

# ESRC's Researchfish submissions and outputs

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## Introduction

The ESRC, along with six of the other councils that now form part of UK Research and Innovation, ask our principal investigators (PIs) and students to tell us about the outputs, outcomes and impacts of the research and investments we fund. We have asked our researchers to do this each year since 2014, and our students since 2016.

The system we use to do this is called Researchfish. There are 16 different outputs that award holders can associate with their awards. There are also two additional reports we ask to be completed, the key findings and narrative impact reports. Once award holders have associated their outputs with their awards and completed their reports, they 'submit' their return to us.

We use the data provided for variety of purposes. It is published on the [Gateway to Research](#) website where it is available to download and allows anyone to view the outcomes of the research we fund. We use it to inform stakeholders about the outputs our research is generating and to make the case to government for the continued public investment in social science research. We also use it to develop case studies to highlight the outcomes and impact of our research. This means that it's very important that submissions are completed fully and accurately.

This report looks at the most recently submitted data for all ESRC awards that have been submitted in Researchfish. The focus of this analysis is the data submitted by PIs only, as it is right to treat studentships as a distinct dataset. The report will begin by setting out our compliance rates. Following this it will summarise the outputs and outcomes that have been reported to us.

## ESRC compliance

All PIs are required to make an annual Researchfish submission. If they do not, they are ineligible to apply for funding until a submission is made. The compliance rate is the percentage of applicants expected to submit who actually did. We use response codes to indicate whether a submission is required. A response code one means that a PI is still a member of staff at the award's host Research Organisation (RO), and so both the PI and RO are responsible for ensuring a submission is made. Awards are changed to a code four once a PI leaves the RO, after which it is only the PI who is responsible for the submission.<sup>1</sup>

The first point to make from our compliance figures is that the vast majority of our PIs made a submission in both 2017 and 2018. In 2017 the compliance rate was 92% and this rose to 94% in 2018 (see Figure 1). We appreciate the effort taken to completing this and thank our award holders and research office staff for their hard work in helping us achieve such a high compliance rate. The compliance rate for response code one awards was 98% in both years, which is significantly higher than the response code 4 rate, which was 74% in 2017 and 83%

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<sup>1</sup> Response code 2 means that a one year exemption has been granted, code three means a submission is no longer required, and code 5 means that a submission is optional. These awards are excluded from this section of the analysis

in 2018. Among other factors, this is a reflection of the role staff in RO research offices play in ensuring that submissions are made. This support is acknowledged and appreciated.

The code 4 compliance rate improved by 9% between 2017 and 2018, but remains 11 points behind the code one compliance rate. It is encouraging that it has improved, but there is also scope to improve these figures further.

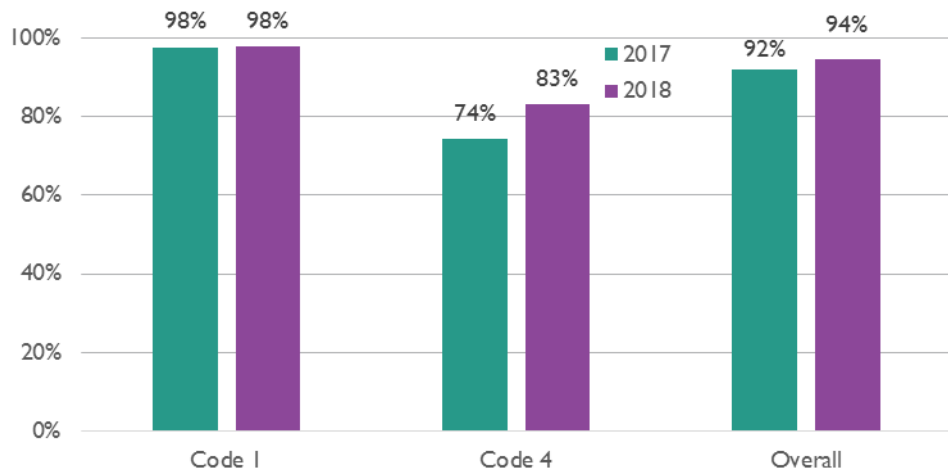


Figure 1. ESRC final compliance rate in 2017 and 2018

The lower compliance rate for code four awards mean that these awards represent the majority (70%) of noncompliant awards, despite making up only 23% of all awards required to submit (see Figure 2).

