



UK Research
and Innovation

Evaluation of the Cross Research Council Responsive Mode Pilot Scheme

Summary Report



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CRCRM at a glance

The Cross-Research Council Responsive Mode (CRCRM) pilot scheme was launched by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) in May 2023, with a budget of £65 million, aimed at enhancing support for interdisciplinary research (IDR). The overarching objectives of the CRCRM pilot included:

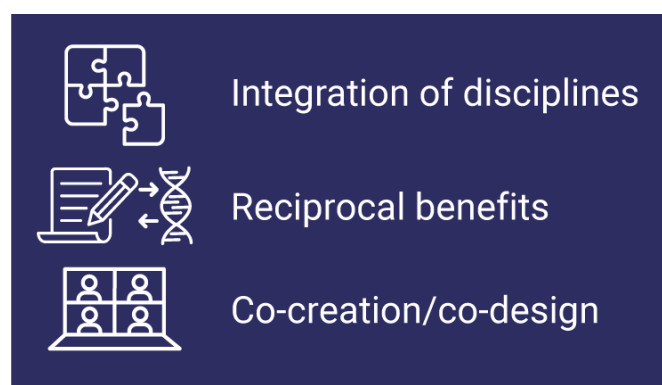
- funding novel IDR ideas
- supporting breakthrough projects that incorporate new methodologies and interdisciplinary combinations
- understanding the demand for such funding within the research community
- testing and refining processes for assessing IDR

The CRCRM pilot scheme was a strategic effort by UKRI to foster IDR by providing a dedicated funding mechanism that addressed the unique challenges faced by IDR applications:

- Challenge 1: IDR applications do not always fit the remit of individual UKRI councils which are organised on a disciplinary basis. While a cross-research council mechanism exists, currently at least 51% of an application needs to be within the remit of one council, which is not always possible.
- Challenge 2: IDR applications are often reviewed from the perspective of individual disciplines which means they often fall between the “cracks” of the individual disciplines involved in the proposed project.

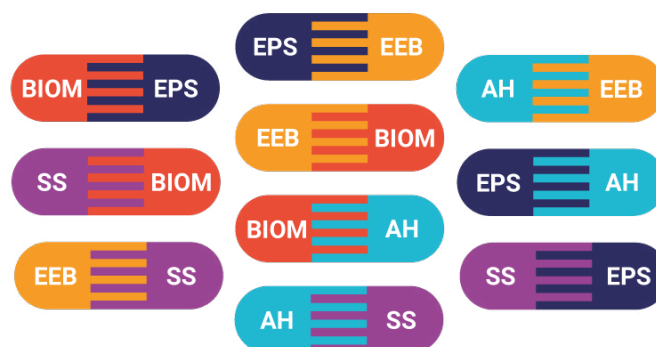
CRCRM supported applicant-led research projects that spanned the remit of at least two research councils to complement UKRI's existing responsive-mode opportunities. It funded IDR applications that demonstrate integration, reciprocal benefits and co-creation/co-design between the disciplines involved.

What excellent interdisciplinary research looks like



The scheme followed a two-stage process, with an outline application stage followed by a full application stage for applicants who were successful at the outline stage. Applications at both stages were assessed by assessment panels spanning interdisciplinary interfaces across key research domains as shown in the infographic.

10x interdisciplinary interfaces



Based on 5x key research domains

- EPS** Engineering and Physical Sciences
- EEB** Earth, Environment and Biological Sciences
- BIOM** Biomedical and Health
- AH** Arts and Humanities
- SS** Social sciences

Source: UKRI

The CRCRM evaluation

The CRCRM pilot scheme was evaluated through a collaboration between UKRI and two independent contractors, Technopolis and the Innovation Research Caucus (IRC) between June 2024 and May 2026.

The evaluation of the CRCRM pilot aimed to assess the scheme's effectiveness and appropriateness in funding IDR projects. The primary aims of the evaluation were to:

- understand the demand for the CRCRM scheme within the research community
- determine whether it effectively fills a funding gap
- to generate insights that could inform future interdisciplinary funding opportunities and assessment processes

Evaluation themes

The evaluation focused on understanding:

- the quality and efficiency of the scheme's processes in assessing IDR applications
- the impact of these processes on the portfolio of funded projects
- the overall effect of the scheme on the research community's perceptions and behaviours regarding IDR funding routes

Evaluation Findings

The evaluation found that the CRCRM pilot successfully met its objectives:



CRCRM provided a unique opportunity to support research that previously had not been supported by UKRI funding mechanisms



CRCRM developed assessment innovations and processes that are high-quality, efficient and effective in the assessment of IDR applications

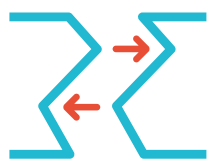


CRCRM applications and projects have higher interdisciplinarity and novelty compared to other UKRI interdisciplinary research funding schemes



The CRCRM pilot supported applications across a diverse range of fields

The [full evaluation report](#) is also available on the UKRI website.



