balance in the portfolio against the programme objectives, and challenge led R&I with development impact**


EQ 1: To what extent are structures and processes in place to support challenge-led R&I with development impact, within signature investment awards and programmes?

<p><b>ODA R&amp;I management</b> (at programme and award level):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scoping and framing of challenge for relevance and coherence</li> <li>• ToC and shared vision</li> <li>• Commissioning and selection of portfolio to deliver against challenge</li> <li>• Capacity needs assessed and identified</li> <li>• Risk factors identified and mitigated</li> <li>• Hands-on programme management (e.g. cohort-building; aggregate level R&amp;I into use)</li> <li>• Flexibility to respond to events and emergencies, e.g. Covid-19</li> <li>• Addressing barriers to interdisciplinary working</li> <li>• Promoting coherence between awards</li> <li>• Facilitating learning for adaptation and legacy</li> <li>• M&amp;E and regular reporting</li> </ul>	<p><b>ODA R&amp;I excellence in design and implementation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relevance + coherence in design and delivery</li> <li>• Strategic/holistic/system lens, including interdisciplinarity</li> <li>• Negative consequences mitigated and a ‘do no harm’ approach</li> <li>• Gender responsiveness and poverty addressed in design and processes</li> <li>• Inclusiveness (SEDI) addressed within design and research processes</li> <li>• Capacity needs identified and assessed</li> <li>• Fairness in engagement with local research ecosystems/stakeholder engagement</li> </ul>
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Programme Analysis Table: General

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Positioning for use in design and delivery ('fit for purpose' engagement and dissemination strategies; relationship building; best platforms for outputs for the target audience and users)</li> </ul>		
<b>Summary of Evidence against each criteria, drawn from the sources.</b>		<b>Combined Sources</b> (interview number / document name / Award write up)		
<b>Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award</b>				
<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the programme is meeting a few of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to effectively support challenge-led R&I	<b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the programme is meeting several of the management criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to effectively support challenge-led R&I.	<b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the programme is meeting most of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes effectively support challenge-led R&I	<b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the programme is meeting almost all of the management criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting challenge-led R&I and puts the award at the cutting edge of managing challenge R&I for development impact.

Programme Analysis Table: General

<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> (please give details on why this award is ‘beginning’, ‘developing’, ‘good’ or ‘exemplary’, drawing on the evidence presented above):
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> (red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)
<b>Reasons why the award structures and processes are in place to the extent observed</b> (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)

EQ 2: To what extent are structures and processes in place to strengthen R&I capacity in LMICs and the UK?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Clear theory of change for how capacity development contributes to the desired programme outcomes</li> <li>▪ Analysis/understanding of local R&amp;I ecosystems and capacity needs</li> <li>▪ Capacity support that aligns with good practice provided to individuals, organisations and/or R&amp;I infrastructure</li> <li>▪ Fairness considerations integrated</li> </ul>				
<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)		<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)		
<b>Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award?</b>				
<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the award is meeting a few of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed and unlikely to support	<b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the award is meeting several of the capacity strengthening criteria, but overall, structures and processes still need further strengthening to	<b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting most of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and	<b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting almost all of the capacity strengthening criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting R&I capacity

Programme Analysis Table: General

	effective R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	support effective R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	processes effectively support R&I capacity strengthening, in LMICs and the UK	strengthening, in LMICs and the UK, and puts the award at the leading edge of capacity strengthening practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.
<b>Rationale for this judgement</b> ( <i>please give details on why this award is 'beginning', 'developing', 'good' or 'exemplary', drawing on the evidence presented above:</i>				
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> ( <i>red, amber or green – see instructions above for details</i> )				
<b>Reasons why the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed</b> (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)				

EQ 3: To what extent are processes [to support challenge-led research] efficiently implemented, are they proportionate for UK and LMIC stakeholders, timely and do they offer value for money?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Efficiency and timeliness of processes</li> <li>▪ Proportionality for size of investment</li> <li>▪ Fairness for partners</li> <li>▪ Read across to VfM rubrics</li> </ul>					
<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)			<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)		
<b>Evidence of alignment / misalignment with structures and processes that could be expected in a challenge programme/award</b>					
<b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b>	<b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that award processes are	<b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that award processes are	<b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and	<b>Exemplary:</b> There are several indications that the award is meeting the criteria, and that overall, structures and processes are highly effective at supporting efficiency,	