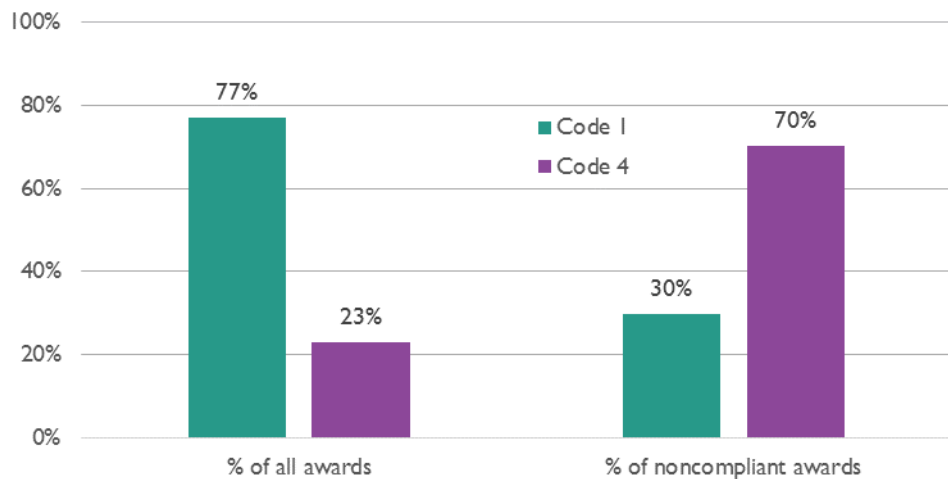


Figure 2. Percentage of all awards that are code one or four and percentage of non-compliant awards that are code one or four

Unsurprisingly, code four awards are much older than code one awards. In 2018, virtually all code four awards have ended, whereas 30% of code one awards are live. For closed awards, there has been 54 months since the average code four award ended, but only 33 months since the average code one award ended.

The chances of a code four award being submitted varies depending on the age of the award, with recently ended code 4 awards more likely to submit than older code four awards (see Figure 3). However the same is not true for code one awards, with the

submission rate high regardless of the age of the award. Given that the code 4 compliance rate for awards ending in 2017 is still 14 points lower than for the code one rate, this means that it isn't just the age of code four awards that explains the lower compliance rates.