CRCRM provided a unique opportunity to support research that previously had not been supported by UKRI funding mechanisms

CRCRM filled a gap in the UKRI funding landscape, supporting applicant-led IDR collaborations involving integration, reciprocal benefits and co-creation between disciplines. Comments from UKRI councils indicate that several of the successful CRCRM applications would not have been funded through the usual responsive-mode routes.

The CRCRM pilot scheme has successfully attracted a large number of applications, demonstrating a strong demand for funding responsive-mode IDR projects. Across two rounds, the CRCRM saw a substantial number of applications. In Round 1, UKRI received 979 outline applications, leading to 170 full applications and 36 awards. To improve efficiency, in Round 2 research institutions were required to conduct internal sifts before putting forward applications within a capped number. Over 1,000 applications went through internal institutional sifts, of which UKRI received 576 outline applications, resulting in 98 full applications and 32 awards.

Round 1



979 outline applications

170 full applications

36 awards

representing...

4885

605

208

researchers
from...



353

134

58

research
organisations

Round 2



576 outline applications

98 full applications

32 awards

representing...

3667

554

203

researchers
from...



428

140

57

research
organisations

“ This is an excellent way to help frame world-leading interdisciplinary research for the future and to learn from colleagues working in other areas”
– Panel member

Responses to applicant surveys at outline and full application stages in Round 1 and 2 (n=1742) showed respondents thought the scheme was achieving its ambitions of:

- providing funding opportunities for IDR that may be disadvantaged through established responsive-mode processes

90% agree or strongly agree

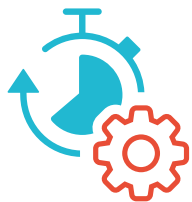
- supporting breakthrough or disruptive ideas and collaborations

84% agree or strongly agree

- unlocking new research, approaches or methods and unlock that would not emerge from established disciplinary thinking

82% agree or strongly agree

“ It was an application we’ve been trying to do for about 5 years. We’d been writing and planning, but we just never got around to submitting it because it just didn’t fit anywhere. I think our application is what the scheme was for; something that just couldn’t work in another responsive mode.” – Applicant



CRCRM processes are high-quality, efficient and effective in the assessment of IDR applications

The processes, guidance and training were seen as robust and effective by applicants and assessors. These were further improved in Round 2 based on lessons learned from Round 1. Applicants and assessors reported improved understanding of the expectations and requirements for successful IDR applications.

“ This is an exciting scheme that recognises the value of high risk, interdisciplinary research and combines assessment of interdisciplinary working as well as the research itself. To this end it’s been invaluable being on the panel to understand the UKRI perspective on what good interdisciplinary research looks like at all sorts of levels, and feed that back into both my own, and my institution’s approaches.”
– Panel member

Key approaches and innovations that added value to the CRCRM assessment process included:

► **An Interdisciplinary Assessment College** covering diverse disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise and trained in how to assess IDR applications. Training was provided to assessors on identifying excellent IDR, scoring and consensus building.

“ I thought I knew how to do and assess great interdisciplinary research however, I’ve learned so much more through this process and through the structured training that’s provided by the team.” – Panel Chair

► **Structured deliberation embedded at all assessment stages** to reconcile disciplinary perspectives and reach collective judgements in a fair and inclusive way. This improved robustness of assessment since score divergence is typically higher for IDR panels than in single-disciplinary panels.

“ In my opinion, the panel discussions were highly effective. Active participation led to a transparent and thorough evaluation of the proposals. Discrepancies in initial assessment scores were resolved through constructive dialogue and collaborative analysis, including a systematic review of each case. This resulted in calibrated scores, ensuring fairness and consistency.”
– Panel member

The scheme has successfully established a community dedicated to IDR assessment with the confidence to identify good IDR applications for funding.

Deliberation was also included as part of providing **integrated applicant feedback**, where a single coordinated set of feedback and clarification questions was developed through discussions by panel members prior to being sent to applicants, mitigating conflicting critiques and improving applicant responses. 93% of panel chairs agreed or strongly agreed that discussion boards for applicant feedback facilitated fairer assessment during panel meetings.

► **A clearly articulated IDR definition** with clear guidance on how to operationalise this definition in applications (for applicants) and in assessment (for panel members) was provided alongside training for IAC members and chairs.

“ The strongest aspects for me are the close attention to honing college members’ understanding of IDR...and having a clear definition of IDR...” – Panel chair

The following IDR definition was developed through the CRCRM scheme:

Interdisciplinary research combines distinct components of two or more disciplines through the integration of separate disciplinary data, methods, tools, concepts and/or theories in order to address a complex issue, question, or problem.

Interdisciplinary projects will be co-created/co-designed with input from all disciplines involved and the disciplines genuinely integrated with each discipline gaining something significant by being part of the project.

A clearly articulated IDR definition has enabled the CRCRM scheme to play a key role in advancing understanding of IDR across UKRI and the wider research community. Through guidance, webinars and engagement activities, the scheme has helped to embed this clear, shared definition of IDR including how to design, articulate and assess high-quality interdisciplinary approaches.

Aspects of the assessment process that add high value according to survey respondents

Interdisciplinary Assessment College:

82% of panel members

80% of panel chairs

61% of applicants

Assessment criteria specifically designed to assess IDR:

84% of panel members

69% of panel chairs,

71% of applicants

Two-stage application process:

75% of applicants

Source: CRCRM applicant, panel member and chair surveys for Round 2 full application stage

► **Generic process innovations** were also introduced to support assessment across a high volume and breadth of applications and some are already being included in UKRI policies and practices. These included a two-stage application process to reduce burden on applicants and assessors, demand management approaches, partial randomisation, the use of generalised feedback statements, inclusion of rovers and readers and clearer scoring guidance.

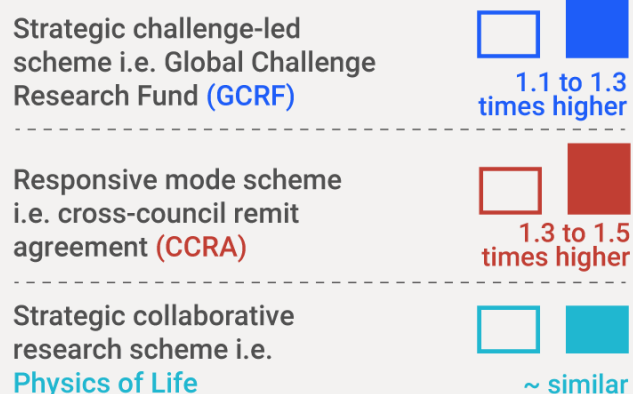


CRCRM applications and projects have higher interdisciplinarity and novelty compared to other UKRI interdisciplinary research funding schemes

► CRCRM awards are more interdisciplinary than benchmark projects

Technopolis compared the interdisciplinarity of awards for the CRCRM pilot with projects funded under benchmark UKRI IDR programmes using two indicators: Herfindahl-Hirschman Index and Entropy. Results indicate that CRCRM applications and awards were significantly more interdisciplinary than the benchmark projects. Both indicators showed that CRCRM projects have greater diversity of fields compared to projects from two of the three benchmark schemes, Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) and the cross-council remit agreement (CCRA) for responsive-mode IDR applications. Results were broadly comparable for Physics of Life, a strategic IDR programme.

Interdisciplinarity of CRCRM awards compared to:



“It has been both fascinating and inspiring to review so many brilliant research proposals—projects with the potential to bring real change to the world. I vividly remember [...] discussing a proposal that could genuinely be a contender for a future Nobel Prize” – Panel member

► A new methodology to assess interdisciplinarity of applications, SIFT, revealed that CRCRM projects are more likely to be “interdisciplinary” than “multidisciplinary”

The IRC developed a methodology, Signals of Interdisciplinary Focus in Text (SIFT), to analyse interdisciplinarity as a measure of how well integrated disciplines, ideas, and teams are and how reciprocal benefits are characterised in application text.

- SIFT analysis indicates that funded CRCRM applications were more likely to involve interdisciplinary approaches, as opposed to multidisciplinary approaches, than unfunded ones
- Compared to a random sample of UKRI-funded research grants, CRCRM grants had higher IDR SIFT scores by a factor of 1.5/ IDR SIFT scores that were **1.5 times higher**

► CRCRM applications have higher novelty compared to benchmark projects

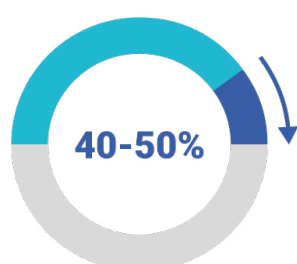
Technopolis analysis showed that CRCRM applications are significantly more novel than benchmark projects. Round 1 applications had **~1.5 times higher odds of being novel**, with Round 2 applications doing even better with **~2.3 times higher odds**.

Taken together, the results suggest that the CRCRM assessment process successfully identified highly novel applications with greater levels of genuine interdisciplinarity, than previously funded UKRI research.

The CRCRM pilot supported applications across a diverse range of fields

► Health and wellbeing and environment and sustainability challenges and impacts targeted in many application

Environmental challenges and health and wellbeing were the primary problem and impact areas targeted across both rounds and at all application stages (around 40-50% of all applications and awards).



of all applications and awards targeted **environmental challenges** and **health and wellbeing** as primary problem and impact areas.

Technical methods, for example biomedical and engineering and technology research methods, dominated the applications and awards in Round 1. However, participatory approaches and co-design featured prominently among methods covered in Round 2 applications alongside the technical methods such as biomedical, engineering and technological and digital and computational research methods.

“ There was a great deal of exciting work looking at the real worlding of theoretical issues or applying knowledge from different domains to real-world impact. The impactfulness of these IDR applications was very impressive.”
– Panel chair



► Social sciences are represented in a high number of applications regardless of panel interface

Social sciences featured far more widely across the CRCRM portfolio than panel interface labels suggest. They appear to some degree in applications across nearly all interfaces in both rounds, indicating the scheme may be supporting disciplinary combinations that go beyond its formal categorisation.

51% of outline applications



46% of full applications

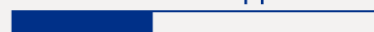


54% of awards

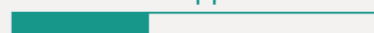


included **social sciences** across both rounds

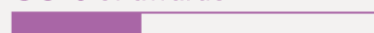
38% of outline applications



37% of full applications



35% of awards



in the **four social science interfaces** i.e. SS-BIOM, AH-SS, SS-EPS, EEB-SS (both rounds)

Recommendations for funding IDR

The evaluation generated insights and a set of recommendations for funding IDR that could be adopted by funders wishing to set up new IDR funding opportunities.

►► **It is important to have a common understanding of what IDR means in the context of the specific IDR funding programme being implemented and its objectives**

There are many differing interpretations of interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research. Therefore, it is important to articulate the specific definition of IDR at the outset and provide guidance on how this should be operationalised in applications as well as assessment.

►► **IDR applications should be assessed by peers with interdisciplinary expertise, preferably those trained in reviewing IDR applications**

Interesting and high-quality IDR applications can be disadvantaged in traditional external written review, where assessments from discipline-specific perspectives may not capture the strength of the interdisciplinary whole, and when judged by panels with limited experience of assessing IDR. Moreover, the topics and approaches covered in IDR are diverse. Therefore, a trained college with experience of assessing IDR is a useful resource to ensure fair and robust assessment of IDR applications. UKRI should maintain the IAC as a resource for assessing IDR applications in the future.

►► **The use of deliberation within panels helps bring together different interdisciplinary expertise and perspectives, thus making for fairer and more robust assessment**

Panel approaches that enable effective deliberation and consensus building, bringing together different interdisciplinary expertise and perspectives to better manage divergent opinions and scores allow for fairer and more robust assessment of IDR. Embedding deliberation within pre-panel feedback processes was seen as highly valuable for mitigating contradictory reviews.

►► **CRCRM has developed and tested some general good practices that could be shared more widely across UKRI and other funders.**

Examples include processes for matching applications with assessors, generalised feedback statements, demand management, partial randomisation and inclusion of readers as well as aspects such as scoring guidance on weaknesses.

UKRI Response to the CRCRM evaluation

The Cross Research Council Responsive Mode (CRCRM) pilot represented an [important step forward in UKRI's approach](#) to supporting interdisciplinary research (IDR), testing how applicant-led funding can better enable research that spans and integrates disciplines.

The evaluation shows the scheme has been highly effective. Across two rounds, CRCRM funded [68 innovative projects](#) addressing challenges from health and climate to digital technologies and cultural heritage, demonstrating the breadth and value of interdisciplinary research.

A key achievement of the pilot has been the development of a clearer, shared understanding of high-quality interdisciplinary research. Through guidance, training and engagement with the community, the scheme has helped articulate what distinguishes interdisciplinary research, and how it can be effectively designed and assessed. The Interdisciplinary Assessment College (IAC), supported by structured training and peer-

to-peer learning, enabled more consistent, confident and robust assessment of complex interdisciplinary proposals.

Importantly, the evaluation highlights that CRCRM addressed a gap in the UKRI funding landscape, enabling [innovative interdisciplinary projects](#) that may not have been supported through standard routes.

While the scheme will not continue in its current form, UKRI remains committed to strengthening support for interdisciplinary research. A Task and Finish group will review the evaluation findings and make recommendations for successful approaches to supporting IDR across UKRI's funding portfolio.

UKRI thanks all those who contributed to the design, delivery and evaluation of the CRCRM pilot, including UKRI colleagues, members of the IAC, the research community, and evaluation partners.



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