Programme Analysis Table: General

	efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but overall, structures and processes are nascent or under-developed to meet the criteria.	meeting the criteria - efficient, proportionate, fair and offer potential for value for money, but overall, structures and processes require further strengthening to meet the criteria effectively.	that overall, structures and processes effectively support efficiency, timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners.	timeliness, proportionality and fairness for partners, and put the award at the leading edge of practice with LMIC partners and UK teams.
<p><b>Rationale for this judgement</b> (please give details on why this award is ‘beginning’, ‘developing’, ‘good’ or ‘exemplary’, drawing on the evidence presented above):</p>				
<p><b>Confidence in evidence:</b> (red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</p>				
<p><b>Reasons why the structures and processes are in place to the extent observed</b> (e.g. requirements of the award proposal process; encouragement and support from programme managers; personal experience in the field among the research team)</p>				

EQ 4: To what extent have the signature programmes made early progress towards their desired outcomes /impacts, and what evidence exists of these?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Results and outcomes from programme ToCs; examples of how these have been met</li> <li>▪ Expected progress</li> <li>▪ Impact of and adaptation to Covid-19 on progress</li> <li>▪ Adaptation to unintended outcomes (positive and negative)</li> </ul>	
<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)	<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)

Programme Analysis Table: General

<p><b>Not enough evidence to make a judgement</b></p>	<p><b>Beginning:</b> There are some indications that the award has made some progress to its ToC but overall, progress is at an early stage (reflect on whether this is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)</p>	<p><b>Developing:</b> There are some indications that the award is progressing along its ToC and meeting early milestones, but further efforts are needed to build up progress to meet as anticipated in the ToC, and ensure that it is well-supported and adaptive (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)</p>	<p><b>Good:</b> There are several indications that the award is progressing well along its ToC, is meeting milestones as anticipated, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported (reflect on whether progress is as expected or faster/slower than expected, and why)</p>	<p><b>Exemplary:</b> There are indications that the award is surpassing expectations of progress along its ToC - is meeting milestones, adapting well to unanticipated outcomes and Covid-19 - and that progress is well-supported - and puts the award at the leading edge of performance.</p>
<p><b>Rationale for this judgement</b> <i>(please give details on why this award is ‘beginning’, ‘developing’, ‘good’ or ‘exemplary’, drawing on the evidence presented above):</i></p>				
<p><b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i></p>				
<p><b>Reasons why progress is being made to the extent observed</b></p>				

EQ 5: What particular features of award and programme processes have made a difference in positioning the signature investments for overcoming barriers and achieving their desired outcomes, in different contexts? (Context, causal factors)

Contextual factors shaping the interventions and outcomes:

- Maturity of the field
- Research capacity strengthening
- Risk in the research environment (i.e. organisational contexts' support for research)
- Risks in political environment (i.e. under-developed policy environment, unstable political context, local recognition of the issues and LMIC communities themselves)
- Risks in data environment (i.e. data availability and agreement on measures)
- Examples of success factors

**PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO RUBRICS FOR THIS EQ.**

Programme Analysis Table: General

Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)	Source (interview number / document name)
<b>Overall assessment of the features that have made a difference and identification of success factors</b>	
<b>Reasons <i>why</i> progress is being made to the extent observed</b>	
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>	

EQ 6. What can be learned about the additionality (uniqueness) of GCRF funding from:

- how the signature investments have adapted their approach in response to covid-19
- the impact of the 2021 funding cuts on the signature investments?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Extent to which GCRF funding is instrumental for achieving the outcomes or can be substituted</li> <li>▪ Additionality of knowledge funded by GCRF and whether the equivalent could be secured through other sources in same time frame/quality etc (as defined in the VfM rubric)</li> <li>▪ Interventions within awards and programmes that rely on GCRF funding</li> <li>▪ Other aspects that GCRF funding is instrumental for</li> </ul> <p><b>PLEASE NOTE THAT THERE ARE NO RUBRICS FOR THIS EQ.</b></p>	
Evidence (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)	Source (interview number / document name)

Programme Analysis Table: General

<b>Overall assessment of how instrumental GCRF funding is for achieving the outcomes</b>	
<b>Reasons <i>why this is so</i></b>	
<b>Confidence in evidence:</b> <i>(red, amber or green – see instructions above for details)</i>	

EQ 7: What lessons can inform improvements in the future delivery of the signature investments & promote learning across GCRF?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Capture specific insights and lessons from the award that stand out as exemplary practice, strong processes, outcomes and results that can be learned from etc. success factors, reasons why</li> <li>▪ Capture also specific areas for improvement in the award, areas of under-performance and reasons why</li> </ul>	
<b>Evidence</b> (include verbatim quotes where possible. Insert new rows if needed)	<b>Source</b> (interview number / document name)
<b>Summary:</b>	

# Overall summary

**Overall summary of the judgements for the Programme:**

- Highlight areas of strength and good/exemplary performance; how overcome challenges, success factors
- Areas for improvement , factors that have inhibited better performance
- Reflect on progress along the GCRF ToC

(300-500 words max)



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