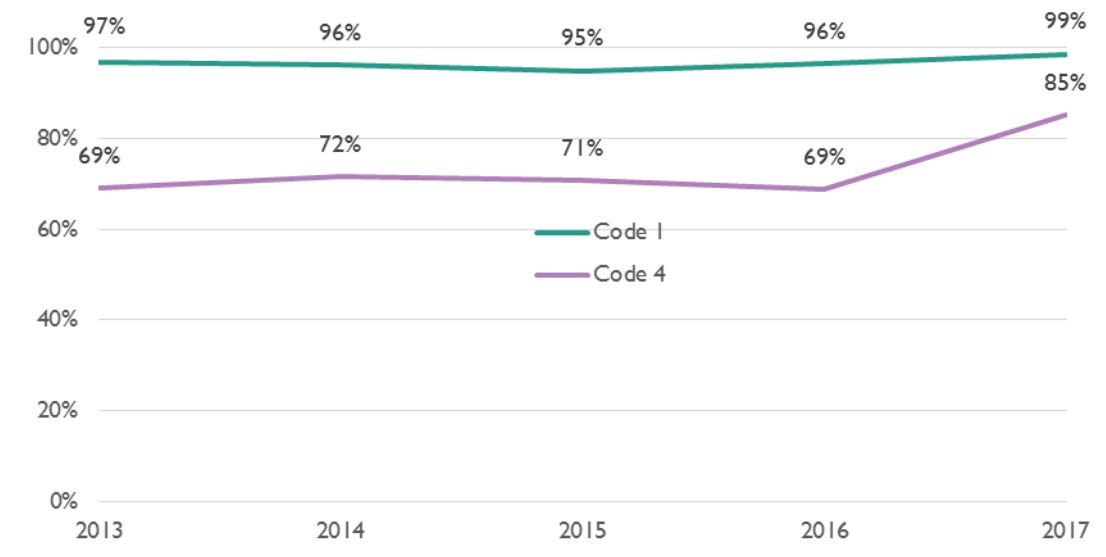


Figure 3. Compliance rate in 2018 by award end year and response code

The Sankey diagram in Figure 4 illustrates the submission statuses of awards across the 2017 and 2018 submission periods, clearly demonstrating that most awards were submitted in both years. A small but significant number of noncompliant awards in 2017 went on to be submitted in 2018, but most were noncompliant again or were closed by us before the 2018 submission period began. These will remain sanctioned until a submission is made. Half of awards not submitted in 2018 were submitted in 2017.

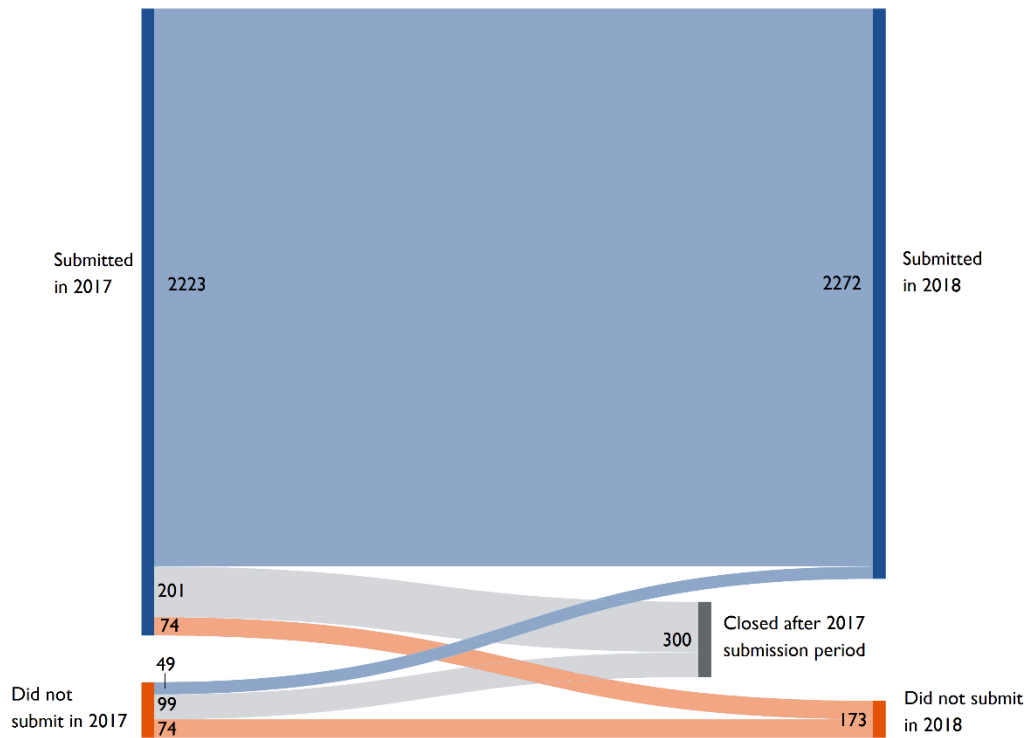


Figure 4. Status of 2017 response code one and four awards across the 2017 and 2018 submission periods. To simplify, this excludes awards that were code two in either submission period and new awards added to Researchfish after the 2017 submission period

## Outputs and outcomes reported

By the 2018 submission period, we had had over 176,000 outputs submitted to the ESRC. As can be seen from Figure 5, nearly half (48%) of these are publications and most are either publications or engagement activities (84%). There are a relatively small, but significant, number of other output types reported.

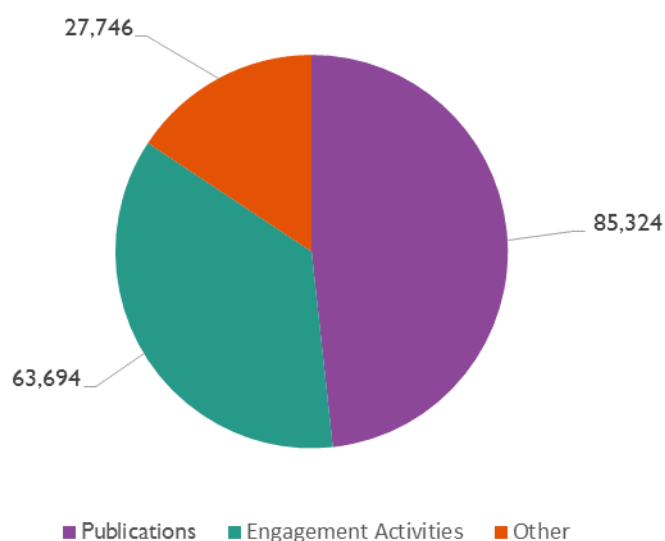


Figure 5. Number of instances of each output type

The number of 'other' outputs are listed in Figure 6. The most common is influences on policy and practice. There are also significant numbers of awards and recognitions, further funding, and collaborations and partnerships. There are very few products and interventions, IP or spin outs. It is not unsurprising that social scientists report more outputs related to the exchange of knowledge, rather than physical products. We would expect more research datasets & models and research materials to be reported, and will work with our community to improve reporting rates of these.

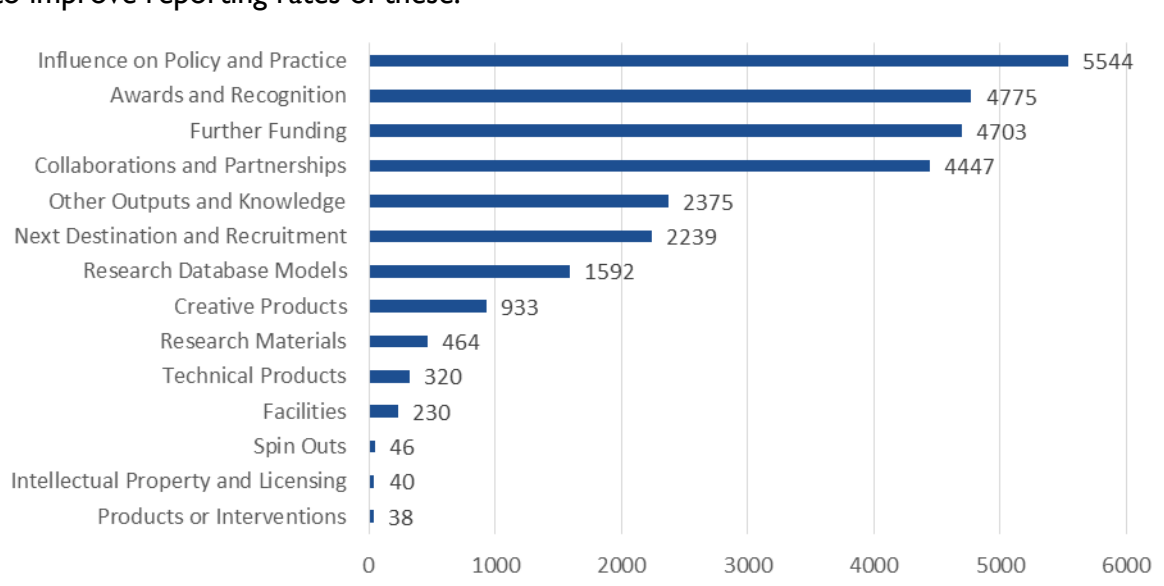


Figure 6. Number of outputs reported, excluding publications and engagement activities

Unsurprisingly, given the volume of outputs reported, most awards report at least one publication, and a majority report an engagement activity. While policy influence is the most common 'other' output, it is reported by fewer awards than collaborations or further funding.

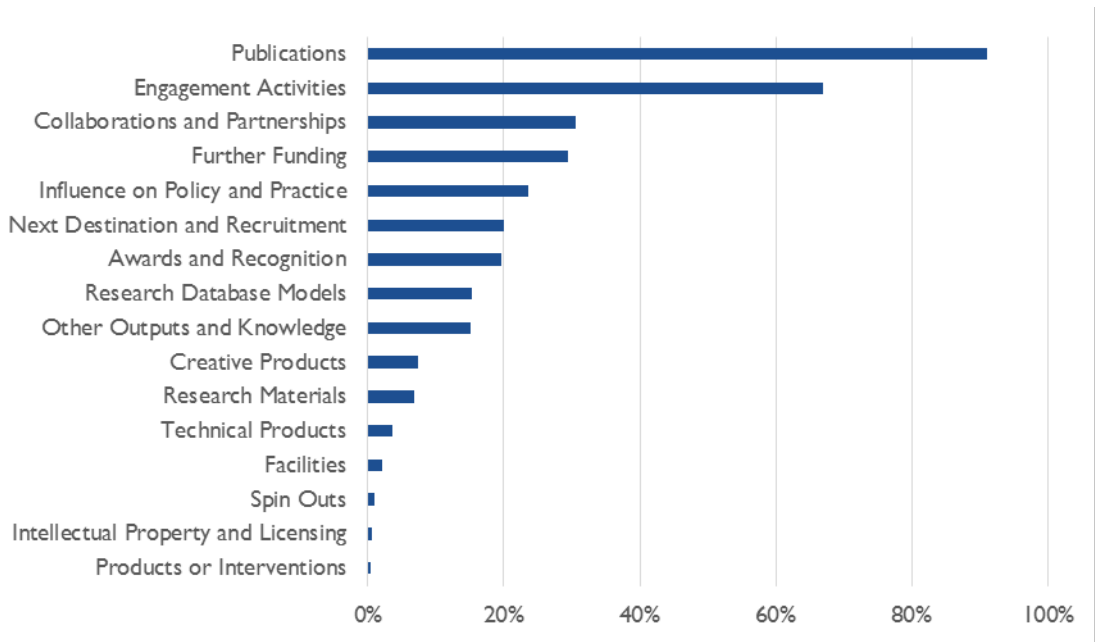


Figure 7. Percent of awards reporting each output type

The median number of output types reported is 2, with a mean of 2.7. As can be seen from Figure 8, there are a small number of awards reporting a high number of output types, but none reporting more than ten types.

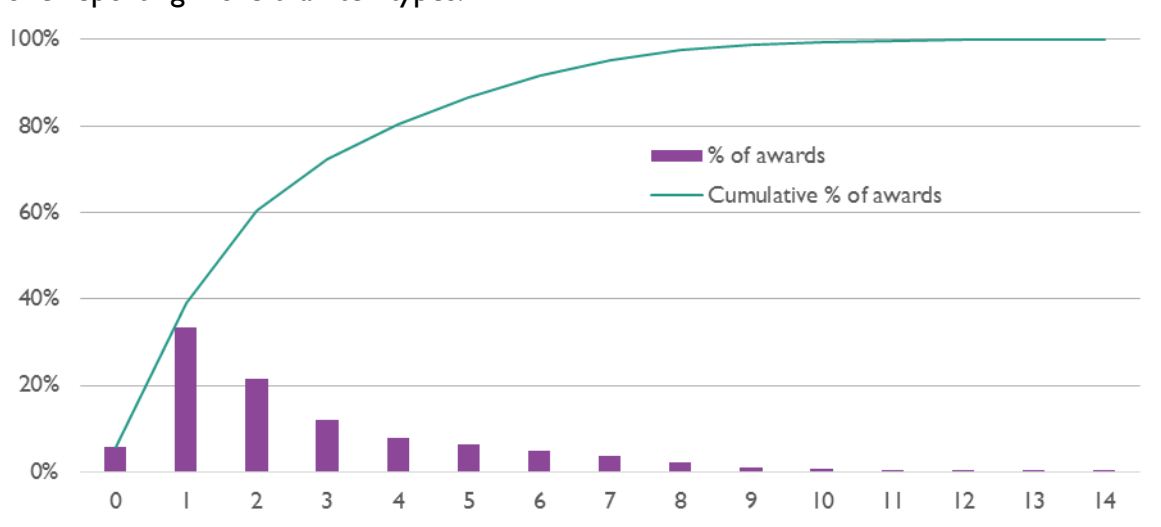


Figure 8. Percentage of awards reporting X number of output types.

For awards reporting engagement activities, the mean number reported is 19 (median of six). This compares to a mean of 16 (median of five) publications, for awards which report publications. When engagement activities are reported, this is done so in higher numbers than publications. Publications is the most common output type because it is reported by more awards.

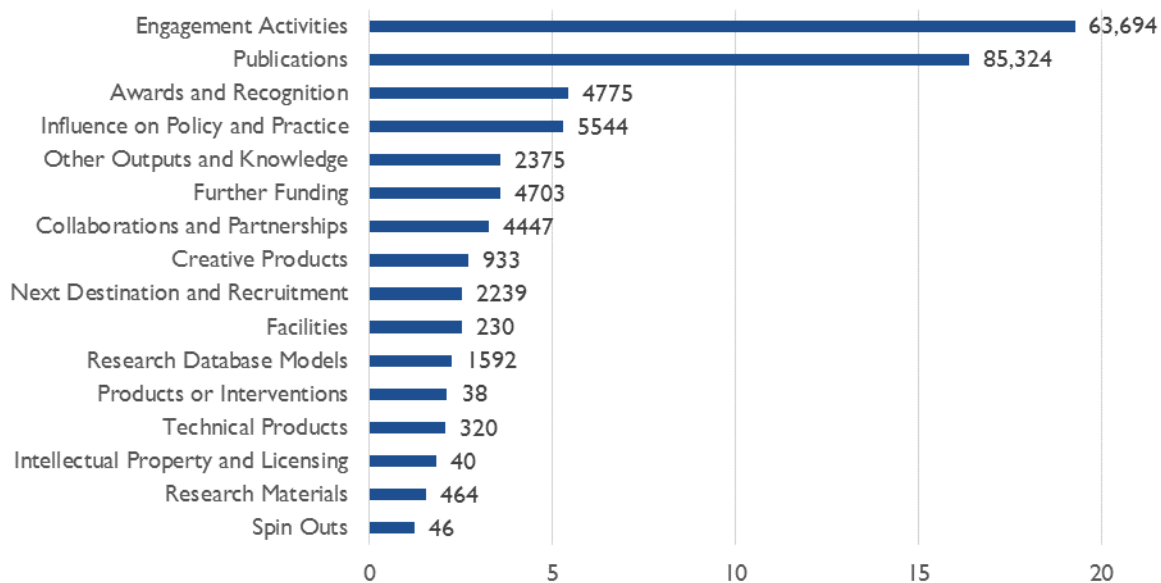


Figure 9. Mean number of outputs, by output type, for awards reporting at least one instance of that output type. Labelled with total number of outputs reported.

There are a variety of different possible combinations of output types that have been submitted to us, and this is illustrated in Figure 10. The most common combination is the reporting of publications, engagement activities and at least one other output type. This is reported by 2,034 awards, and is followed by the reporting of just publications (1,805 awards) and publications and engagement activities (925 awards).

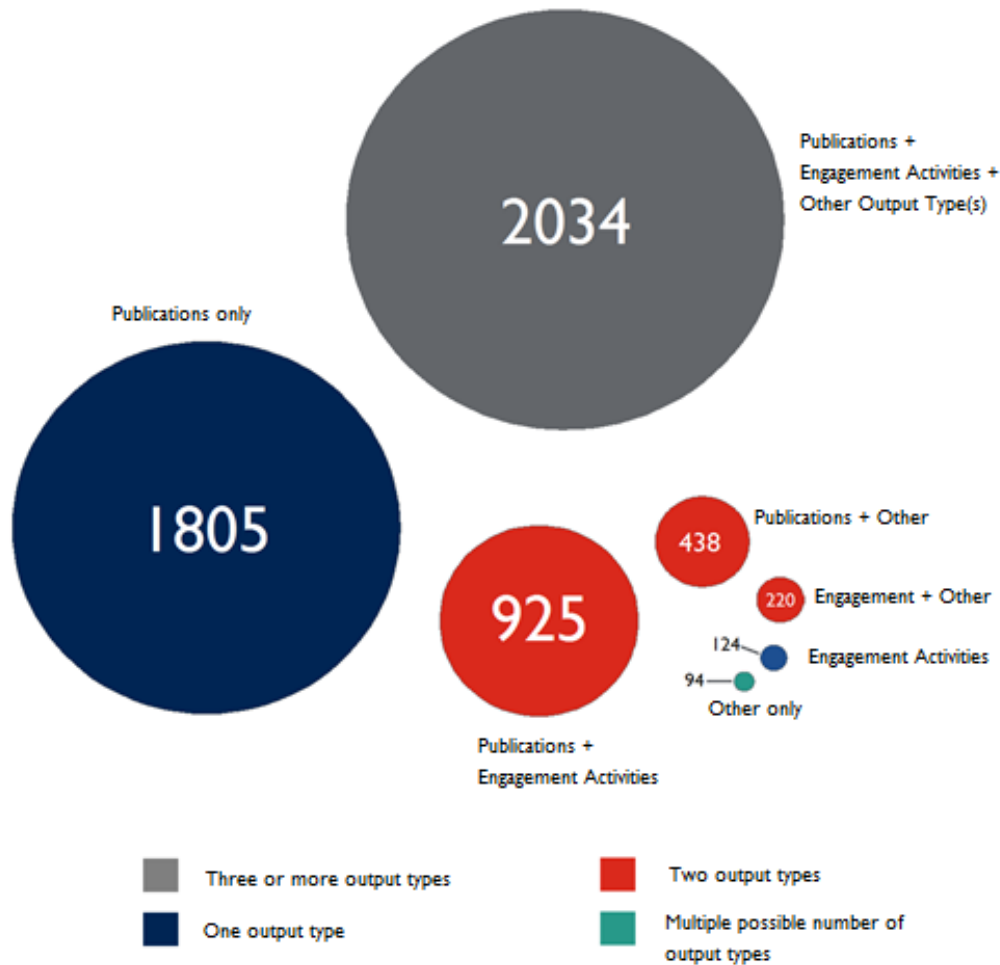


Figure 10. Number of awards reporting different combinations of outputs ('Other' outputs are defined as outputs other than publications and engagement activities).

## Conclusion

This report has given an overview of ESRC's Researchfish data. Each year, nearly all of our PIs complete their submission. However the rate is significantly lower for response code 4 awards than it is for response code one awards. The code four compliance rate is not just lower because these awards are older than code one awards. It is also likely to be a reflection of the role RO research office staff play in ensuring code one compliance, and there may be other factors as well. The challenge of keeping in contact with former PIs remains, but given that some PIs made a submission in one submission period but not the other, this means it cannot only be a case of incorrect or missing contact details.

It is a concern that some researchers who made a submission in 2017 did not make one in 2018, and this should be investigated as to why this is the case. Conversely, it is encouraging that some who did not submit in 2017 did make a submission in 2018, demonstrating that it is possible to reach those who have previously been noncompliant.

Just under half of the outputs submitted to us are publications, and the majority are either publications or engagement activities. As well as these two outputs, four other outputs appear to be the focus of our community – at least in terms of the volume submitted.



These are influences on policy and practice, awards and recognitions, collaborations and partnerships, and further funding. As we have high volumes of these outputs submitted, our focus will now be on the quality of the data associated with these outputs.

Further investigation is required to identify why our research databases & models and research materials outputs appear to be reported in smaller numbers than expected. Our researchers have an excellent record of producing data and we would expect this to be reflected in our Researchfish submissions.

It is clear that our PIs are reporting a range of different outputs. Many report a variety of output types, while many others only report publications. A few don't report any outputs at all. Further investigation is needed to understand the differences in reporting and to further our understanding of the research we fund.