E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL

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The future for research funding

UPDATE ON SPENDING REVIEW AND POLICY AND FUNDING PRIORITIES

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BACKGROUND AND TIMETABLE – A REMINDER

- Research Councils and BIS developing plans and priorities against a range of funding scenarios
- Government Spending Review to be announced 20 October – overall science budget will be known. Average reduction across all departments will be c25%
- Individual Research Council allocations expected to be announced before Xmas
- Definite decisions on future funding not possible therefore until at least beginning of 2011

SOME HEADLINES

1. Given expectation of reduced funding, much sharper focus needed on priority areas
2. Need to demonstrate more clearly than ever potential for economic and societal impact
3. Any reduction must be strategic – not necessarily equal pain for all
4. HMT expectation of greater institutional concentration of funding
5. Requirement to reduce administrative costs by 33% over the SR period i.e. 2011-2015

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESRC

- Many of these points are applicable across the piece - but I can only speak with any authority about my own Council
- Need to demonstrate relevance of research agenda and engage with key policy debates e.g. How do we build sustainable growth in the UK?
- Need to increase engagement with and impact on business – but challenge of generating significant co-funding in current economic climate

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESRC

- Limited funds available for any new activity without reductions elsewhere. Worst case scenario - may need to consider early termination of some awards to release funds for new work
- How far should we continue to maintain entirely open responsive funding streams without steering them towards priority areas?
- Ability to support RCUK cross-disciplinary agenda and cross-Council programmes. Crucial that work on energy, climate change, security etc has social science at the core

IMPLICATIONS FOR ESRC

- How do we continue to protect long-term funding for our core data infrastructure which underpins much of our research and training support, not least our longitudinal studies?
- How do we facilitate wider use of this infrastructure through secondary analysis, including by non-academic researchers, and maximise its influence on policy-makers?

TARGETING, STREAMLINING AND EFFICIENCY

- Government looking for greater institutional concentration of funding both for research and doctoral training
- May need to be more strategic allocation of studentships to priority areas
- Will need to remove or merge current funding streams. Possible areas - funding for small grants; creation of a single early career scheme; merging support for centres and large grants; streamlining of KT schemes
- Ensure we all minimise overlap and maximise complementarity with other funders

TARGETING, STREAMLINING AND EFFICIENCY

- Looking at scope for greater efficiencies within Research Councils to help deliver reduction in administrative costs
- Need for further action on demand management. This needs to be done in partnership between the RCs and HEIs
- RCs responding to the Wakeham report on Full Economic Costing. Need for greater transparency without increasing the administrative burden.