Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

# Value for Money Assessment

## Global Challenges Research Fund

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# Contents

# Figures

# Tables

# Boxes

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| BEIS | Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy |
| Co-I | Co-Investigator |
| DFID | Department for International Development |
| DSIT | Department for Science, Innovation and Technology |
| ECR | Early Career Researcher |
| EDI | Equity, Diversity and Inclusion |
| FCDO | Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office |
| FCR | Field Citation Ratio |
| FLAIR | Future Leaders – African Independent Research |
| FoR | Fields of Research |
| GCRF | Global Challenges Research Fund |
| ISPF | International Science Partnership Fund |
| LMIC | Low and Middle-Income Country |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| ODA | Official Development Assistance |
| PI | Principal Investigator |
| PO | Partner Organisation |
| R&I | Research and Innovation |
| RQ+ | Research Quality Plus |
| RQ++ | Research Quality Plus Plus |
| SD | Subdimension |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goal |
| ToC | Theory of Change |

| | |
|---|---|
| UK | United Kingdom (of Great Britain & Northern Ireland) |
| UKRI | UK Research and Innovation |
| UKSA | UK Space Agency |
| UN | United Nations |
| VfM | Value for Money |

# Executive summary

This report presents the findings from the second and final Value for Money (VfM) assessment of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Assessing VfM provides insight into how resources are used and whether their outcomes and impacts justify the resources invested. This report provides a summative assessment of VfM for the Fund, ensuring accountability for investments made and advancing VfM assessment methodologies, generating lessons for future application in official development assistance (ODA) research and innovation (R&I) funds. The assessment found that 89% of the sampled GCRF awards demonstrated adequate, good, or excellent performance, meeting, and in many cases exceeding GCRF's VfM standards. The assessment concluded that the results produced by the Fund represented good value for the investment. The sampled awards were diverse and showed different strengths but, as a whole, generated substantial value through a balanced set of outcomes in line with the Fund's strategic aims.

## The Global Challenges Research Fund

Launched in 2016, GCRF was a £1.5 billion R&I fund, managed by the United Kingdom's (UK's) Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT). It was established to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aims to enhance research excellence, international research partnerships – particularly with low and middle-income countries (LMICs) – and impact-driven research.

This report was produced in 2024. The GCRF has now closed. Since then, the government has taken the difficult decision to temporarily reduce Official Development Assistance (ODA) to the equivalent of 0.3% of GNI by 2027 to fund an increase in defence spending. The government remains committed to international development and to returning ODA to 0.7% of GNI when fiscal conditions allow.

## Assessing VfM in GCRF

This report presents a summative assessment of VfM in GCRF, culminating five years of evaluation activities and evidence, and comprises two analyses. To support accountability for investments made, the first is a summative analysis of VfM in GCRF, aggregating quantitative data from two samples of GCRF awards assessed over two years (2024[1] and 2025). The second analysis is a standalone assessment

[1] Standalone findings from the 2024 VfM assessment are available from: DSIT. 'Global Challenges Research Fund: value for money assessment' 2025 (viewed on 22 May 2025)

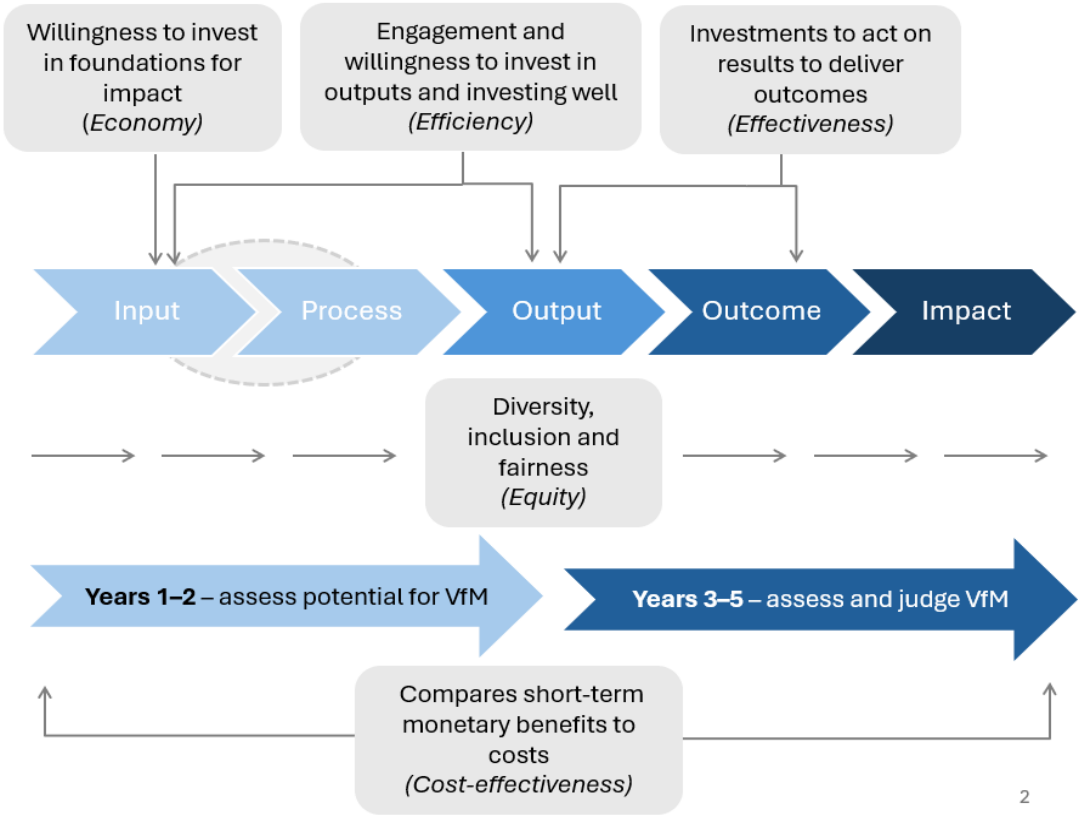
of 31 awards conducted in the final year of the evaluation (2025). This analysis leverages output and outcomes data collected in previous stages of the evaluation to provide a stronger evidence base for assessment, expanding our understanding of how VfM is realised in GCRF as the fund matures. As part of the 2025 VfM assessment, we also present a qualitative analysis of the drivers of VfM in GCRF, including the enablers and barriers to value generation, building the knowledge base of how VfM is realised in ODA R&I funds.

**To evaluate VfM in GCRF, we developed an innovative rubric-based approach in collaboration with Partner Organisations (POs) and DSIT.** A highly quantitative approach to assessing VfM is not suitable for a fund such as GCRF where many of its intended outcomes are intangible, non-monetisable and not easily quantifiable. The new approach allowed for flexibility by defining a series of value for money performance dimensions and sub-dimensions to cover the main 'value' propositions of GCRF.

**The rubric-based approach is centred on the 4Es framework developed by FCDO[2] and tailored to align with GCRF's intended value proposition.** In line with the evaluation's theory-based approach, the rubric-based approach to VFM maps on to the GCRF Theory of Change (ToC), assessing the value generated at each stage. The rubric includes four dimensions, corresponding to the 4Es. A fifth 'E' – Equity – is integrated across dimensions. 'Economy' assesses inputs, 'Efficiency' assesses how inputs are converted to outputs through award activities and processes, 'Effectiveness' assesses outputs and outcomes, and 'Equity' is assessed across all stages of the ToC. 'Cost-effectiveness' assesses the cost at the input stage to monetary benefits at the output and outcome stages.

[2] DFID. 'DFID's approach to Value for Money (VfM)' GOV.UK 2011 (viewed on 14 February 2025)

**Figure 1: Overview of the approach to VfM assessment in GCRF**




**The four dimensions of the GCRF VfM rubric – corresponding to the 4Es – are underpinned by 14 subdimensions (SDs).** Rubric subdimensions were developed based on evidence collected over four years of the GCRF evaluation and on a broader understanding of the key factors that drive value in ODA R&I. Rubric subdimensions articulate the value that should be invested or generated within each dimension. These align with GCRF's value proposition, the value the Fund intended to create, and strategic aims, the overall impact it sought to create. The framework is illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Dimensions and subdimensions of the VfM rubric**

| GCRF VFM rubric |
|---|
| **Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy)** |
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |

| |
|---|
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |
| **Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency)** |
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |
| **Dimension 3: investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness)** |
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities[3] *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |
| **Dimension 4: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs (Cost-effectiveness)** |
| SD4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 GCRF |
| SD4.2 LMIC Principal Investigators (PIs) secure further research funding, per £1 of GCRF funding *(Equity)* |
| SD4.3 Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding |

**The GCRF VfM rubric establishes tailored performance standards for each rubric subdimension, assessed using a five-point rating scale.** Each award is assessed against these standards and rated ‘unacceptable (0)’, ‘poor (1)’, ‘adequate (2)’, ‘good (3)’, ‘excellent (4)’, ‘not applicable’, or ‘insufficient evidence’. Ratings are

[3] Challenge-oriented capabilities: the ability to design, implement and manage research and innovation projects focused on addressing real-world challenges.

qualitatively defined for each subdimension, providing a clear guide for award assessment. Overall, unacceptable performance describes awards that have failed to generate value, as defined by GCRF's value proposition. Poor performance describes awards that have generated slightly less GCRF-relevant value compared to resource invested. Adequate performance describes awards that have generated value, as defined by GCRF's value proposition, which meets the level of resource invested. Good performance describes awards that have generated more GCRF-relevant value compared to the resource invested. And excellent performance describes awards that have generated substantially more GCRF-relevant value compared to the resource invested. This means that "adequate" awards have done what they were expected to do, "good" awards have done more than expected, and "excellent" awards have done substantially more than expected.

**Given the diversity of awards funded through GCRF we classified awards into a typology, facilitating comparison of awards with similar characteristics to enable VfM assessment**. Box 1 provides a brief introduction to the award types featured in this report.

**Box 1: Overview of GCRF award types featured in this report[4]:**

**Thematic research grant** programme-funded projects were led by a UK-based principal investigator (PI) in response to a specific thematic call.

**Strategic investments** funded one-off projects or activities. All such awards within this sample focused on secondary data analysis (i.e. they were desk-based work focusing on analysis of existing data sets).

**Applied innovation** grants were more applied in nature, involving collaborations with industrial partners to work on later stages of research.

**Network awards** provided funding to build sustained engagement and collaboration on emerging or challenging research areas. Often these awards also included activities such as workshops, events and communications to establish new relationships.

**Early and mid-career awards** were research grants directed to researchers in early stages of their careers. Our sample included early career awards from two distinct programmes that should be considered separately:

- Springboard awards provided funding to support early career biomedical scientists based in eligible higher education institutes within the UK.
- The Future Leaders – African Independent Research (FLAIR) programme provided postdoctoral fellowships for African early career researchers at sub-Saharan African institutions. It is distinct from other GCRF programmes in awarding funding directly to African fellows and their host institutions and so was among few GCRF investments that were led by Global South countries.

## Findings from the quantitative summative analysis

In this section, we present findings from the summative analysis of 2024 and 2025 VfM assessments covering 81 GCRF awards.[5]

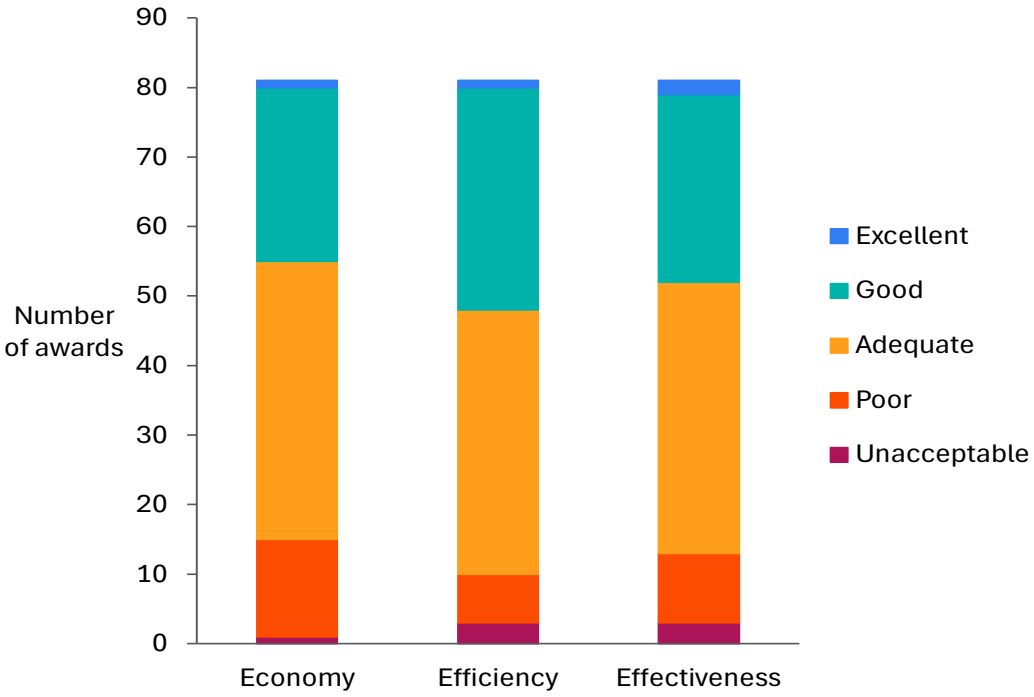
**Evidence from the summative sample suggests that GCRF met, and in some cases exceeded, VfM performance standards, with 89% of awards rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.** Performance for each dimension is shown in Figure 2. Insufficient evidence in Cost-effectiveness (not pictured in the figure) precluded dimension-level summary. This indicates that, overall, the sample generated value

[4] Academy of Medical Sciences. 'Springboard' 2024 (viewed on 14 February 2025); The Royal Society. 'FLAIR Fellowships' 2024 (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[5] Adaptions in the rubric across VfM assessments limit the summative assessments to Years 4 and 5.

which met, and in some cases exceeded, the level of resource invested. This provides assurance that the assessed awards deliver VfM.

**In assessing cost-effectiveness, we found that total investment from non-GCRF sources was, on average, 4.0 times more than the GCRF investment; however, this figure is sensitive to sampling effects and should be interpreted cautiously.** A sensitivity analysis found that our sample secured additional investment between 1.0 and 5.1 times the initial investment in the portfolio, indicating how much this figure varied depending on the sample of awards chosen.

**Figure 2: VfM performance of 81 awards across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness[6]**



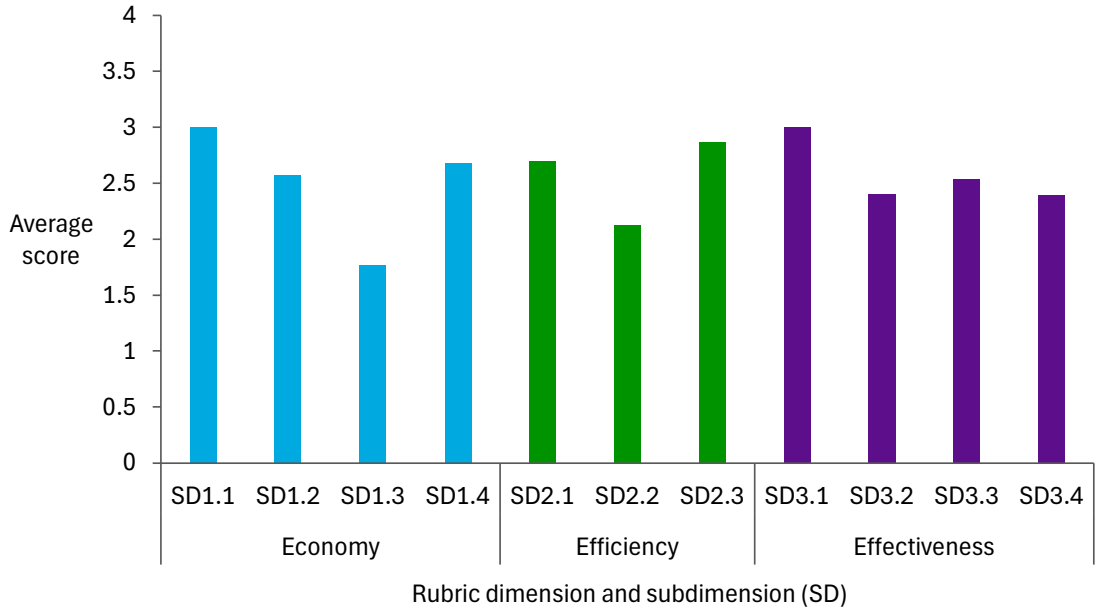

**The average performance at the subdimension levels across all awards is adequate (2), except for in investment in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) processes** (SD1.3) – a subdimension of Economy – where the average score in the summative sample was poor. This relatively consistent performance across rubric subdimensions indicates that, overall, GCRF awards have successfully leveraged inputs and investments and transformed these into activities, outputs and outcomes consistent with GCRF's aims.

[6] Subdimensions of Equity are integrated throughout Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness (see Table 1) and therefore are not analysed as a standalone dimension of the rubric. Overall performance in Cost-effectiveness could not be determined due to limited evidence.

## Variation in performance by award type indicates that awards have strengths and weaknesses across VfM subdimensions.

Across the portfolio, we see that research excellence and positioning for use (SD1.1, SD2.3 and SD3.1) are strengths of GCRF awards, while investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) is a weakness. The variation at the award level, as shown in Figure 3, could reflect the differing objectives of different award types. Because research innovation, originality, and positioning for use were key GCRF objectives, strong performance in related subdimensions (SD1.1, SD2.3, and SD3.1) suggests these aims were effectively embedded in awards and contributed to value at the outcome stage. In contrast, weaker performance on EDI indicates a lack of mechanisms at the Fund and commissioning level to embed EDI in project design and delivery.

**Figure 3: Average scores of 81 awards across subdimensions of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.[7]**




## A diversified funding portfolio supports fund-wide VfM.

Awards show variable performance across subdimensions while maintaining adequate performance overall. Within the summative sample, network awards perform particularly well, outperforming other award types across most subdimensions. Performance by subdimension and award type is presented in Figure 4.

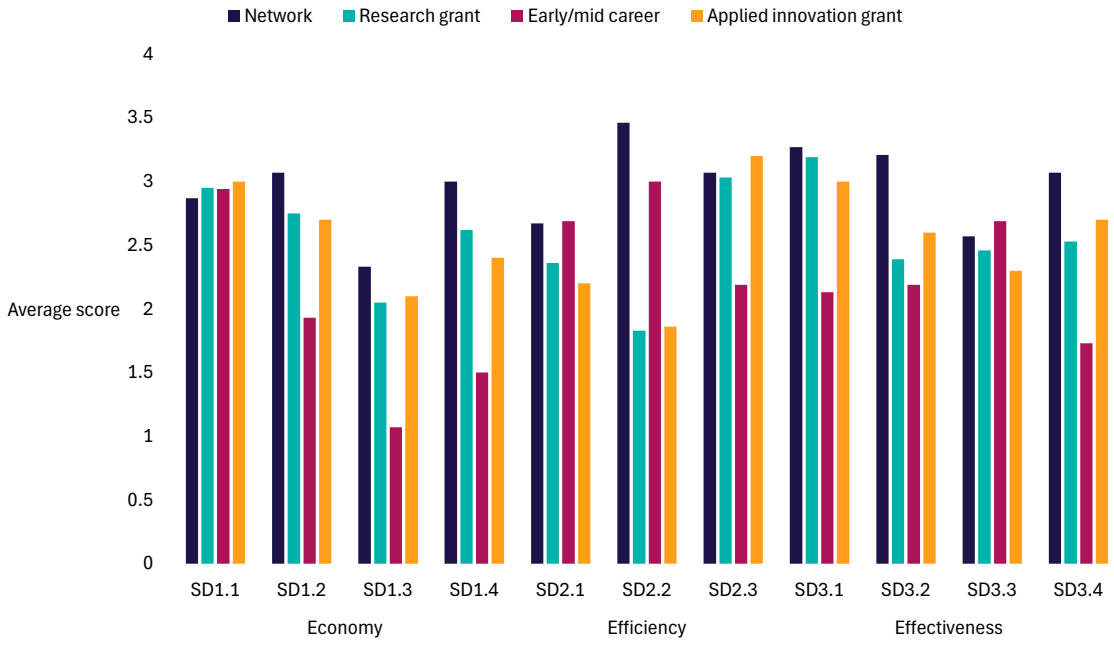
Having a variety of award types allows different awards to focus on generating a range of GCRF-relevant value and supports a portfolio that, overall, generates value in line with GCRF's value proposition. This highlights the value of a portfolio

[7] 0-1 = Poor; 1-2 = Adequate; 2-3 = Good; 3-4 = Excellent

approach, ensuring that diverse award types contribute to a balanced set of outcomes that align with the Fund's strategic aims. It also underscores the importance of aligning funding mechanisms with intended objectives.

**Award types demonstrate strengths and weaknesses across VfM subdimensions. Network awards consistently perform better across most VfM subdimensions, while early/mid-career awards tend to score lower, particularly in areas related to Economy and Efficiency. A score of 2 corresponds to an 'adequate' rubric rating. Subdimensions are defined in Table 1.**

**Figure 4: Average scores of 81 awards across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness subdimensions by award type.[8]**




# Drivers of VfM in GCRF

In this section we present findings from a qualitative analysis from the 2025 VfM assessment of 31 awards, which enabled us to identify drivers of good VfM in GCRF.

## Stakeholder engagement strategies and activities enable excellent research that is well positioned for use

Awards with stronger investment in research innovation and originality (SD1.1) often generated research positioned for uptake and wider use by intended audiences and stakeholders (SD3.1). Early stakeholder engagement, interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral research enabled research relevance. Awards that integrated LMIC

[8] 0-1 = Poor; 1-2 = Adequate; 2-3 = Good; 3-4 = Excellent

expertise in defining challenges and solutions tended to produce outputs that were more applicable and widely used. Awards with dedicated communication plans, engagement strategies and higher funding often performed better in translating research into outputs usable by wider audiences. This underscores the need to provide dedicated resources for an inclusive and equitable approach to setting research agendas through effective stakeholder engagement.

In addition, awards that focus on networking activities, including non-network awards which prioritise stakeholder engagement through co-design, consultation exercises, workshops and other engagement strategies, typically have strong performance across the VfM rubric. Notably, network awards outperform other award types in many subdimensions, underscoring the value generated by an explicit focus on stakeholder engagement. Such awards also appear to offer good VfM at lower funding levels, emphasising their value as a useful complement to other award types within a portfolio approach.

### Early investment in equitable partnerships can lead to more sustainable partnerships

Sustainable partnerships (SD3.2) were linked to early investment in equitable collaboration (SD1.4, SD2.2), including co-design, shared decision making and equitable responsibilities across award activities. Awards with strong post-award partnerships also showed these early investments, fostering long-term collaboration. Longer award duration and higher funding did not consistently enable sustainable partnerships, although network awards were an exception where increased funding supported more equitable collaboration.

### Larger and longer awards are better placed to improve challenge-oriented capabilities

There is no clear link between investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1) and performance in challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3). Higher ratings were more common in well-funded, long-duration innovation grants and early and mid-career awards, suggesting that time and resources are key enablers of capacity building. Larger-scale and network-based awards also performed well, benefiting from shared resources, flexible funding and longer project durations. However, some awards with lower capacity-building investment (SD1.2) still performed well in challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3), suggesting that strategic partnerships and external funding also play a role.

### Investment in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) processes can support more equitable practices and sustainable partnerships

While investment in EDI was considered a weakness across the portfolio of awards included in the VfM assessment, we found that awards with clear EDI strategies (SD1.3), equitable funding arrangements (SD2.2) and inclusive decision-making and

capacity-building efforts (SD1.4) demonstrated better performance in EDI-related subdimensions. Investment in EDI was correlated with stronger performance across the VfM rubric including positioning for use, challenge-oriented capabilities and stakeholder networks. Higher funding supported better EDI outcomes, and longer projects tended to build more sustainable partnerships. Shorter, lower-funded projects struggled to sustain EDI efforts. Early EDI investment often led to more equitable outcomes; but overall, EDI was not a strong initial focus in most GCRF projects.

### Clear structures that enable cross-sectoral collaboration play a role in supporting sustainable partnerships

Investment in interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) alone did not ensure enhanced stakeholder networks (SD3.4). High-performing awards focused on cross-sectoral engagement and structured networking; weaker ones remained limited to academia, with little external collaboration. No clear link emerged between investment in interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) and sustainable partnerships (SD3.2), but high-scoring awards shared strong management structures, cross-sectoral collaboration and proactive engagement, reinforcing the role of structured processes in sustaining partnerships.

## Learnings from GCRF VFM assessments to date

Learnings from GCRF VfM assessments are intended to support UK government funders of ODA R&I, as well as wider communities of practice, in evidencing the VfM of research for development investments and in advancing VfM assessment approaches.

**Performance in Effectiveness, representing the value generated by the Fund's outputs and early outcomes, is expected to improve as the Fund matures.**

The 2025 sample shows improved performance in Effectiveness compared to Year 4. Differences in the timing of the assessments is one factor, with the 2025 assessment capturing maturing outcomes, aligning with expectations that GCRF awards will generate value over time. Year 2025 also included an enhanced evidence base, with supplemental outcome evidence from evaluation activities. This richer evidence base illuminated the drivers of improved performance in Effectiveness but also highlighted a broader issue: such comprehensive data is unlikely to be captured through existing reporting systems. To systematically assess the Effectiveness of awards, future funds should invest in enhanced data collection systems that provide a more complete and ongoing record of research uptake and outcomes.

**In addition to limited data to assess effectiveness, there is little evidence to support the assessment of Cost-effectiveness.**

Owing to differences in endline award reporting processes across POs, evidence of follow-on and co-funding was patchy. The main source of information to assess cost-effectiveness was Gateway to Research, a platform where UKRI-funded projects report on performance, including quantitative evidence of follow-on funding at the award level. However, Gateway to Research has several limitations. First, it only covers UKRI awards and is self-reported, typically by UK-based PIs as part of the ResearchFish return, likely limiting data quality and comprehensiveness. Second, the self-reported nature of Gateway to Research also poses some limitations in attributing follow-on funding directly to specific awards. Importantly, because Gateway to Research is a UK-focused system, it was a poor evidence source for follow-on funding secured by LMIC PIs and co-investigators (Co-Is), severely limiting assessment of the extent to which LMIC researchers leveraged GCRF funding to support future research.

**Better VfM in ODA R&I funds relies on building a culture of VfM in UK R&I funders.**

The findings from this study, and those from similar studies, provide important evidence of present VfM in ODA R&I funds. These studies provide valuable learnings on how greater VfM can be generated and how R&I ecosystems can be better equipped to assess VfM in future funds. Measuring VfM in ODA R&I is complex due to the diverse nature of the intended outcomes and impacts from these investments; the fact that many of these are not easily quantified; and the time lags from the investment to their realisation. The approach used here, which brings together evidence from the evaluation with expert insights to reach a shared understanding and assessment of VfM that doesn't oversimplify the complexity of the investment and its outcomes, sets a precedent which could be relevant to future ODA R&I investments. Evidence from this GCRF evaluation VfM module indicates that overall, the Fund delivers VfM, but generation of greater VfM in ODA R&I funds depends on bringing VfM insights about the drivers of VfM to commissioning, ensuring that the foundations for generating value are resourced through implementation, and then gathering consistent data on results, outcomes and follow-on investments.

# Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, evidence across GCRF VfM assessments provides assurance that the portfolio of awards deliver VfM, with different types of awards contributing different kinds of value to the Fund. While an adequate performance average provides assurance that the Fund has met VfM performance standards, it also indicates scope for future funds to drive value generation that, on average, exceeds investment. We also note scope for improvement – particularly around EDI practices – and we are able to identify key drivers of good VfM, such as a focus on stakeholder

engagement. Therefore, as part of the learning function of this assessment, we have identified recommendations for driving VfM in future ODA funds.

**The summative analysis showed the value of a strategic portfolio approach to funding to ensuring fund-wide VfM.**

*Recommendation:* DSIT should ensure that future ODA research investments align award types with specific Fund objectives, considering the ways in which these award types may be complementary. For example, network awards for fostering collaboration; innovation grants for translational research; etc. This requires a portfolio analysis and strategy to maintaining a diverse portfolio and address the breadth of the Fund's strategic aims.

**Qualitative analysis highlighted that early and sustained stakeholder engagement is key to translating research into high-quality, relevant outputs and broader outcomes.**

*Recommendation:* To facilitate early stakeholder engagement, in ODA research funds DSIT should consider implementing small grants to 'spin up' projects, providing resources at the stage of problem definition. Larger award sizes may also be considered to sustain stakeholder engagement throughout the research life cycle providing resources to employ dedicated engagement specialists, host events and expand research networks.

**Improvements in EDI practices such as investment in co-design and equitable balance of research funding would support better VfM performance.**

*Recommendation:* DSIT should ensure that future ODA research funds make EDI strategic priorities clear in funding calls, providing support to award holders in integrating EDI considerations into their work and requiring justification for any funding allocation where less than 50% is directed to LMIC partners.

**Enhancing challenge-oriented capabilities requires dedicated but flexible resources and sufficient time to realise benefits.**

*Recommendation:* Where capacity building is a key objective, DSIT should consider longer funding durations for ODA research and dedicated, flexible resources, such as ringfenced funds for capacity building activities, that can be tailored to the emerging needs of the research team and local research ecosystem. Strengthening mechanisms for follow-on funding and institutional support will improve the sustainability of challenge-oriented capabilities in LMICs.

**Awards that focus on networking and stakeholder engagement appear to offer particularly good VfM, in line with GCRF's value proposition.**

*Recommendation:* DSIT should ensure that future ODA research funds consider dedicated networking awards within the funding portfolio as well as allocating additional resources for networking activities and stakeholder engagement activities within other award types.

**Current reporting systems do not capture the comprehensive data needed to make a proper VfM assessment**

*Recommendation:* DSIT and POs should consider strengthening systematic data collection efforts and end-of-award reporting to ensure comprehensive tracking of outputs and outcomes of ODA-funded R&I projects. This should include enhanced tracking mechanisms for follow-on funding to support more comprehensive collection of funding secured researchers, including LMIC PIs and Co-Is.

**Enhancing VfM in ODA R&I funds requires embedding a culture of VfM within UK R&I funders.**

*Recommendation*: DSIT and ODA R&I funders should aim to develop an understanding of the drivers of VfM in R&I funding in general as well as of the specific drivers for each programme based on its value proposition. This would contribute to acknowledging that VfM extends beyond the monetisable outcomes of a programme.

# 1. Introduction

*This report presents the findings from the final Value for Money (VfM) assessment of the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), across five years of evaluation evidence. Assessing VfM provides insight into how resources are used and whether their outcomes and impacts justify the resources invested. This section introduces GCRF and outlines the purpose of this report.*

**GCRF was a nine-year £1.5 billion R&I fund, launched in 2016 and overseen by the United Kingdom's (UK's) Department for Science, Innovation and Technology[9] (DSIT).[10]** GCRF was implemented by 17 of the UK's Research & Innovation (R&I) funders, which commissioned R&I as partner organisations (POs).[11] The GCRF evaluation examines the Fund's progress from activities to impacts by gathering evidence to test its Theory of Change (ToC). The evaluation has been conducted in three stages over a five-year period from 2020 to 2025.

GCRF formed part of the UK's Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitment and was established to support the UK's commitment to spur progress towards the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by leveraging the UK's research strengths.[12] GCRF aimed to enhance research excellence, international research partnerships – particularly with low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) – and impact-driven research, underpinned by transparent and rigorous funding and spending processes.[13] In line with its objectives, GCRF sought to strengthen research, innovation and knowledge exchange capacity in both the UK and developing countries, fostering collaborations with leading UK-based researchers and institutions.[14] Aligned with these goals, GCRF sought to accelerate progress towards the UN SDGs by investing in challenge-led R&I across disciplines, sectors and geographic regions.

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[9] Formerly the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS).
[10] £1.5 billion between 2016 and 2021 was the budgeted investment; this does not reflect the subsequent budget changes and actual spend. See: BEIS. 'Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF): How the Fund Works' GOV.UK (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[11] GCRF is delivered through 17 POs, including: the seven Research Councils; Innovate UK; the Research Councils' umbrella organisation, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI); the four National Academies; the UK Space Agency (UKSA); and the four higher education funding councils. These POs manage and disburse finding through the existing system of universities and other research organisations, as well as to their partners in low and middle-income countries (LMICs). Higher education funding is devolved to the four nations of the UK and administered by the governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and (in England) by Research England.
[12] HM Treasury. 'UK aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest' GOV.UK 2019 (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[13] BEIS. 'UK Strategy for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)' GOV.UK (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[14] BEIS. 'UK Strategy for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)' GOV.UK: page 3 (viewed on 14 February 2025)

**Assessing VfM is a core component of the GCRF evaluation, serving two primary purposes:**

- **Ensuring accountability** – VfM assessments investigate whether and how the Fund delivers VfM, supporting transparency in ODA investments.
- **Advancing VfM assessment methodologies** – the VfM assessments conducted as part of the GCRF evaluation contribute to the development of a cross-fund framework for analysing VfM and impact, applicable to other DSIT ODA R&I funds.

To support these aims, this report presents a summative assessment of VfM in GCRF, culminating five years of evaluation activities and evidence.

This report is intended to support DSIT ODA teams in evidencing GCRF's VfM. Reflections on the VfM assessment methodologies used in this evaluation are intended to support UK government funders of ODA R&I and wider communities of practice in advancing VfM assessment approaches.

## 1.1 Structure of the report

Section 2 provides an **overview of VfM assessment in GCRF**, situating this in the context of a nascent VfM culture in the UK R&I funder ecosystem. It also presents a brief overview of the five-year GCRF evaluation, including prior assessments within the VfM workstream. Section 3 presents the **methodology** for assessing VfM in the GCRF evaluation, which uses a rubric-based approach. We briefly describe the development and evolution of this approach throughout the evaluation and its implementation in this study, noting its strengths and limitations.

Section 4 presents **summative findings** from the VfM assessments conducted in Years 4 and 5 of the evaluation. Section 5 presents stand-alone **findings from the Year 5 VfM assessment**, including a **thematic analysis of the drivers of VfM in GCRF**. Section 6 presents **conclusions and recommendations**. Conclusions summarise key insights at the Fund level, informed by findings across the GCRF evaluation VfM workstream. Recommendations address considerations for future funding programmes and VfM assessments.

# 2. Overview of VfM assessment in the GCRF evaluation

*This section provides an overview of VfM assessment in the GCRF evaluation, situating this in the context of ODA VfM assessment.*

## 2.1. Policy context of ODA VfM assessment

The UK is a major provider of ODA, supporting sustainable development in LMICs. R&I plays a key role in these efforts, with ODA funding going towards programmes such as GCRF and the Newton Fund designed to facilitate international partnerships, knowledge exchange and capacity building. GCRF was established to fund research that directly contributes to development challenges in Global South countries, fostering collaboration between UK and LMIC researchers.[15]

The landscape of UK ODA funding has changed in recent years. In response to COVID-19, the UK's ODA budget was reduced from 0.7% to 0.5% of gross national income in 2021,[16] leading to a shift in funding priorities. As a result, GCRF's ODA allocation was reduced mid-programme, affecting the Fund's impact potential and sustainability.[17] GCRF closed in March 2025 and thus was not affected by subsequent ODA policy changes.

Assessing VfM in the context of ODA R&I is challenging. Investments such as VfM are complex and multifaceted, and the impacts and outcomes they are intended to produce are often not readily quantified and may take many years to emerge. This makes typical VfM approaches such as cost-benefit analysis difficult to apply at the Fund level. In this context, a rubrics-based approach has been proposed[18] for these types of investments, building on the use of such rubrics in wider non-R&I focused ODA investments. Such a rubric-based approach has also been piloted in the evaluation of the Newton Fund[19], but this remains a novel approach to VfM assessment.

[15] BEIS. 'UK Strategy for the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)' GOV.UK (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[16] Wozniak, P. 2023. 'Three years of UK aid cuts: where has ODA been hit hardest?' Development Initiatives. As of 14 February 2025:
[17] For further information on the impacts of ODA funding cuts on GCRF, see: BEIS. 'Evaluation of the Global Challenge Research Fund: Midpoint Synthesis Report: Assessing quality, impact positioning and early outcomes against GCRF's Theory of Change' 2023 (viewed on 5 March 2025)
[18] King J and OPM VfM Working Group. 'The OPM approach to assessing value for money: A guide' Oxford Policy Management Ltd 2018 (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[19] Tetratech. The Newton Fund: Final Evaluation Report. 2022 (viewed on 8 March 2025)

## 2.2. Objectives of VfM assessment in the GCRF evaluation

VfM assessment is a core module of the five-year GCRF evaluation. The module aims to provide evidence on whether and how the Fund has delivered VfM. It also seeks to advance VfM assessment methodologies.

As the summative assessment of VfM in GCRF, the primary objectives of this study are to:

- provide a summative assessment of VfM within the Fund (*accountability)*
- advance our understanding of VfM as the Fund matures (*accountability and learning*)
- analyse the drivers of VfM in GCRF (*accountability and learning*)
- advance VfM assessment methodologies (*learning*).

## 2.3. Prior VfM assessments within the GCRF evaluation VfM module

VfM assessment is a core module within the broader GCRF evaluation. The GCRF evaluation follows a theory-based approach, guided by the Fund's ToC, which maps the pathways through which GCRF contributes to impact (see Annex A).

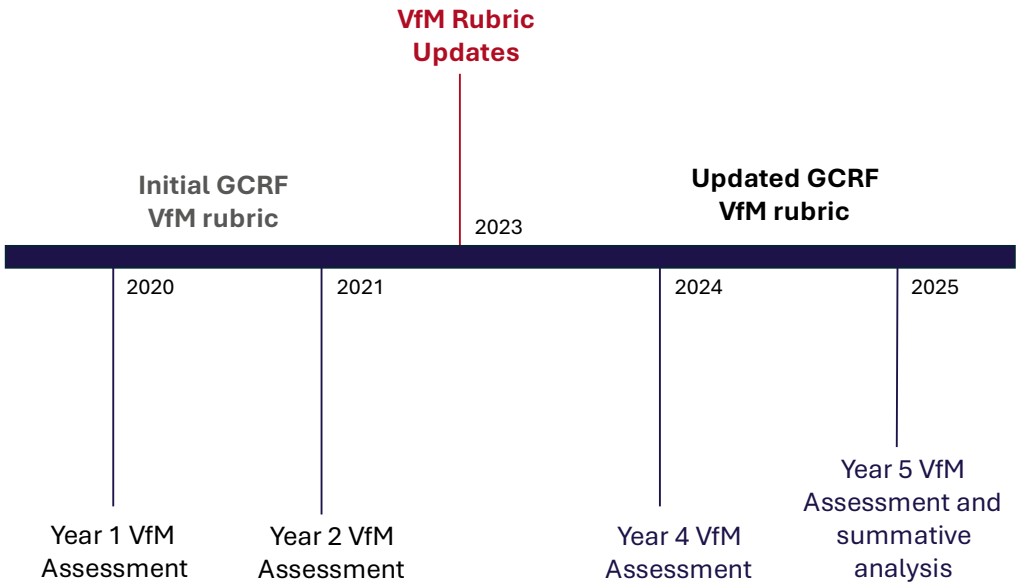
Given the scale and complexity of GCRF, the evaluation team adopted an adaptive approach to VfM assessment. This involved iterative development of the evaluation's VfM assessment tool – a VfM rubric – across a series of interim VfM assessments. This adaptive approach allowed for interim findings and process learning to be incorporated into subsequent assessments. This approach enabled the evaluation team to address challenges in assessing VfM in GCRF, such as the need to retrofit performance benchmarks and the absence of standardised reporting mechanisms for capturing relevant outputs and outcomes, particularly in LMICs. It also provided flexibility to adapt the assessment to account for time lags in realising outcomes as the Fund matured.

Three assessments of VfM in GCRF precede this report. An initial GCRF VfM assessment rubric was developed, implemented and refined in Years 1 and 2 (2020-22). Learnings from VfM assessments in Years 1 and 2 informed rubric adaptations in Year 3 (2023). This included changes to better accommodate for the diversity of awards in the GCRF portfolio and improve capture of award outputs and outcomes.

This rubric was then used in VfM assessment in Years 4 and 5 (2024-25). A timeline of VfM assessments in the GCRF evaluation is presented in Figure 5.

**The GCRF VfM rubric was updated in 2023, following VfM assessments conducted in Years 1 and 2 of the GCRF evaluation; the updated GCRF VfM rubric was used in VfM assessments in Years 4 and 5**.

**Figure 5: Timeline of VfM assessments and rubric updates in the GCRF evaluation**




This report presents a summative assessment of VfM in GCRF, as well as a standalone analysis of the VfM assessment conducted in Year 5 (2024-25). Due to adaptations in the GCRF VfM assessment rubric in Year 3, the summative analysis presented in this report only aggregates findings from VfM assessment conducted in Years 4 and 5 of the evaluation. A summary of findings across the GCRF evaluation VfM module is presented in Annex E.

# 3 Methodology

*This section provides a summary of the rubric-based approach used to assess VfM in GCRF and details of the implementation of this approach in this study, including strengths and weaknesses. Further information on the approach development is available elsewhere.*[20]

## 3.1. Background on the approach to VfM assessment in GCRF

### 3.1.1 A rubric-based approach for VfM assessment

This study employs a theory-based approach to assess GCRF's VfM, aligning with its ToC. The approach integrates established VfM frameworks, including those developed by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)[22] and the approach outlined by King and OPM VfM Working Group (2018), and sets out: (i) a typology to define award characteristics; (ii) dimensions and subdimensions; and (iii) performance standards, rated on a five-point scale.

**Defining VfM**

VfM poses an evaluative question about how well resources are used and whether they are being used well enough.[21]

Assessing whether awards meet VfM performance standards is an evaluative judgement based on whether the programme creates more value than it consumes and/or whether sufficient outcomes or impacts are achieved to justify the investment of resources.

**Rationale for a rubric-based approach to VfM assessment in GCRF**

The rubric-based approach provides several advantages, addressing some of the challenges in assessing VfM in ODA R&I funds, including GCRF. Assessment of VfM in ODA R&I funds remains an active challenge for the sector, which lacks a pre-

[20] DSIT. '[Global Challenges Research Fund: value for money assessment]' 2025 (viewed on 22 May 2025)
[21] King J and OPM VfM Working Group. '[The OPM approach to assessing value for money: A guide]' Oxford Policy Management Ltd 2018 (viewed on 14 February 2025)
[22] Formerly the Department for International Development (DFID).

existing VfM mechanism, meaning that appropriate data capture is limited. Moreover, existing UK government guidance on VfM assessment needs to be tailored to R&I, owing to various challenges in the context of ODA R&I funds, including:

- long timelines, and often non-linear processes, from initial R&I work to impacts;
- intangible and hard-to-measure outcomes and impacts;
- diversity of award objectives, target groups and contexts;
- outcome data that is hard to gather, owing to complex LMIC systems and the wide range of possible outcomes.

Within this broader context, specific challenges in designing an approach for VfM assessment in GCRF also included the need to retrofit benchmarks for success and variation in monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reporting systems across POs.

In the context of these challenges, a rubric-based approach offers a robust, standardised and repeatable means of assessment where quantitative return-on-investment measures are unavailable or impractical, outcomes are intangible or non-monetisable, and findings are primarily reported qualitatively.[23]

### 3.1.2 Adapting and developing a rubric-based approach to assess VfM in GCRF

**For this study, we adapted FCDO's 4Es framework to align with GCRF's ToC**. These refinements build on insights gained from previous VfM assessments (Stages 1a and 1b) that used the same framework. The modifications reflect GCRF's specific context, ensuring that the evaluation criteria appropriately assess whether the programme generates more value as compared to the resources invested in it.

**As part of this adaptation, we defined four core dimensions which form the basis of the rubric-based instrument**:

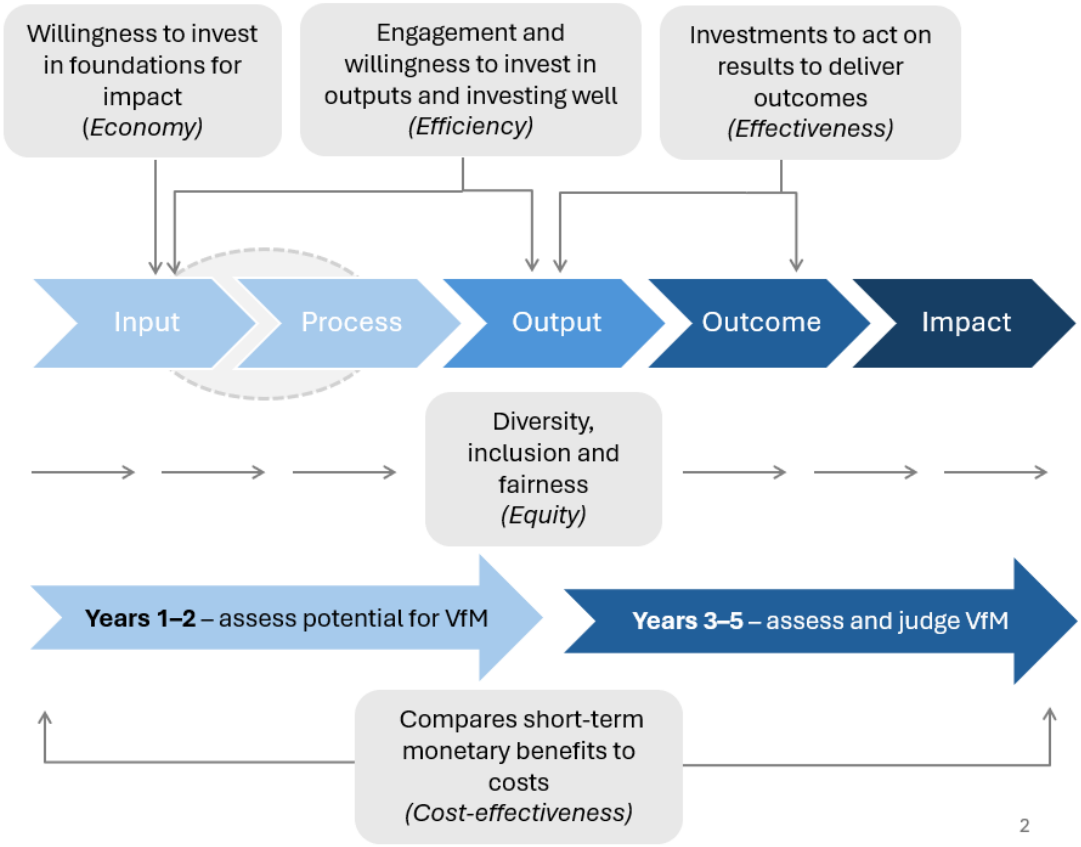
- willingness to invest in foundations for impact (*Economy*)
- engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (*Efficiency*)
- investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes (*Effectiveness*)
- compares short-term monetary benefits to costs (*Cost-effectiveness*).

[23] King J. 'Using Economic Methods Evaluatively' American Journal of Evaluation 2017: volume 38, pages 101–13 (viewed on 14 February 2025)

A fifth E, Equity, is embedded across all four dimensions, representing diversity, inclusion and fair distribution of programme outcomes. Figure 6 illustrates how the 4Es align with different stages of the programme value chain. Economy and Efficiency focus on early-stage investments, assessing how resources contribute to a project's potential for VfM. Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness examine later-stage impacts, evaluating the extent to which outputs and outcomes translate into tangible benefits.

**The four dimensions (4Es) of the VfM rubric map on to stages of GCRF ToC. Equity is integrated across dimensions. The bottom of the figure shows how the objectives of the VfM assessments evolved over the years of the GCRF evaluation as the Fund matured.**

**Figure 6: Overview of our approach to GCRF VfM assessment, illustrating how VfM assessment dimensions map on to stages of the GCRF ToC**




To ensure relevance to GCRF, the rubric was customised through a consensus-driven process, incorporating feedback and review from DSIT and POs as well as insights from existing evaluation evidence.

This report presents a summative analysis VfM assessments conducted in Years 4 and 5 of the evaluation, corresponding to the penultimate and final year of GCRF's 10-year funding period. This analysis is therefore positioned to capture emerging evidence of outcomes and scaling according to the GCRF ToC.

## GCRF VfM assessment rubric

The GCRF VfM assessment rubric is designed to assess how value is generated and transformed over time, while accommodating for the varied nature of GCRF awards, ensuring that projects with different budgets, durations and objectives can be assessed effectively.

The rubric consists of three main components:

- **award characteristics** – captures variations in budget, duration and objectives, which are essential given the diversity of GCRF-funded awards
- **dimensions and subdimensions** – defines the criteria used to assess VfM
- **performance standards** – establishes a five-point rating scale to evaluate performance against predefined benchmarks.

Across the four dimensions, Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness, the rubric includes **14 subdimensions**, which were developed based on evidence collected over four years of the GCRF evaluation and on a broader understanding of the key factors that drive value in ODA R&I. Each subdimension is clearly defined and assessed using specific performance standards. Table 2 provides an overview of these 14 subdimensions. The full rubric instrument is provided in Annex B.

**Table 2: Dimensions and subdimensions of the VfM rubric**

| GCRF VFM rubric |
|---|
| **Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy)** |
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |
| **Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency)** |
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |
| **Dimension 3: investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness)** |
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |

| **Dimension 4: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs (Cost-effectiveness)** |
|---|
| SD4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 GCRF |
| SD4.2 LMIC PIs secure further research funding, per £1 of GCRF funding *(Equity)* |
| SD4.3 Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding |

A **five-point scale** was used to assign a numerical score to each rubric subdimension – 'unacceptable (0)', 'poor (1)', 'adequate (2)', 'good (3)', 'excellent (4)' – or 'not applicable' or 'insufficient evidence'.[24] The GCRF VfM rubric outlines qualitative score definitions for each subdimension, providing tailored performance benchmarks and enabling consistent assessment across awards (see Annex B). These ratings therefore represent an evaluative judgement as to whether and to what extent an award has generated GCRF-relevant value, as defined in the subdimension-specific performance standards.

While performance standards are defined for each subdimension, overall, unacceptable performance describes awards that have failed to generate value, as defined by GCRF's value proposition. Poor performance describes awards that have generated slightly less GCRF-relevant value compared to resource invested. Adequate performance describes awards that have generated value, as defined by GCRF's value proposition, which meets the level of resource invested. Good performance describes awards that have generated more GCRF-relevant value compared to the resource invested. And excellent performance describes awards that have generated substantially more GCRF-relevant value compared to the resource invested. This means that "adequate" awards have done what they were expected to do, "good" awards have done more than expected, and "excellent" awards have done substantially more than expected.

[24] The 'not applicable' category was assigned when a subdimension was deemed irrelevant to a particular award. For instance, subdimension 4.3, on matched or co-funding, was excluded for most awards in our sample, because these projects typically lacked market-oriented outcomes.

## 3.2 Implementing the GCRF VfM rubric in this study

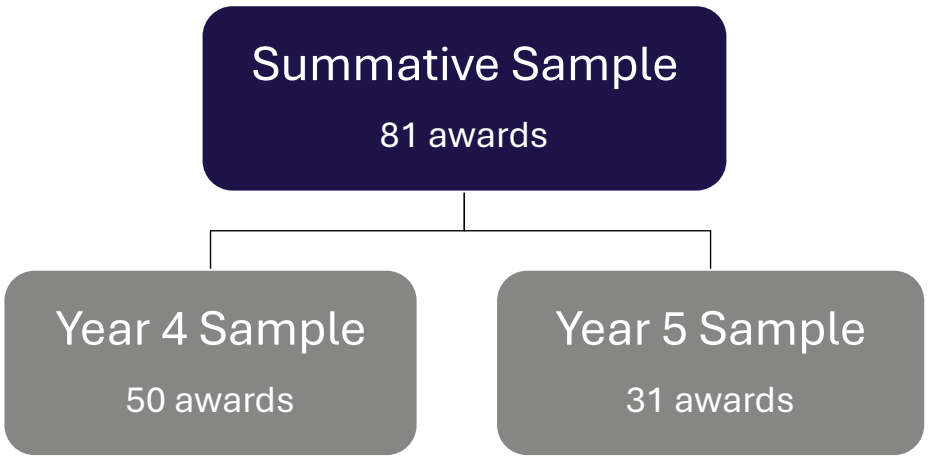
This report presents findings from two distinct analyses, supporting the accountability and learning functions of the GCRF evaluation VfM module. First, to provide accountability for investments, we present summative findings of VfM in GCRF, aggregating two years of VfM assessment. Second, to advance our understanding of VfM as the Fund matures, we present findings from the 2025 VfM assessment exercise. The Year 5 assessment leverages output and outcome data collected through other evaluation activities to explore Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness with a stronger evidence base, addressing a limitation of previous GCRF VfM assessments. As part of the Year 5 assessment, we present a qualitative analysis of the drivers of VfM in GCRF, expanding our understanding of how VfM is realised in ODA R&I funds, including the enablers and barriers to value generation.

### 3.2.1. Award sampling

This report presents findings from two samples of GCRF awards. The summative analysis aggregates two samples of awards analysed over two years of the evaluation (Year 4 and Year 5 of the VfM assessment, as illustrated in Figure 7), to yield a larger sample of awards. The Year 5 Assessment presents standalone findings from the Year 5 sample.

**The summative sample, totalling 81 GCRF awards, is comprised of 50 awards from the Year 4 sample and 31 awards from the Year 5 sample.**

**Figure 7: Award samples included in this summative assessment**



To facilitate comparisons across the diversity of awards within the GCRF portfolio, the GCRF evaluation, with input from DSIT, developed an award typology which categorises awards according to their central research focus and approach. An overview of award types included in this report are presented in Box 2.

**Box 2: Overview of GCRF award types included in this study[25]**

**Thematic research grant** programme-funded projects were led by a UK-based principal investigator (PI) in response to a specific thematic call.

**Strategic investments** were similarly funded particular projects or activities, but these were one-off awards. All such awards within this sample focused on secondary data analysis (i.e. they were desk-based work focusing on analysis of existing data sets).

**Applied innovation** grants were more applied in nature, involving collaborations with industrial partners to work on later stages of research.

**Network awards** provided funding to build sustained engagement and collaboration on emerging or challenging research areas. Often these awards also included activities such as workshops, events and communications to establish new relationships.

**Early and mid-career awards** were research grants directed to researchers in early stages of their careers. Our sample included early career awards from two very distinct programmes that should be considered separately:

- Springboard awards provided funding to support early career biomedical scientists based in eligible higher education institutes within the UK.
- The Future Leaders – African Independent Research (FLAIR) programme provided postdoctoral fellowships for African Early Career Researchers (ECRs) at sub-Saharan African institutions. It is distinct from other GCRF programmes in awarding funding directly to African fellows and their host institutions and so was among very few GCRF investments that were led by Global South countries.

[25] Academy of Medical Sciences. 'Springboard' 2024 (viewed on 14 February 2025); The Royal Society. 'FLAIR Fellowships' 2024 (viewed on 14 February 2025)

For VfM assessment, awards were also grouped into funding quintiles to enable fair comparison of awards with similar levels of resource. These funding quintiles are as follows:

- Lowest (0%-20%): Less than £31,600
- Lower (20%-40%): £31,600 - £127,354
- Middle (40%-60%): £127,354 - £252,639
- High (60%-80%): £252,639 - £600,000
- Highest (80%-100%): £600,000 - £118,759,063

### Year 5 assessment award sample

The 31 awards examined in the Year 5 VfM assessment correspond to the 40 case studies[26] assessed as part of the GCRF evaluation's Research into Use Synthesis Report, conducted in Year 4.[27] Case studies in the Research into Use Synthesis Report were sampled with the aim of developing thematic award clusters, where awards were grouped based on similarities in topic and geographic scope.[28] Award characteristics and sizes are shown in Figure 7.

### Year 4 assessment award sample

Sampling and analysis for the Year 4 VfM assessment is provided in full in the Year 4 VfM report.[29] Briefly, the Year 4 assessment sampled 50 awards from an existing pool of 150 awards utilised in the Research Quality Plus Plus (RQ++)[30] Synthesis

[26] To facilitate impact assessment, the Research into Use module considered case studies rather than awards. Case studies typically corresponded to a single award, although occasionally large awards were broken down into smaller case studies, as in the case of Hub awards. Consequently, the number of awards included in the Year 5 VfM sample is smaller than the number of case studies included in the Research into Use Synthesis Report.
[27] Add citation for RIU report when available.
[28] The Research Into Use Synthesis Report considered five thematic clusters of GCRF awards: food security and agricultural sustainability in India; marine and coastal governance in the southern Indian Ocean region; clean, safe, resilient water supply in Kenya; young people's access to education and employment in Lebanon; socio-ecological resilience to climate change impacts in Vietnam.
[29] DSIT. 'Global Challenges Research Fund: value for money assessment' 2025 (viewed on 22 May 2025)
[30] Research Quality Plus (RQ+) is an established standard for assessing the quality of research for development efforts. RQ++ is a GCRF-specific adaptation of this approach.

Report,[31] conducted in Stage 1b of the GCRF evaluation.[32] A combination of purposive and random sampling was used to ensure that sampled awards were representative of the Fund across award characteristics. A mix of award types and funding levels facilitated comparisons. Award characteristics and sizes are shown in Figure 8.

[31] BEIS. 'Evaluation of the Global Challenge Research Fund: Midpoint Synthesis Report: Assessing quality, impact positioning and early outcomes against GCRF's Theory of Change' 2023 (viewed on 5 March 2025)

[32] For further information on the sampling strategy used for RQ++, see 'Annex 5: Sampling Strategy' in BEIS. 'Evaluation of the Global Challenges Research Fund: Assessment of Research Quality, Positioning for Use and Results' 2023 (viewed on 14 February 2025)

**The largest proportion of awards in the summative sample are research grants, followed by early and mid-career awards and network awards. The smallest proportion of awards is strategic investments.**

**Figure 8: VfM award samples in Year 4 and 5 assessments, by award type and funding quintile**

| | | Award type | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Funding quintile** | **Assessment year** | **Research grant** | **Network** | **Strategic investments** | **Applied/ innovation grants** | **Early and mid-career awards** | **Total** |
| **Highest 80%–100%** | Year 4 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 12 |
| | Year 5 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 10 |
| **High 60%–80%** | Year 4 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 10 |
| | Year 5 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 |
| **Middle 40%–60%** | Year 4 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 19 |
| | Year 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 5 |
| **Lower 20%–40%** | Year 4 | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 9 |
| | Year 5 | 4 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 1 | 12 |
| **Total** | | 37 | 15 | 3 | 10 | 16 | 81 |

### 3.2.2. Assessing awards using the GCRF VfM rubric

The process of assessing and scoring awards was the same across the Year 4 and Year 5 samples. A team of evaluators conducted the VfM assessment. Each award was scored by one assessor. For each rubric subdimension, assessors reviewed the evidence sources (see Section 3.2.3) and assigned a score based on the subdimension-specific performance standards, as defined by the rubric. Assessors were prompted to consider award characteristics, including award type, total budget, duration and stage of implementation when scoring awards. Assessors also provided a descriptive rationale for each subdimension rating, outlining the underpinning evidence.

The evaluation team held weekly harmonisation meetings throughout the assessment phase to ensure consistent interpretation of the rubric subdimensions and performance standards and to address context-specific challenges, such as cases where awards' dissemination activities were disrupted by COVID-19. All assessments were reviewed by a single team member to support consistency in scoring across assessors and to challenge ratings that were not justified by the evidence available. A moderation meeting was held at the conclusion of the assessment phase to debate any remaining disagreements in scoring, ahead of finalising award ratings.

### 3.2.3. VfM evidence base

To conduct VfM assessments, VfM assessors reviewed the evidence base available for each award. Evidence reviewed for Year 4 and Year 5 VfM assessments included a combination of primary and secondary data gathered though the evaluation at the time of assessment. However, no new primary data was collected specifically for this VfM module; instead, the study relied on data collected during previous GCRF evaluation activities.

Because both samples of awards assessed in this study were previously used for other evaluation activities, there are slight differences in the evidence they had available for VfM assessment, although there were key commonalities. The Year 4 sample included evidence from the evaluation's RQ++ assessments, which synthesised evidence from award documents and interviews, focusing on early results and outcomes. The Year 5 sample included evidence from the evaluation's Research into Use case study write-ups, which also synthesised evidence from documents and interviews but focused on outputs and short-term outcomes.

The evidence reviewed for these assessments included:

- proposal and project documentation, including application documents, progress updates and M&E reports
- bibliometric evidence
- key informant interviews with PIs and partners where available
- award and researcher profiles on Gateway to Research[33]
- publicly available information online (e.g. researcher profiles on institutional websites, award webpages)
- previous qualitative analyses of each award (RQ++ assessments)[34] (Year 4 only)
- survey data from PIs and/or partners, matched to grant ID (Year 4 only)
- Research into Use case study write-ups[35] (Year 5 only).

### 3.2.4. Analysis

The same analytical process was used for the Year 4 and Year 5 samples. Quantitative scores and qualitative justifications were combined across awards. Score frequencies were tabulated at dimension and subdimension levels. For each dimension and subdimension, awards were disaggregated based on several characteristics, such as grant size, type of award, and nationality of the PI (UK or LMIC, based on proposal documentation and/or funding scheme). Qualitative evidence was further used to identify/validate patterns and correlations observed from quantitative scorings. For the summative analysis, scores from Year 4 and Year 5 were aggregated.

[33] Gateway to Research is a publicly available database of information on awards funded by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).
[34] RQ++ assessments synthesised evidence from award documentation (including proposals, publications and reports), interviews with PIs and co-investigators (Co-Is), and bibliometric data.
[35] Research into Use case study write-ups synthesised evidence from award documentation (including proposals, publications and reports) and interviews with PIs, Co-Is, research partners and key stakeholders.

## 3.5. Strengths and limitations of the study

### 3.5.1. Strengths

The strength of this study lies in the **robustness of the rubric-based approach** and the evidence used to assess VfM.

- **The rubric was developed through a consultative process involving POs and grant officials,** ensuring its relevance to the diverse range of GCRF awards. Through this consultation process we refined the definition of the sub-dimensions within the rubric to ensure their applicability across different disciplines, award types and sizes, and to take into account the feasibility of collecting and sharing relevant data for the different POs. It was further refined based on evidence from earlier phases of the GCRF evaluation, strengthening its credibility.
- **The award-level evidence used in assessment was triangulated from multiple sources** to validate key outputs and outcomes across most projects.
- **Implementation of the rubric ensured consistency and rigour in scoring.** Each award assessment was reviewed by a common reviewer, with ratings discussed through regular harmonisation meetings during the assessment process and with moderation meetings after each phase. The assessment process was transparent, with scores assigned based on clear criteria and full reporting of the methodology used.
- **Compared to previous GCRF VfM assessments, the Year 5 evidence base includes more data on outputs and short-term outcomes,** including from LMICs, strengthening the assessment of Effectiveness and improving understanding of VfM along GCRF's ToC, particularly at output and early outcome stages.
- Beyond its role in evaluating VfM in GCRF, **the rubric provides a useful tool for capturing and assessing the value generated by an ODA R&I funds**, particularly in capturing value that is nonquantifiable and non-monetisable**.**
- Learnings from VfM rubric development and implementation **contribute to methodological advancements and learnings** for future VfM assessments, both within GCRF and for the ISPF. These learnings are valuable in the nascent landscape of VfM in ODA R&I in the UK.

### 3.5.2. Limitations

This assessment has several limitations, including a relatively small sample size of awards, insufficient post-award documentation, and differences in the evidence bases between the Year 4 and Year 5 assessments.

- **Small sample size and representation across GCRF award types.** The summative sample includes 81 awards, but these represent only a small portion of all GCRF awards and are predominantly composed of thematic research grants. As award types differ in their aims and priorities, the dominance of thematic research grants in this sample may lead to findings that disproportionately reflect the features and outcomes of this award type.
- *Mitigation:* A summative assessment somewhat improves the sample size compared to previous assessments of VfM in GCRF, though sample size remains a limitation of this study. A small sample size and somewhat limited diversity across GCRF award types in this study limits the generalisability of the findings to the entire GCRF award portfolio.

  **Variability in available evidence.** VfM assessments relied on evidence collected in prior evaluation activities, leading to differences in evidence depth across awards. For example, challenges responsiveness in previous evaluation activities meant that there was variation in interview data across awards.

  *Mitigation:* Confidence levels were incorporated into assessments to reflect the strength of available evidence.
- **Limited post-award documentation.** A key challenge, particularly in Year 4, was inconsistent reporting on project outputs and outcomes, affecting assessment of Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness.

  *Mitigation:* We supplemented data with project website and LMIC news reports where possible, filling in gaps using publicly available information. Confidence levels provide transparency where data gaps remained. The Year 5 sample, benefiting from additional data sources, addresses some of these gaps; however, incomplete capture of outputs and outcomes remains a limitation.
- **Inconsistent financial reporting.** Some awards lack detailed budget breakdowns in proposal documentation, making financial analysis difficult.

*Mitigation:* We used available financial data to generate indicative comparisons, ensuring reasonable estimates of fundings allocation across awards. Confidence levels provide transparency where data gaps remained.

- **Challenges in tracking follow-on funding.** Gateway to Research, the primary source for follow-on fund data on awards (in the absence of comprehensive reporting across the Fund), only covers UKRI awards, mostly capturing UK-based PI funding, with little insight into funding secured by LMIC partners.

  *Mitigation:* We triangulated follow-on funding data where available, using additional evidence from award documents and external sources; however, this data gap remains a limitation.

- **Limited evidence for assessing Cost-effectiveness.** As VfM reporting mechanisms were not built into GCRF, the evaluation relied other sources to evidence VfM. Lack of uniformity in award reporting practices posed limitations in capturing follow-on funding, resulting in a patchy evidence base for assessment of cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, challenges in tracking follow-on funding, particularly for LMIC researchers, limited assessment of Cost-effectiveness.

  *Mitigation:* We used Gateway to Research and publicly available information from web searches to fill evidence gaps in capture of follow-on funding; however, a lack of evidence of follow-on funding remained a limitation for many awards.

# 2 Summative findings

*This section presents summative findings from VfM assessments conducted in Years 4 and 5 of the GCRF evaluation. The summative analysis of 81 awards provides an overall assessment of VfM in GCRF and examines variation in performance across VfM rubric subdimensions and award types.*

## Overall VfM in GCRF

**Box 3: Summary of key findings on overall VfM in GCRF**

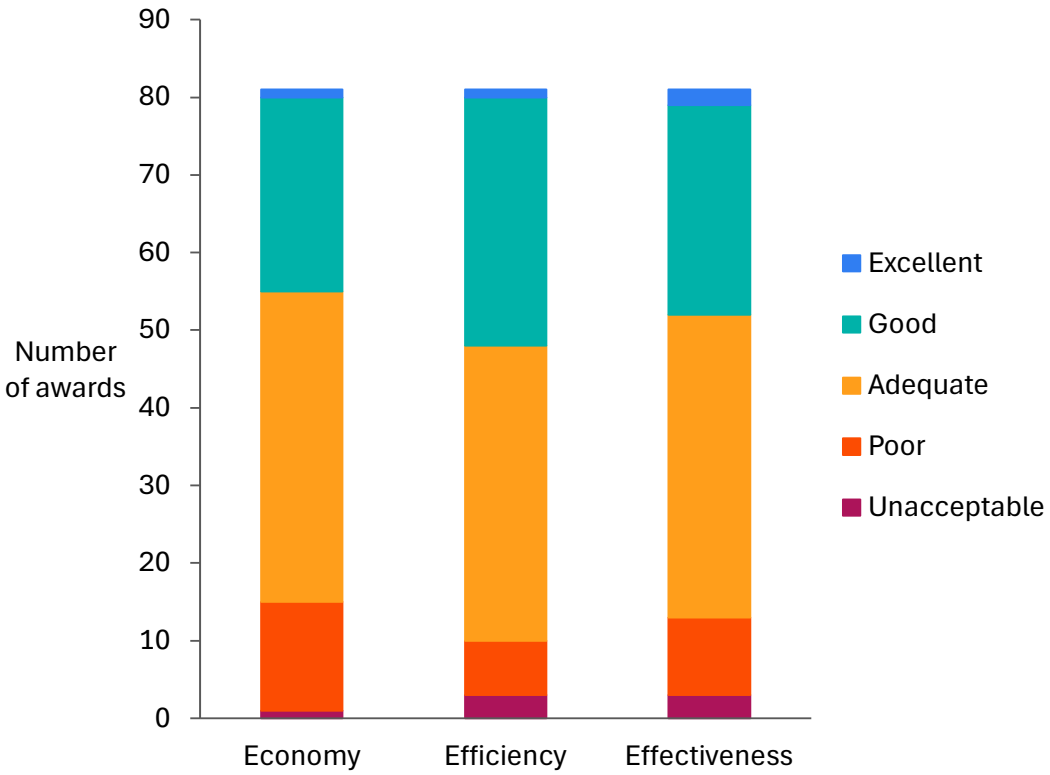
- Overall, GCRF awards meet VfM performance standards, with 89% of awards rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.
- The summative sample performs best in research innovation and originality (SD1.1), investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3), and high-quality R&I positioned for use (SD3.1), suggesting that GCRF objectives related to research excellence and positioning for use have been well incorporated into awards and utilised effectively to generate value at the output and outcome stages.
- The sample performs weakest on investment in equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) processes (SD1.3), indicating a lack of mechanisms at the Fund and commissioning levels to incorporate EDI into project design and implementation, with possible implications for the equity and fairness in the ways in which GCRF generates value as the Fund matures.

**Overall, evidence from the summative sample indicates that GCRF awards meet, and in some cases exceed, VfM performance standards, with 89% of awards rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.** Performance for each dimension is shown in Figure 9. This corroborates findings from the Year 4 VfM assessment, which found that 86% of awards were rated adequate, good or excellent across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

Across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness, adequate is the most common rating, followed by good. A small proportion of awards are rated poor or unacceptable. Overall, this provides assurance that the awards assessed largely meet VfM performance standards. However, it also indicates that more could be done to drive performance that exceeds VfM performance standards. Throughout this report we identify areas where performance can be improved, highlight enablers of good and excellent VfM performance, and, in Section 6, provide recommendations for how this can be achieved in future ODA R&I funds.

**Most awards in the summative sample demonstrate adequate, good or excellent VfM performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. Insufficient evidence in Cost-effectiveness (not pictured) precluded dimension-level summary.**

**Figure 9: VfM performance of 81 awards across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness[36]**




[36] Subdimensions of Equity are integrated throughout Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness (see Table 1) and are therefore not analysed as a standalone dimension of the rubric.

**GCRF awards perform best in research innovation, originality and positioning for use, and weakest in EDI-related subdimensions.**

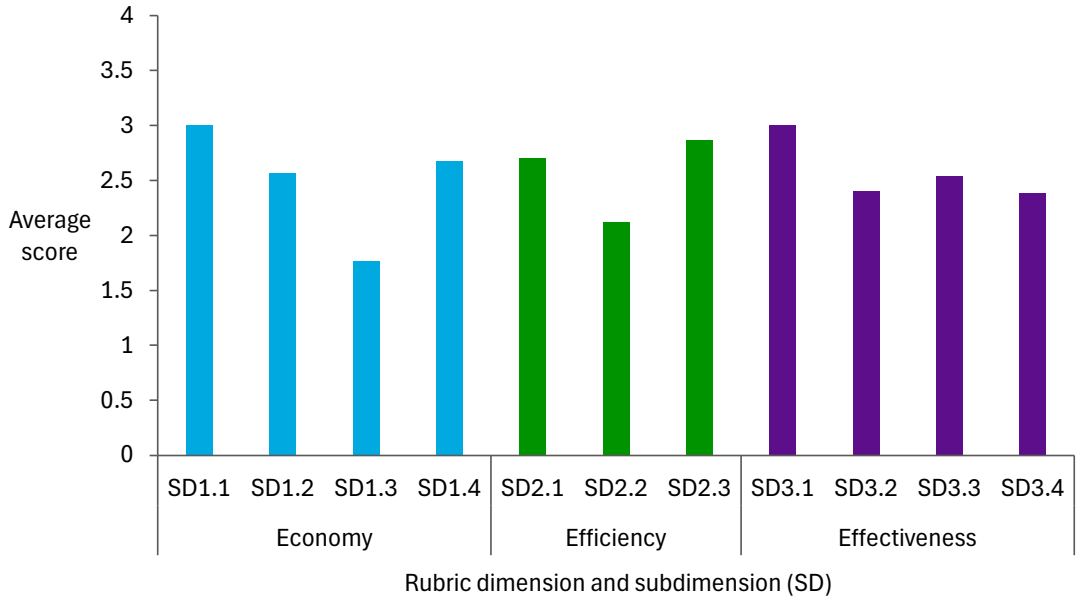
The summative sample performs strongest on research innovation and originality (SD1.1), investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) and high-quality R&I positioned for use (SD3.1). Because research innovation, originality and positioning for use were among GCRF's strategic objectives, this finding suggests that these objectives have been well established in awards. Moreover, awards perform well in high-quality research and positioning for use across dimensions (SD1.1, SD2.3 and SD3.1), suggesting that investments in these objectives were utilised effectively to realise benefit and generate value at the outcome stage.

**GCRF awards perform weakest on investment in EDI processes (SD1.3).**

Investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) is the only subdimension where the summative sample performs below adequate (2) on average, indicating that equity-related objectives were not well established in awards. This finding suggests a lack of mechanisms at the Fund and commissioning level to incorporate EDI into project design and implementation. Performance for each subdimension is shown in Figure 10.

**Award performance at the subdimension level varied. Awards performed well, on average, in research innovation and originality (SD1.1), investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) and high-quality research positioned for use (3.1). Awards performed weakest, on average, in investment in EDI process (SD1.3). A score of 2 corresponds to an 'adequate' rubric rating. Subdimension are defined in Table 1.**

**Figure 10: Average scores of 81 awards across subdimensions of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness**




**Network awards outperform other award types across many areas of the GCRF VfM rubric, particularly in Equity-related subdimensions.**

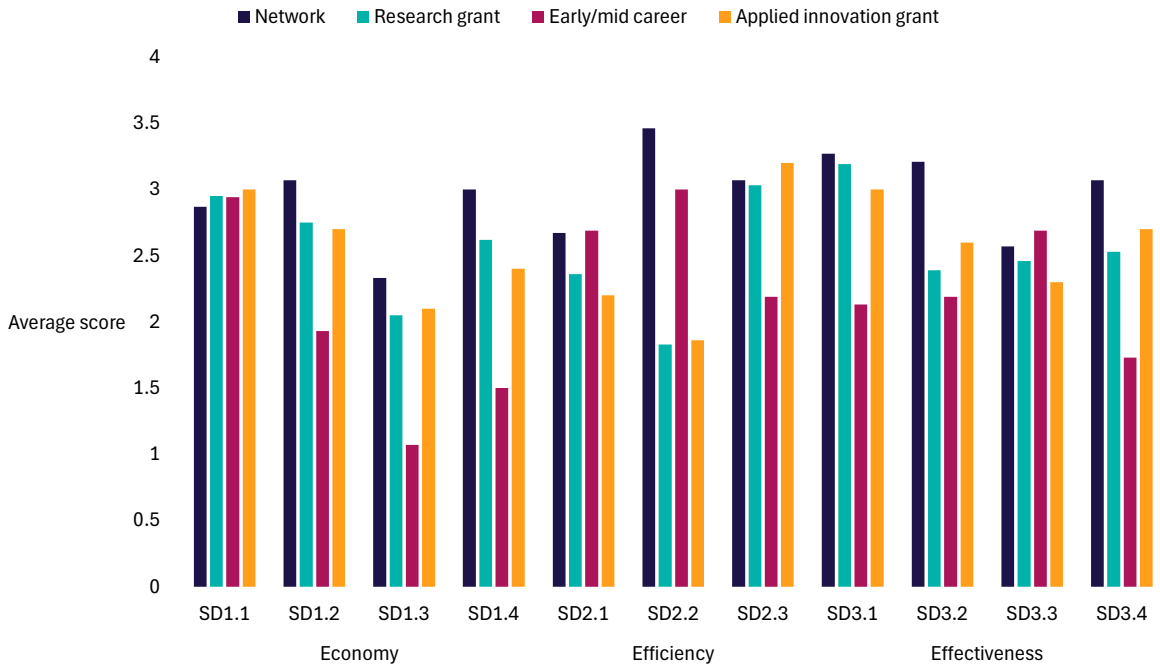
Network awards perform slightly better than other award types across seven out of 12 subdimensions, consistent with observations in the Year 4 VfM assessment. Network awards perform particularly well compared to other award types in equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2) and sustainable and equitable partnerships (SD3.2). This may reflect the fact that the objectives of network awards – including equity, inclusion and capacity building – were well aligned with GCRF's strategic objectives. Research grants and applied/innovation awards perform similarly to each other and closely trail network awards across most subdimensions, indicating that these award types also generated value in alignment with GCRF's strategic objectives. Variation in VfM rubric score by award type is presented in Figure 11.

**Compared to other award types, early and mid-career awards underperform across multiple subdimensions.**

Early and mid-career awards perform less well than other award types across seven out of 12 subdimensions. Early and mid-career awards within our sample were generally made to an individual or small team and were funded at lower levels compared to other award types, possibly limiting the extent to which these awards could generate value across some areas aligned with GCRF's strategic objectives, particularly related to breadth of expertise and reach of the award. Notably, early and mid-career awards demonstrated strong performance in equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), reflecting the fact that many awards in our sample were made to LMIC PIs.

## Variation in performance by award type indicates that awards have strengths and weaknesses across VfM subdimensions.

**Figure 11: Average scores of 81 awards across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness subdimension by award type**



**In assessing Cost-effectiveness, we found that total investment from non-GCRF sources[37] was, on average, 4.0 times more than the GCRF investment; however, this figure is sensitive to sampling effects and should be interpreted cautiously.**

Across the summative sample, we identified follow-on or co-funding totalling approximately £144.3 million. This compares to the GCRF investment of approximately £80.5 million in the same awards. We calculated that the total further investment from non-GCRF sources was, on average, 4.0 times the initial investment in GCRF. However, this figure should be interpreted with caution, as it is heavily influenced by a small number of awards. The amount of follow-on funding may be an underestimation as Gateway to Research, which only covers UKRI awards and UK-based PIs, was the primary evidence source; however, it may also be an overestimation as attributing follow-on funding to GCRF remains a challenge.

We conducted a sensitivity analysis by taking the top 70 and the bottom 70 awards in terms of their level of 'return' as characterised by further investment from other sources. We found that our sample secured additional investment between 1.0 and 5.1 times the initial investment in the portfolio, indicating how much this figure varied depending on the sample of awards chosen. Although the overall level of additional investment exceeds the initial GCRF investment considerably in the summative sample, only 24 awards had evidence of investment which exceeded the initial GCRF investment, and over half of further investment identified (59%) came from just four awards. Excluding these three awards reveals that follow-on funding was, on average, 2.9 times the initial GCRF investment.

**The performance of the summative sample provides assurance that GCRF delivers VfM.**

Findings from the summative sample, representing the combined sample of awards assessed in Years 4 and 5, are largely congruent with the findings from prior GCRF VfM assessments and findings from other areas of the evaluation. Key findings from all GCRF VfM assessments are presented in Annex D.

Overall, the summative findings provide assurance that GCRF awards meet VfM performance standards and deliver GCRF-relevant value, in line with the Fund's strategic objectives. However, there is scope for future funds to improve on this performance. Variation in performance across VfM subdimensions and GCRF award types illuminates areas of relative strength and weakness across the Fund. These

[37] Non-GCRF sources include private and overseas public funding.

themes are explored in Section 5, and recommendations for future ODA R&I funds are presented in Section 6.

In the next section, we present stand-alone findings from the Year 5 assessment, which utilised output and outcome evidence from LMICs to explore Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness with a stronger evidence base, advancing our understanding of how VfM is realised in GCRF as the Fund matures.

# 5. Year 5 assessment – overall findings

*This section presents stand-alone findings from the VfM assessment conducted in Year 5 of the GCRF evaluation. It examines how the Year 5 sample performed overall, including variation in performance across the GCRF VfM rubric and across award types. Importantly, the Year 5 assessment leverages output and outcome data collected through other evaluation activities to explore Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness with a stronger evidence base, addressing a limitation of previous GCRF VfM assessments. As part of this assessment, we present a qualitative analysis of the drivers of VfM in GCRF, expanding our understanding of how VfM is realised in ODA R&I funds, including the enablers and barriers to value generation.*

## Overall findings on VfM in the Year 5 sample

**Box 4: Key findings from the Year 5 assessment**

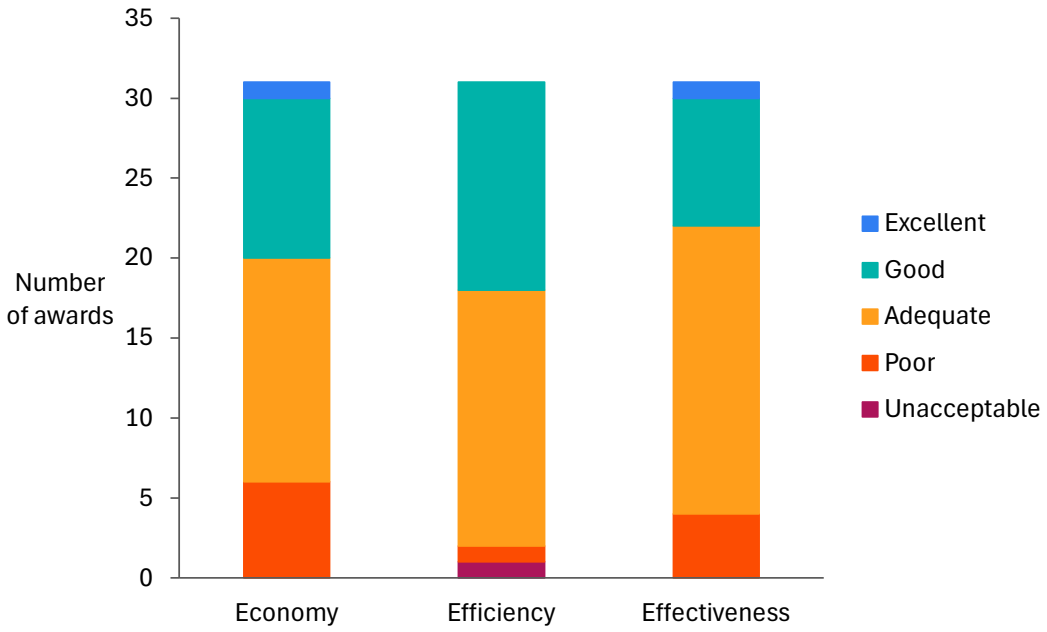
- Evidence from this sample indicates that GCRF awards meet, and in some cases exceed, VfM performance standards, with 94% of awards rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.
- The Year 5 sample shows better performance in the Efficiency and Effectiveness dimensions when compared to the Year 4 assessment, evidencing the value generated by GCRF awards at the output and early outcome stages. This improvement may reflect improved data capture relevant to these dimensions.
- We observe strengths and weaknesses at the subdimension level in the Year 5 sample that mirror those from the Year 4 assessment, with strongest performance on research excellence/originality (SD1.1 and SD3.1) and positioning for use (2.3), with relatively poorer performance on investment in EDI processes (SD1.3).
- Unlike the Year 4 sample, equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC (SD2.2) is a relative weakness of this sample, although the average score is above adequate (2), indicating a potential avenue for improved VfM performance for some awards.

**Evidence from this sample indicates that GCRF awards in the Year 5 sample meet, and in some cases exceed, VfM performance standards, with 94% of awards rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.** Compared to the Year 4 VfM assessment, which found that 86% of awards were rated as adequate or better across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness, the present sample had fewer awards rated as poor or unacceptable across these dimensions.

Notably, the present sample shows better performance in the Efficiency and Effectiveness dimensions when compared to the Year 4 assessment, possibly reflecting improved data capture relevant to these dimensions. This suggests that previous GCRF VfM assessments may have underestimated performance in Efficiency and Effectiveness, due to limited evidence of outcomes at the time of assessment. Figure 12 presents award performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.

### Most awards demonstrate adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. Insufficient evidence in Cost-effectiveness (not pictured) precluded dimension-level summary.

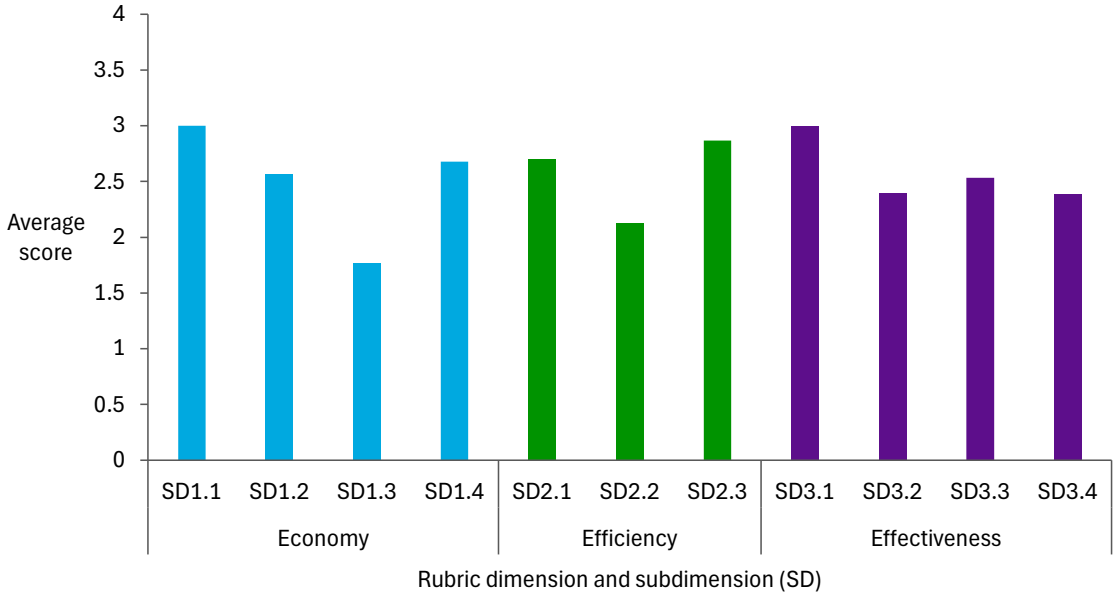
**Figure 12: VfM performance of Year 5 awards (n = 31) across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness**



Findings at the subdimension level mirror those from the Year 4 assessment, with strongest performance on research excellence (SD1.1 and SD3.1) and positioning for use (2.3), with relatively poorer performance on investment in EDI processes (SD1.3). Unlike the Year 4 sample, equitable balance of research funding between the UK and LMICs (SD2.2) is a relative weakness of this sample, although the average score is above adequate (2). This suggests that on average, the portfolio of awards is delivering VfM, with opportunities for improvement in some subdimensions. Figure 13 presents average scores of all Year 5 awards across VfM rubric subdimensions.

**Award performance at the subdimension level varied. Awards performed well, on average, in research innovation and originality (SD1.1), investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) and high-quality research positioned for use (3.1). Awards performed weakest, on average, in investment in EDI process (SD1.3). A score of 2 corresponds to an 'adequate' rubric rating. Subdimension are defined in Table 1.**

**Figure 13: Average scores of 31 awards across subdimensions of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness**




Overall, findings from the Year 5 assessment provide assurance that GCRF meets VfM performance standards, demonstrating consistency with the Year 4 assessment. In the next subsections we explore VfM performance by dimension, subdimension and award type, providing a rich and nuanced assessment of the sample's performance across the VfM rubric.

## Findings on Economy: Willingness to invest in foundations for impact

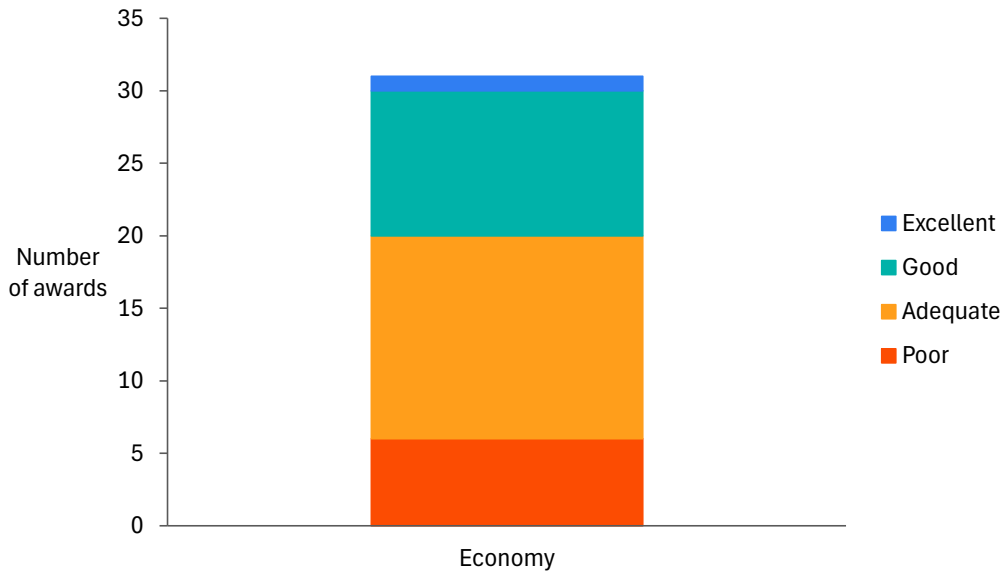
**Box 5: Key findings in "willingness to invest in foundations for impact" (Economy)**

- 11 awards (35%) offer good or excellent VfM in Economy, 14 awards (45%) offer adequate VfM, and 6 awards (19%) offer poor VfM.
- Research innovation and originality (SD1.1) is a strength of this sample, with all awards rated adequate, good or excellent on this subdimension.
- Investment in EDI processes is a relative weakness within Economy, with 14 (45%) awards rated poor or unacceptable on this subdimension.
- Compared to the Year 4 sample, this sample demonstrated better investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4), with 29 (94%) awards rated as adequate or better on this subdimension, compared to 66% of awards in the Year 4 sample. Elsewhere in this analysis we observe that investment in Equity-related subdimensions supports stronger performance across the VfM rubric; strong performance in equitable partnership may be explained by sampling bias in the Year 5 sample.

Overall, the Year 5 sample performs well in Economy, which assesses willingness to invest in foundations for impact. Our analysis found that **11 awards (35%) offer good or excellent VfM in Economy, 14 awards (45%) offer adequate VfM, and 6 awards (19%) offer poor VfM.** No awards were rated as unacceptable overall in Economy. Figure 14 presents a summary of award performance in Economy.

### 81% of Year 5 GCRF awards show adequate, good or excellent willingness to invest in foundations for impact (Economy).

**Figure 14: Summary of Year 5 awards performance in Economy dimension (n = 31)**




### As observed in the summative assessment, the Year 5 sample performed well in research innovation and originality (SD1.1) while investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) remained a weakness.

Research innovation and originality (SD1.1) was a strength of this sample, with all awards rated adequate, good or excellent on this subdimension. Research innovation and originality was a strength across award types, with all types scoring above adequate (2). This indicates that GCRF consistently invested in research that aligned with its strategic aim of supporting novel and innovative research that was viewed as important and relevant by potential users, including those in LMICs.

Relative to other subdimensions, investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) was a weakness within Economy, with 14 awards (45%) rated below adequate on this subdimension and an average of below adequate (2) across all award types. This suggests that priority was not given to investments relevant to EDI, including

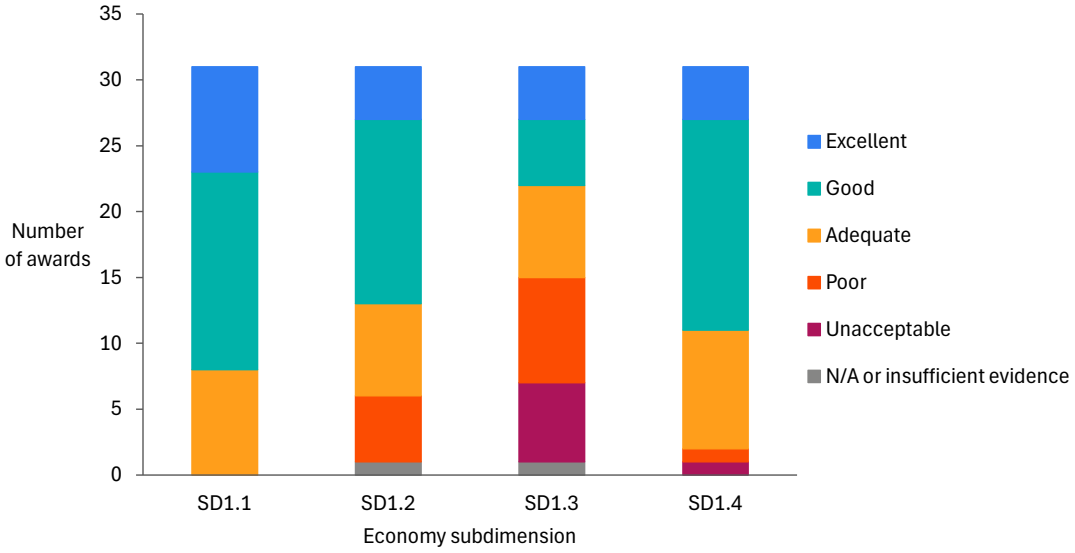
consideration of sociodemographic characteristics in research populations and sociodemographic variety in project team. This further supports a finding from the UK ODA Capacity and Benefits Study as part of the GCRF evaluation, which states that “there are areas of practice [in GCRF] that need further focus such as aspects of EDI”.

**The Year 5 sample performs better than previous samples in investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4), possibly due to sampling bias.**

Compared to the Year 4 sample, this sample demonstrated better investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4), with 29 awards (94%) rated as adequate or higher on this subdimension, compared to 66% of awards in the Year 4 sample. In the thematic analysis (see later in Section 5), we observe that investment in Equity-related subdimensions supports stronger performance across the VfM rubric. Because the Year 5 sample was selected from impact case studies, strong performance in investment in equitable partnership may be explained by sampling bias. Figure 15 presents a summary of award ratings across subdimensions of Economy.

## GCRF has supported research innovation and originality (SD1.1) but level of investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) varied across awards.

**Figure 15: Summary of Year 5 awards' performance in four subdimensions within Economy (n = 31)**




| Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy) |
|---|
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality: |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |

## No award type consistently performs better than others in Economy, though early- and mid-career awards underperform in two subdimensions.

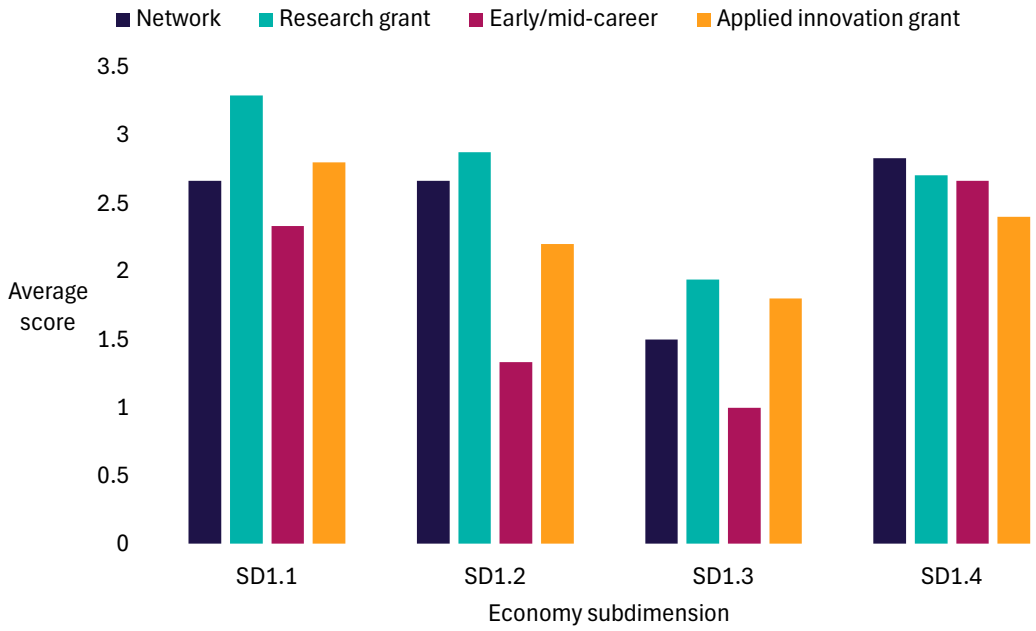
We observed variation in performance by award type, with different award types having areas of relative strength and weakness across Economy, with no type consistently performing better than others. Unlike the Year 4 assessment, network awards do not outperform other award types in Economy in this sample. Research grants perform marginally better than other award types in research innovation and originality (SD1.1), interdisciplinarity (SD1.2), and investment in EDI processes (SD1.3).

Early and mid-career awards perform less well than other award types across all Economy subdimensions other than investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4), with investment in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) and investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) being particular

weaknesses. Figure 16 presents average scores on Economy subdimensions by award type.

**Network awards, research grants and applied innovation awards perform adequate (2) or above on all subdimensions within Economy, while early and mid-career awards perform below adequate on average on investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) and investment in EDI processes (SD1.3).**

**Figure 16: Average performance of Year 5 awards (n = 31) within four subdimensions of Economy based on type of award**




| Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy) |
|---|
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality: |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |

To illustrate strong and weak performance in Economy within the context of individual awards, we present anonymised examples of good and poor-performing awards in Box 6.

**Box 6: Examples of good and poor-performing awards in Economy**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Dimension: Economy<br><br>Award type: Applied innovation grant<br><br>Funding level: Highest (£600,000 - £118,759,063)<br><br>Average score in Economy: 3.25</td><td colspan="4">Dimension: Economy<br><br>Award type: Early and mid-career award<br><br>Funding level: Lower (£31,600–£127,354)<br><br>Average score in Economy: 1.5</td></tr>
<tr><td>SD1.1: 3</td><td>SD1.2: 3</td><td>SD1.3: 4</td><td>SD1.4: 3</td><td>SD1.1: 2</td><td>SD1.2: 1</td><td>SD1.3: 0</td><td>SD1.4: 3</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">The award leveraged its investment well to establish interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral partnerships across countries. Involvement of and engagement with local organisations helped the project align its activities to resolve an explicit gap in LMIC challenges.<br><br>The award demonstrated good research originality, combining novel methodologies to address complex challenges in the LMIC partner country. The project's approach to research was comprehensive, facilitating an alignment between its activities and gaps in LMIC contexts. This was also reflected through their active engagement strategy, involving researchers from the Global North and Global South with expertise in diverse fields. It also established strong cross-sectoral</td><td colspan="4">The award aimed to make original contributions in a well-researched field, collaborated with organisations in LMIC partner country. However, the majority of the research activities were performed in the UK, and there was a lack of investments in stakeholder engagement, EDI and collaborative project design.<br><br>Although it contributed towards advancement in a scientific field, the award was not groundbreaking. The project's potential for innovative outcomes was limited in scope, relying on well-established techniques to generate new findings in newer contexts. Its relevance to LMIC contexts was also broadly defined, lacking sufficient alignment with and inclusion of perspectives from partner countries.</td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| **networks** with industry stakeholders, political organisations, civil society organisations and local communities, using participatory research and dissemination methods.<br><br>**EDI considerations deeply informed the project's rationale, design, methodology and analysis.** Investments were made into formal project management processes, such as regular discussions on EDI during team meetings. **Local LMIC contexts were considered in all engagement activities**, and there were expansive goals to ensure gender balance in participant recruitment and stakeholder interactions.<br><br>**Partnerships established under this project were equitable**, with positive signs of **co-design** and **fair distribution of benefits and responsibilities.** The assessment also notes an equitable distribution of financial and staff resources among partners. In addition, involvement of local technicians and institutions in the project helped foster trust and strengthen community ownership of research outcomes. | The project **lacked interdisciplinarity**, primarily involving experts from basic sciences fields. Similarly, the project had **no focus on cross-sector partnerships**, lacking engagement with practitioners such as end users, policymakers or local communities. The assessment also notes a lack of investment in processes to support interdisciplinary working.<br><br>**EDI considerations were neither a motivation of the project nor considered during conduct of any research activities.** In addition, no investments were made towards implementation of EDI principles within the team.<br><br>The award demonstrates equitable distribution of award resources and research activities. However, the project **lacked opportunities for collaboration on project design**. |

Next, we explore the Year 5 sample's performance in Efficiency.

## Findings on Efficiency: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs

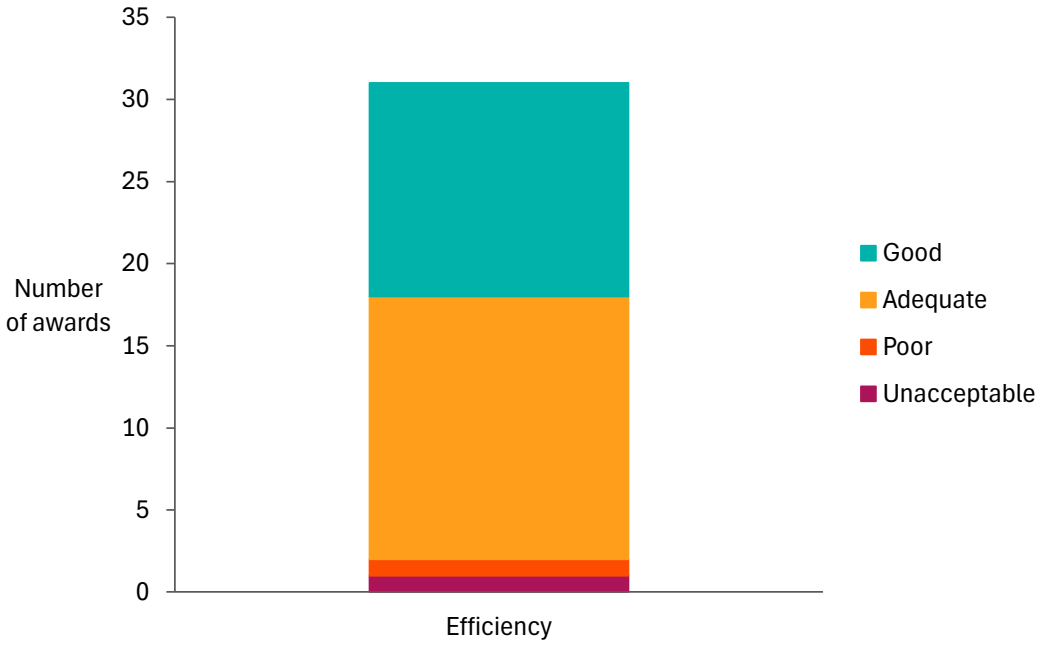
**Box 7: Key findings in "engagement and willingness to invest in outputs" (Efficiency)**

- 13 awards (42%) offer good VfM in Efficiency, 15 awards (48%) offer adequate VfM, and 2 awards (6%) offer poor or unacceptable VfM.
- Compared to the Year 4 sample, the Year 5 sample demonstrates better VfM in Efficiency, with a smaller proportion of awards rated less than adequate, possibly reflecting either improved data capture of award activities and outputs or a sampling bias in the Year 5 sample.
- Investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) was a relative strength of this sample, with 22 awards (71%) offering good or excellent VfM.
- Although 18 awards (58%) offered adequate or better VfM in equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), this was a relative area of weakness within Efficiency, with 6 awards (19%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM.

The Year 5 sample performs well in Efficiency, which assesses the extent to which planned resources are utilised to support collaboration and dissemination. Our analysis finds that **13 awards (42%) offer good VfM in Efficiency, 15 awards (48%) offer adequate VfM, and 2 awards (6%) offer poor or unacceptable VfM.** Compared to the Year 4 sample, the Year 5 sample demonstrates better VfM in Efficiency, with a smaller proportion of awards rated poor or unacceptable. Improved performance in Efficiency may reflect improved data capture of award activities and outputs, or it may suggest a sampling bias in the Year 5 sample. These awards were selected for impact case studies and therefore may be stronger performers across the VfM rubric compared to other GCRF awards. Figure 17 presents a summary of award performance in Efficiency.

**94% of Year 5 GCRF awards show adequate, good or excellent engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency).**

**Figure 17: Summary of Year 5 awards performance in Efficiency dimension (n = 31)**




**As observed in the summative sample, the Year 5 sample performs well in investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3).**

We observed differences in performance across subdimensions of Efficiency. Similarly to the Year 4 assessment, investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) was a strength within Efficiency with 22 awards (71%) demonstrating good or excellent VfM performance. This finding indicates that awards utilised GCRF funding to develop research outputs and communicate findings in ways that were appropriate and accessible for intended audiences and end-users. This suggests that GCRF investment was transformed into activities in alignment with the Fund's strategic aims.

**While insufficient evidence precluded assessment in some cases, equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2) was an area of weakness within Efficiency.**

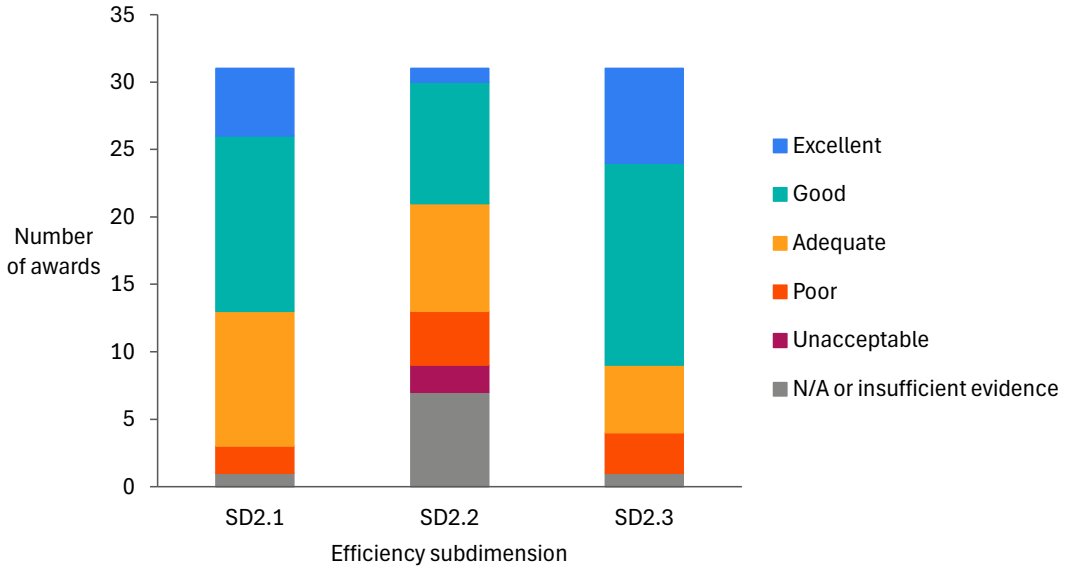
Although 18 awards (58%) offered adequate or better VfM in equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), 6 awards (19%) offered poor or unacceptable VfM, including the only 'unacceptable' ratings across the

dimension. While this represents a minority of awards within the sample, this finding suggests that, in some cases, GCRF investment was not utilised to establish equitable structures and working arrangements among partners, indicating a misalignment with Fund aims.

Notably, there was insufficient or conflicting evidence on equitable balance of research funding in 7 awards (23%), which precluded assessment. This was often because of financial information which was not sufficiently detailed or disaggregated to indicate whether funds were allocated to UK or LMIC partners. A summary of performance across Efficiency subdimensions is presented in Figure 18.

**Awards performed well in investments in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1) and dissemination of GCRF outputs (SD2.3) while performance in equitable balance of award funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2) was more varied.**

**Figure 18: Summary of Year 5 award performance in the three subdimensions within Efficiency (n = 31).**



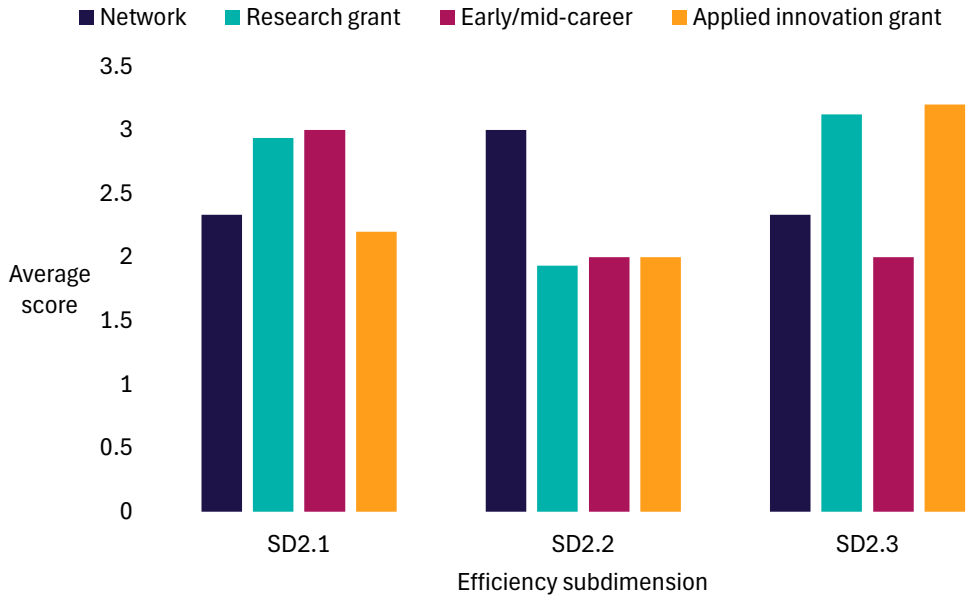

| Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency) |
|---|
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |

**Performance across subdimensions of Efficiency reflect the different objectives of different award types, with network awards performing well on equitable research funding and project-focused awards performing well in positioning for use.**

As with Economy, no single award type outperforms other types in Efficiency, but rather award types appear to have areas of relative strengths and weakness. Research grants and early and mid-career awards perform slightly better in investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1), possibly reflecting a focus among these awards on building research capacity. Network awards outperform other award types on equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC PIs. This may reflect networks' focus on equity and inclusion processes more widely as well as a need to establish equitable processes and ways of working at the proposal stage. Research grants and applied innovation awards perform well in positioning for use (SD2.3), possibly reflecting a focus on applied research. Figure 19 presents average scores on Efficiency subdimensions by award type.

**While no award type has consistently outperformed others in Efficiency, early and mid-career awards and research grants have performed better on their investments towards capacity-building activities in LMICs (SD2.1), and applied innovation and research grants have performed well in investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3)**

**Figure 19: Average performance of Year 5 awards (n = 31) by award type within the three subdimensions of Efficiency**



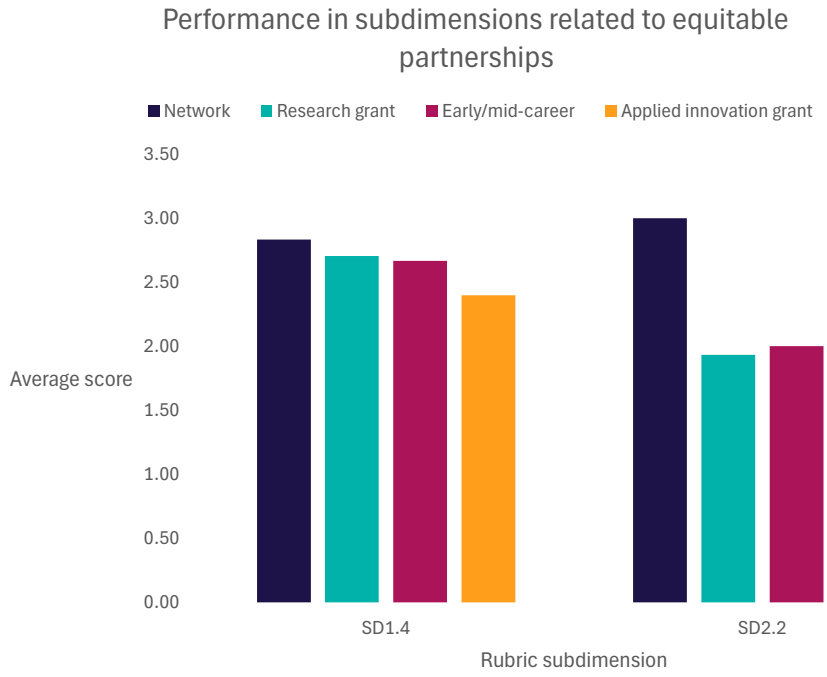

| Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency) |
|---|
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |

**With the exception of network awards, most awards performed worse in financial equity than in other processes and structures that support equitable partnerships.**

Interestingly, performance is more varied in the financial equity of partnerships (SD2.2) than in investment in process and structures to support equitable partnership and collaboration (SD1.4), indicating a potential disconnect or lack of appropriate utilisation of investment by some awards in this sample, with the notable exception of network awards. Performance in dimensions related to investment in equitable partnerships is presented in Figure 20.

**A comparison of investment into the structures and processes to support equitable partnerships (SD1.4) and equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC researchers (SD2.2) indicates a disparity in performance. With the exception of network awards, awards perform worse, on average, in financial equity compared to equity of the structures and processes that support equitable partnerships.**

**Figure 20: Average score on investment in the structures and processes to support equitable partnerships (SD1.4) compared to scores on equitable balance of research funding (SD2.2)**




| Subdimensions related to equitable partnerships |
|---|
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |

To illustrate strong and weak performance in Efficiency within the context of individual awards, we present anonymised examples of good and poor-performing awards in Box 8.

**Box 8: Anonymised examples of good and poor-performing awards in Efficiency**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Dimension: Efficiency<br><br>Award type: Network award<br><br>Funding level: Lower (£31,600–£127,354)<br><br>Average score in Efficiency: 3</td><td colspan="3">Dimension: Efficiency<br><br>Award type: Applied innovation grant<br><br>Funding level: Lower (£31,600–£127,354)<br><br>Average score in Efficiency: 1</td></tr>
<tr><td>SD2.1: 3</td><td>SD2.2: 3</td><td>SD2.3: 3</td><td>SD2.1: 1</td><td>SD2.2: 0</td><td>SD2.3: 2</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">The award performed well in this dimension. The network made vital investments for capacity building in LMIC partner countries and proposed a balanced distribution of resources to finance engagement and dissemination in local communities.<br><br>The award had a strong emphasis on capacity building, envisioning improvements to institutional and technical capabilities as a crucial objective of its activities. Through participation in the network, students and ECRs received access to skill-building and knowledge exchange workshops. The network also invested in training programmes, providing mentorship and avenues for commercial and cross-sector networking. The effectiveness of these activities was evidenced through establishment of spin-off firm and technology progression among LMIC partners.<br><br>The award allocated 67% of total contribution to its LMIC partners. This distribution of resources covered</td><td colspan="3">The award leveraged some of the investments to communicate its findings in academic networks. However, there was a severe lack of investment into capacity building and targeted dissemination among LMIC partners.<br><br>The award made minimal investments to support capacity building for LMIC partners. The majority of ECRs involved in the award were UK-based, and there was limited involvement of LMIC researchers in analysis.<br><br>LMIC researchers’ involvement in the award was financed in kind. Resources were allocated to LMIC partner for lab consumables. However, the assessment notes that these lab consumables were largely used by the UK lead.<br><br>The award planned for some dissemination activities through participation in international conferences and events. However, scope for non-academic dissemination was restricted, owing</td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| LMIC partners' involvement in research activities and helped finance exchange visits and dissemination events in partner countries.<br><br>As a network award, **dissemination and knowledge exchange were of key importance** to foster participation of stakeholders from diverse fields and sectors. Proposed distribution of funds further confirms this: 18% of the budget was allocated to fund dissemination events and exchange visits. The network planned a wide range of events, including conferences, workshops and meetings. These investments enabled the network to **align their outputs with LMIC needs** and commercial prospects. | **to insufficient engagement with local stakeholders at the output stage**. The assessment also notes that the award's dissemination activities required better positioning for use. |

Next, we explore the Year 5 sample's performance in Effectiveness.

## Findings on Effectiveness: Investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes

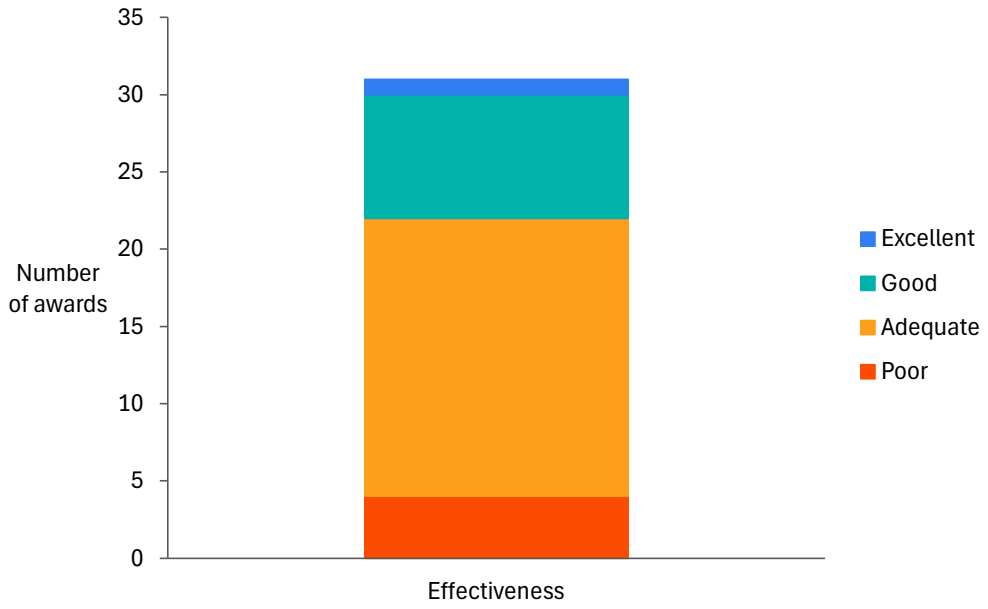
**Box 9: Key findings in "investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes" (Effectiveness)**

- 9 awards (29%) offer good or excellent VfM in Effectiveness, 19 awards (61%) offer adequate VfM, and 4 awards (21%) offer poor VfM.
- This sample is strong in research excellence and positioning for use (SD3.1), with 30 awards (97%) offering adequate or better VfM.
- Although most awards in this sample (77%) offer adequate or better VfM in establishing user-side stakeholder networks, this was a relative weakness of the sample within Effectiveness, with the remainder (23%) offering poor VfM.

Overall, the Year 5 sample performs well in Effectiveness, which assesses investment to act on results to deliver outcomes. Our analysis finds that **9 awards (29%) offer good or excellent VfM in Effectiveness, 19 awards (61%) offer adequate VfM, and 4 awards (21%) offer poor VfM**. No awards were rated as unacceptable overall in Effectiveness. Compared to the Year 4 sample, the Year 5 sample demonstrates marginally better VfM in Effectiveness, with a smaller proportion of awards rated less than adequate. As noted in Economy, this may reflect improved data capture of award activities and outputs, or it may reflect the sample selection. A summary of award performance in Effectiveness is presented in Figure 21.

**87% of GCRF awards in the Year 5 sample show adequate, good or excellent level of investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness).**

**Figure 21: Summary of Year 5 award performance in Effectiveness dimension (n = 31)**




**Research excellence and positioning for use (SD3.1) was a strength within Effectiveness.**

As observed in the Year 4 assessment, this sample is strong in research excellence and positioning for use (SD3.1), with 30 awards (97%) offering adequate or better VfM. This indicates that GCRF investments have been utilised to design, deliver and promote high-quality research that addresses key development challenges. This finding suggests that GCRF investment was transformed into outputs that are in alignment with the Fund's strategic aims.

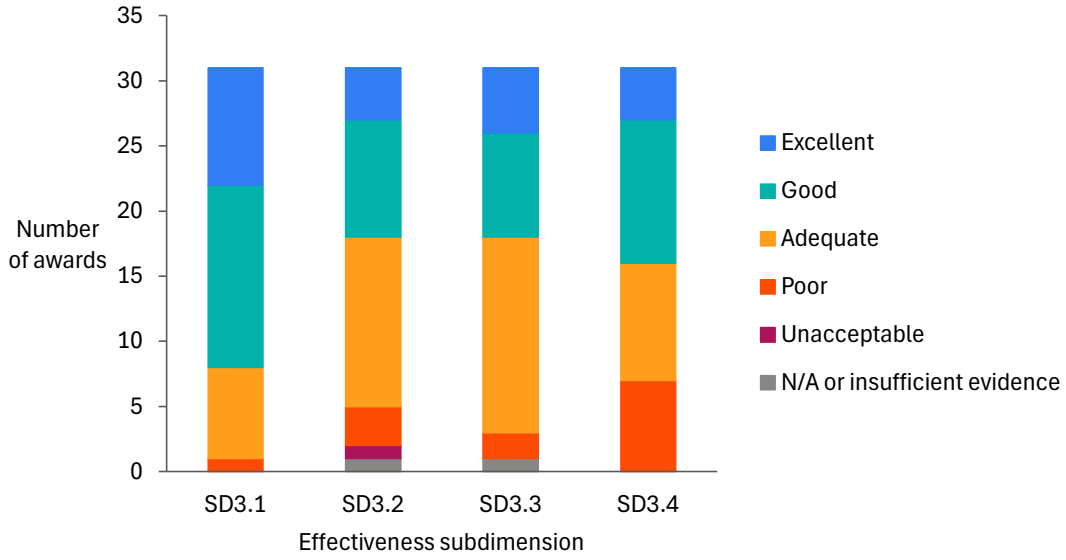
**However, some awards underperformed in establishing user-side stakeholder networks (SD3.4).**

Although most awards in this sample (77%) offer adequate or better VfM in establishing user-side stakeholder networks (SD3.4), this was a relative weakness of the sample within Effectiveness, with the remainder (23%) offering poor VfM. This finding suggests that a minority of awards did not utilise their resources to establish networks that promote the research and support its uptake, highlighting an instance where GCRF investment was not transformed in line with the Fund's strategic aims.

Figure 22 presents a summary of award ratings across Effectiveness subdimensions.

**GCRF awards have led to high-quality R&I activities and outputs that were well-positioned for use (SD3.1) but establishment of user-side stakeholder networks (SD3.4) was a relative weakness for some awards.**

**Figure 22: Summary of Year 5 award performance in the four subdimensions within Effectiveness (n = 31)**




| Dimension 3: Investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |

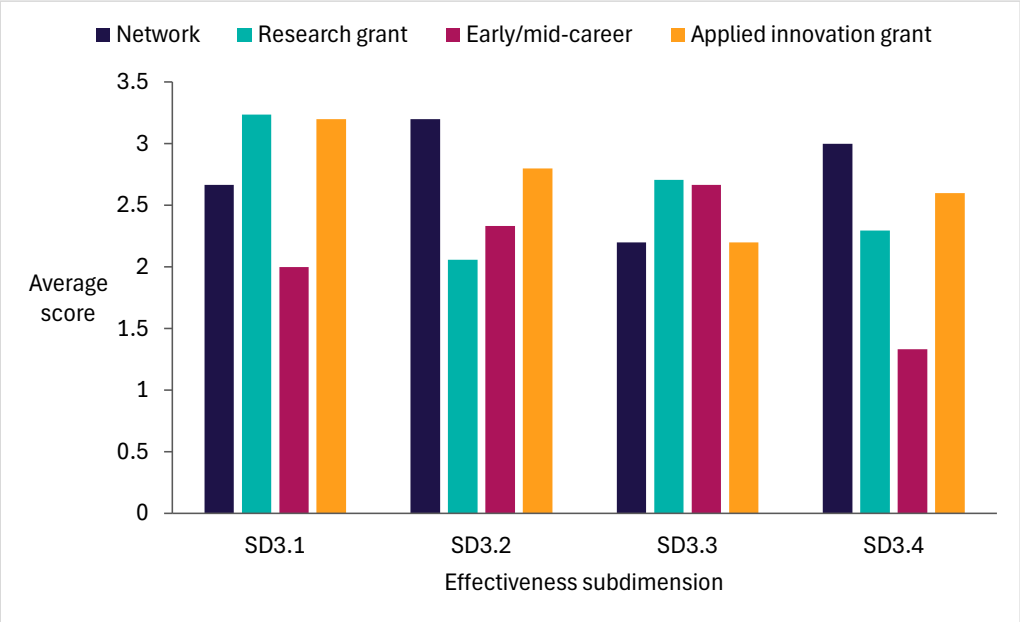
**Strengths and weaknesses of different award types reflect their different objectives, with network awards performing well on partnership and network building, research and innovation grants performing well on high-quality R&I positioned for use, and early- and mid-career awards performing well on capacity strengthening.**

As with Economy and Efficiency, we observe variation in performance by award type, with award types demonstrating relative strengths and weaknesses across Effectiveness. Network awards perform better than other award types in partnership-related subdimensions of Effectiveness, including sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2) and establishment of user-side stakeholder networks (SD3.4). Research and

applied innovation grants perform better than other award types in high-quality R&I positioned for use (SD3.1), possibly reflecting their focus on research excellence, applied research and positioning for use. Finally, early and mid-career awards underperform relative to other award types, with the exception of enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3), possibly reflecting greater room for improved capabilities among early and mid-career researchers. Average scores on Effectiveness subdimension by award type are presented in Figure 23.

**Variable performance by award type indicates that awards have strengths and weaknesses.**

**Figure 23: Average performance of Year 5 awards (n = 31) by award type across the four subdimensions of Effectiveness**




| Dimension 3: Investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |

To illustrate strong and weak performance in Effectiveness within the context of individual awards, we present anonymised examples of good and poor-performing awards in Box 10.

**Box 10: Anonymised examples of good and poor-performing awards in Effectiveness**

<table>
<tr><td colspan="4">Dimension: Effectiveness<br><br>Award type: Research grant<br><br>Funding level: Highest (£600,000–£118,759,063)<br><br>Average score in Effectiveness: 4</td><td colspan="4">Dimension: Effectiveness<br><br>Award type: Early- and mid-career award<br><br>Funding level: Middle (£127,354–£252,639)<br><br>Average score in Effectiveness: 1.75</td></tr>
<tr><td>SD3.1: 4</td><td>SD3.2: 4</td><td>SD3.3: 4</td><td>SD3.4: 4</td><td>SD3.1: 3</td><td>SD3.2: 1</td><td>SD3.3: 2</td><td>SD3.4: 1</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="4">The award’s communication strategy was extensive, with resources invested to ensure their outputs’ relevance and accessibility. The project generated new insights, contributed to policy reform and successfully sustained engagement with cross-sectoral stakeholders beyond the duration of the GCRF award.<br><br>The project was conducted by a large international and interdisciplinary team, generating and positioning findings for translation into policies and practice. As a part of the team’s communication strategy, outputs were precisely adapted to different stakeholders, published on open access platforms and released in multiple languages for wider uptake.<br><br>Outputs generated from the award were diverse and tailored to different stakeholder groups. Examples include</td><td colspan="4">The award generated findings relevant for LMIC partner country. The project’s interdisciplinary approach and regular engagement with practitioners also helped generate interest during dissemination. However, the award was unable to establish and sustain partnerships in the LMIC partner country.<br><br>The award’s findings were relevant for diverse stakeholders within and beyond the partner country involved. Applicability of the project’s findings was further enhanced through regular engagement with practitioners. The project also made limited but positive contributions to build capabilities among practitioners and improve their systems in practice.<br><br>Dissemination activities also generated significant interest from participants, leading to opportunities of further engagement. However, the assessment notes that these engagements could not</td></tr>
</table>

| | |
|---|---|
| peer-reviewed articles, policy papers, leaflets and an online course.<br><br>The award used its resources and dissemination activities effectively, contributing to international policy reform and shifts in public perception. **The project's activities also led to enhanced capabilities**, including improvements to infrastructural facilities and growth opportunities accessible to researchers in LMIC partner countries.<br><br>The award **successfully engaged with key stakeholders across different disciplines and sectors** throughout the lifespan of the project, gathering inputs at the design, analysis and dissemination stages. Partnerships established through this award were interdisciplinary and across multiple countries. The award has also successfully secured follow-on funding, demonstrating continued engagement in the field and **sustainable partnerships**. As a result, the award has encouraged more research and development activities among LMIC partners via establishment of new research centres and increased investments. | be sustained beyond the award's completion.<br><br>The award was **unsuccessful in sustaining its partnerships beyond the duration of funding**. Although relevant practitioners were involved in the design and analysis activities, the project was **unable to mobilise its networks for subsequent activities in the field**. |

Next, we explore the Year 5 sample's performance in Cost-effectiveness.

## Findings on Cost-effectiveness: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs

**Box 11: Key findings in "compared short-term monetary benefits to costs" (Cost-effectiveness)**

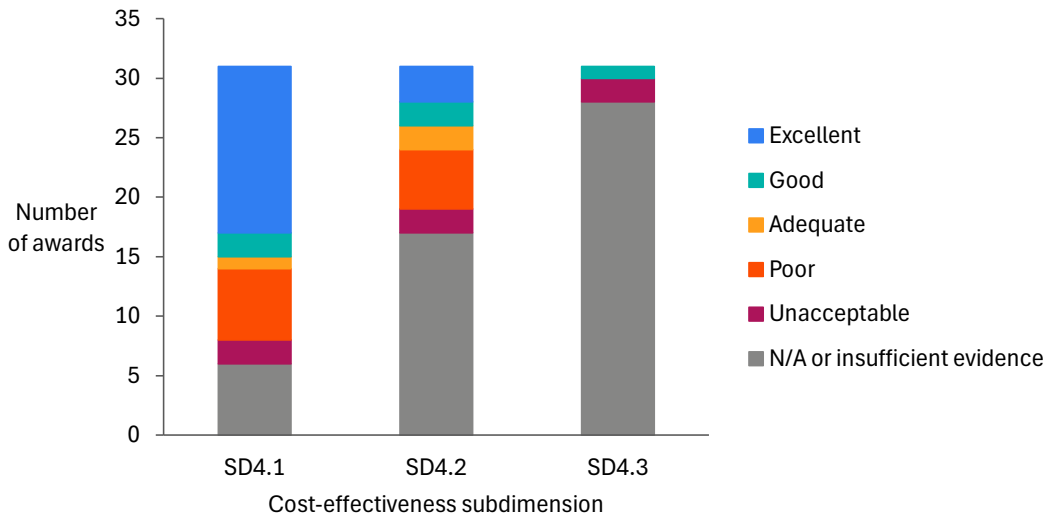
- Assessing Cost-effectiveness and its subdimensions with confidence was challenging, owing to insufficient evidence. This was largely a result of limited post-award reporting and the use of UK-based reporting systems, which are likely to underreport on LMIC researchers.
- We identified follow-on or co-funding totalling approximately £78 million within this sample, relative to the GCRF investment in our sample of approximately £50.5 million. This value is likely to be an underestimation, because fewer than half of the awards in this sample had quantitative evidence of follow-on funding, although many more had qualitative evidence of the same.
- A sensitivity analysis found that this sample secured additional investment of between 1.3 times and 7.9 times the initial GCRF investment in the sample, indicating substantial variation across awards.
- Based on limited evidence, we identified approximately £5.2 million in follow-on funding for LMIC researchers, representing 7% of the total amount of further investment in this sample.
- The majority of further investment was associated with 15 awards. We did not observe any patterns in award characteristics (i.e. award size, duration or type) and the level of return on investment.

**We identified £78 million in follow-on funding or co-funding in our sample of awards. This compares to the GCRF investment of £50.5 million in our sample. We calculated that the total further investment from wider sources was, on average, 5.8 times the initial GCRF investment.** This value should be treated with caution, because follow-on funding was identified in fewer than half of the awards in this sample, and therefore this figure may be prone to sampling bias. A summary of performance across Cost-effectiveness subdimensions in presented in Figure 24.

Although the overall level of additional investment considerably exceeds the initial GCRF investment in this sample, only 15 awards (48%) had evidence of investment which exceeded their initial award value, and over 50% of further investment identified comes from two awards. However, excluding these awards only modestly reduces the sample's return to 5.6 times the initial GCRF investment.

**Awards demonstrate variable performance in their ability to leverage follow-on investment (SD4.1). There was insufficient evidence to assess follow-on investment secured by LMIC PIs in most cases. Assessment of receipt of matched or co-funding was not applicable to most awards.**

**Figure 24: Summary of Year 5 award performance in the three subdimensions within Cost-effectiveness (n = 31)**




| Dimension 4: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs (Cost-effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 GCRF |
| SD4.2 LMIC PIs secure further research funding, per £1 of GCRF funding *(Equity)* |
| SD4.3 Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding |

**The observed level of return should be treated with caution as it is sensitive to sampling effects.**

We conducted a sensitivity analysis by taking the top 25 and bottom 25 awards in terms of their level of return as characterised by further investment from other sources. We found that our sample secured additional investment of between 1.3 times and 7.9 times the initial investment in this sample, demonstrating how much this figure varies depending on the sample of awards chosen. Two awards in the sample demonstrated very strong returns of greater than 20:1, which likely skewed the sample. Excluding these awards results in an average return of 3.4 times the initial GCRF investment.

**Due to gaps in data, return estimates are likely understated and may be difficult to attribute solely to GCRF-funded activity.**

Estimates of follow-on funding may be conservative, in that many awards had qualitative evidence of follow-on funding that was not captured quantitatively. Additionally, given a paucity of evidence of follow-on funding, Gateway to Research was the primary evidence source for follow-on funding. As Gateway to Research only covers UKRI awards, its only covers a portion of our sample. Nevertheless, there remain challenges in attributing follow-on funding solely to GCRF, because prior and concurrent non-GCRF-funded research may have contributed to receipt of further funding. As such, these findings do not represent a return in a formal sense but rather provide an estimate of the value of GCRF research by other funders and investors, based on their further investment.

**Evidence was sparse regarding further funding secured by LMIC PIs and Co-Is (SD4.2).**

The sources available identified further funding of approximately £5.2 million for LMIC PIs and co-Is, representing 7% of the total amount of further funding identified in this sample. This is likely an underestimation, because the qualitative evidence indicates that LMIC researchers secured more further funding than that which was captured quantitatively.

# Thematic analysis – drivers of VfM in GCRF

This subsection presents findings from a qualitative analysis of the Year 5 assessment sample, which explored the drivers of VfM in GCRF. Using the pillars of ODA R&I excellence[38] as a starting point, we now consider performance across rubric dimensions and how value is generated and transformed across the award life cycle. In the context of VfM assessment, this refers to awards' performance across the 4Es. The purposes of this subsection are to explore and interrogate theoretical relationships built into the VfM rubric, aligning with GCRF's ToC and strategic aims, and to contribute to the learning function of this assessment, supporting wider understanding of VfM in the context of a nascent UK R&I funder ecosystem. Throughout this subsection we seek to answer two central questions:

- Is Economy translated and converted into Efficiency and Effectiveness across sampled awards – and if so, how?
- What drives good and excellent performance in Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness?

This analysis seeks to support our understanding of what investments, strategies, supports and interventions drive value generation in ODA R&I funds, including catalysts and barriers to realisation of VfM in GCRF.

This analysis covers five themes present across the GCRF VfM rubric:

- Theme 1: Challenge-led research excellence,[39] relevance and positioning for use[40]
- Theme 2: Equitable partnerships
- Theme 3: Capacity building
- Theme 4: EDI

[38] ODA excellence includes R&I that, over and above technical merit, includes an integral focus on EDI, promotes fairness and equity in international partnerships, and is positioned for use, policy and development relevance by producing actionable knowledge and mobilising stakeholder networks for uptake.

[39] Challenge-led research excellence refers to research that "generate[s] excellent and novel research on global challenges directly and primarily relevant to developing countries that cuts across multiple thematic areas covered by the SDGs." The Royal Society. 'Challenge-led Grants' (viewed on 8 March 2025)

[40] In the ODA research context, positioning for use refers to the process of designing, communicating and engaging with stakeholders to ensure that research outputs are accessible, relevant and ready to be taken up by intended users, such as policymakers, practitioners, or communities.

- Theme 5: Stakeholder mobilisation and networking

A summary of findings from the thematic analysis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 3: Key findings related to the drivers of VfM in GCRF**

| Theme | Key rubric subdimensions | Key findings |
|---|---|---|
| **Challenge-led research excellence, relevance and positioning for use** | SD1.1, SD1.2, SD2.3, SD3.1 | • Investment in challenge-led research excellence (SD1.1) appears to support the production of high-quality outputs (SD3.1), because awards with stronger investment in research innovation and originality often generated research positioned for use. Early stakeholder engagement may enhance research relevance, because awards that integrated LMIC expertise in defining challenges and solutions tended to produce outputs that were more applicable and widely used.<br>• Interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) appears to benefit from higher funding levels, with awards rated highly in interdisciplinarity receiving greater investment on average, suggesting that larger teams and collaboration may require additional resources.<br>• