



UK Research
and Innovation

Evaluation of the UKRI Cross Research Council Responsive Mode Pilot Scheme

March 2025



Introduction

As part of [UK Research and Innovation's Corporate Plan \(2022-25\)](#) and its dedication to breaking down silos in interdisciplinary research, UKRI has implemented an innovative £65 million Cross Research Council Responsive Mode (CRCRM) pilot scheme. The CRCRM scheme is a pioneering initiative designed to nurture emerging interdisciplinary research by bridging diverse fields and will address a gap in UKRI's current provision identified by the 2016 Nurse Review and the 2022 Grant Review by supporting research that covers disciplines from two or more of our seven research councils.

This scheme complements the existing council responsive mode schemes and UKRI strategic funding opportunities. It will enhance knowledge, the economy, and societal impact by unlocking new research, new approaches or new methods that would not emerge from established disciplinary thinking.

UKRI is committed to rigorous evaluation of all our key programmes, and we are using the two pilot rounds to learn about the effectiveness of the novel assessment approach we are adopting.

We are running an evaluation of the CRCRM application and assessment process alongside the pilot scheme which aims to:

1. Understand if and how the scheme, and its processes are of high quality, are efficient and effective in the assessment of IDR applications across all disciplines to inform best practice and approaches for the support of IDR moving forward
2. Understand how and to what extent the scheme's processes have enabled the effective assessment and funding of new interdisciplinary research and impacted perceptions of IDR support in the UK funding landscape.
3. Understand the impact of the scheme on the nature of the applications and the portfolio of awards supported through the scheme, specifically focused on
 - i. the extent to which new research and people are being supported and how they differ from that funded by other UKRI schemes, to inform best practice and approach for supporting IDR moving forward
 - ii. the extent to which and how the research and innovation (R&I) communities' perceptions and behaviours have changed, with respect to funding routes for IDR
 - iii. how the outcomes and impact of the IDR funded differ (if at all) from other responsive mode schemes

Questions that the evaluation aims to address are listed in [Annex 1 - Evaluation Aims - Specific Questions](#).

Evaluation Objectives

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

1. Enable UKRI to improve processes for a second round of scheme (particularly in terms of efficiency and user experience).
2. Inform evidence-based decisions as to the success and value of this scheme and improve future strategic approaches to funding IDR.
3. Evidence to what extent, and how, the new process effectively assesses new interdisciplinary research that may struggle to find a home or be assessed fairly through existing responsive mode schemes.
4. Inform improvements for the CRCRM mechanisms and responsive mode schemes more generally on supporting IDR work.
5. Demonstrate our commitment to evolving what we do and how we do it to create the best funding landscape for the R&I community we support.

Evaluation Workstreams (to April 2026)

[UKRI Interdisciplinary Responsive Mode \(IRM\) Team](#), responsible for the management of the CRCRM scheme, will manage the collection and management of scheme data and information and have run surveys to capture feedback from applicants and IAC members on the round 1 call. UKRI will lead on the governance and oversight of the evaluation workstreams.

[The Innovation and Research Caucus \(IRC\)](#) funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Innovate UK, aims to increase the use of robust evidence and insights in UKRI strategies and investments, as well as undertaking a co-produced programme of research. The IRC will be investigating the CRCRM scheme to understand the breadth and diversity of disciplinary participation, quality, and alignment of applications with funding objectives in order to identify potential modifications to the funding call and assessment process.

[Technopolis Ltd](#) were awarded a contract by UKRI to conduct an independent evaluation of the appropriateness and effectiveness of the pilot scheme. This includes the volume and quality of demand generated across the research community by the scheme and the extent to which the scheme has filled a gap in UKRI's funding landscape. Technopolis will build on the surveys conducted by UKRI for round 1 and will conduct more in-depth interviews across the breadth of stakeholders involved in the scheme.

The evidence generated and lessons learned from the evaluation will inform future IDR funding opportunities and assessment processes. Once the evaluation has concluded, a final evaluation report bringing together the different components will be published by UKRI.

Annex 1: Evaluation Aims – Specific Questions

The three aims of the evaluation have a specific set of questions to guide the evaluation.

Aim 1: Understand if and how the scheme, and its processes are of high quality, are efficient and effective in the assessment of IDR applications across all disciplines to inform best practice and approaches for the support of IDR moving forward

- a) How well has the programme addressed common challenges¹ in the assessment of interdisciplinary research? What further challenges related to doing and assessing IDR have surfaced as part of the evaluation of the pilot scheme? To what extent do they align with challenges identified in the literature?
- b) Has this been done efficiently, in a manner that optimises the use of resource in UKRI and within ROs?
- c) Was the resource allocated to this scheme sufficient for its delivery?
- d) Are the assessment processes understood and regarded as credible, internally and externally?
- e) Did we provide effective, high-quality communications and ‘user experience’ for applicants, assessors, UKRI staff, broader research community?
- f) How effective was the process of establishing the Interdisciplinary Assessment College (IAC)? Did the applications received cover the breadth of disciplines and expertise needed to build a diverse and effective IAC?
- g) Was the training for IAC members sufficient? What motivated IAC applicants to apply/participate?
- h) How effective was the Assessment College approach? How could this be improved? What factors affect assessments of interdisciplinarity? Are there any discernible patterns to assessments based on assessor characteristics? To the extent that these (a) exist and (b) appear to influence outcomes, what measures can be suggested to mitigate issues?
- i) Did we have the suitable breadth of expertise in IAC for the assessment of proposals? How could this be improved? What are the characteristics of the pool of assessors and how do these align/differ from the pool of applicants/applications?
- j) Does the assessment process allow for all voices in the room to be heard? Did panel discussions facilitate balanced integration and tensioning of cross-disciplinary perspectives?

¹ The [2015 Nurse Review](#) and the [2022 Grant Review](#) identified a potential gap in UKRI funding for projects that significantly span the remits of different research council disciplines and the need to identify a ‘home’ research council which disincentivises IDR. Difficulties in fairly assessing interdisciplinary research through traditional peer review were also noted.

There is a perception among researchers and strategic leaders in higher education institutions (HEIs) that reviewers’ single-disciplinary focus makes IDR less likely to be funded. Feedback from UKRI’s existing cross council mechanism for supporting research that covers more than 1 council remit, [the Cross Council Remit Agreement](#), suggests that applications receive a ‘death by a thousand cuts’ in external peer review because the proposals are viewed through the lens of a single research discipline and the excitement of the whole project is lost.

- k) What does the college think and feel about the process and its value?
- l) How do applicants think and feel about the provision, quality and value of feedback process and its value?
- m) How effective was the partial randomisation process? How was it viewed by the college members on the panels? How was it viewed by the applicants?
- n) What level of support did applicants receive from host organisations in helping them navigate the interdisciplinary terminology in the call text (e.g. what is meant by reciprocity and integration), in developing applications, and in facilitating conversations between interdisciplinary researchers? How clear was the guidance in enabling host organisations to support applicants in developing applications, with respect to eligibility, costings, scope, etc.

Aim 2: Understand how and to what extent the scheme's processes have enabled the effective assessment and funding of new interdisciplinary research and impacted perceptions of IDR support in the UK funding landscape.

- a) To what extent, if at all, has the programme funded what we intended- high quality research, transformative and well-integrated interdisciplinary research ideas? To what extent does the funded/fundable research appear to be interdisciplinary, as compared to the unfundable research? What are the dimensions of interdisciplinarity (e.g. in the project and in the team) and how do proposals suggest they will be integrated?
- b) How and to what extent are the projects distinctive and complementary to interdisciplinary research funded through individual Council Responsive Mode?
- c) How diverse is the subject breadth– does the funded portfolio span a range of research areas/ disciplines/ councils (some limitations here given size of scheme, the 'unfunded' portfolio will be important indicator in round one)?
- d) What is the nature of collaborations in awards? Do they contain a range of different types of collaborations including cross-institutional and international? How is collaboration being proposed to underpin IDR? What indicators demonstrate that collaboration serves IDR goals and is not occurring in silos (for example)? What impact does the diversity of organisations involved in the proposed projects have on assessments of interdisciplinarity (e.g. interdisciplinarity scores) and final outcomes? Does having more organisations involved positively affect outcomes?
- e) Does funding span a range of career stages, diversity on four protected characteristics (sex, age, ethnicity, disability)?
- f) Does funding span a range of organisations – the diversity of organisations involved (as lead and co-investigators)?

Aim 3: Understand the impact of the scheme on the nature of the applications and the portfolio of awards supported through the scheme, specifically focused on:

The extent to which new research and people are being supported and how they differ from that funded by other UKRI schemes, to inform best practice and approach for supporting IDR moving forward.

The extent to which and how the research and innovation (R&I) communities' perceptions and behaviours have changed, with respect to funding routes for IDR.

How the outcomes and impact of the IDR funded differ (if at all) from other responsive mode schemes.

- a) To what extent is the programme incentivising, facilitating, and reducing barriers to IDR? What barriers does this analysis suggest might exist to meaningful IDR?
- b) To what extent does the research supported differ for other responsive mode schemes?
- c) Where the scheme has met its goals/ambitions, what conditions/factors seem to have enabled that?
- d) Where the scheme hasn't met its goals/ambitions, what conditions/factors have held it back?
- e) What is the nature of the cross-disciplinary research challenges being tackled?
- f) To what extent has this scheme enabled the research community to change their approaches to developing IDR proposals and creating innovative ways of thinking?
- g) What should we do the same/ differently going forwards?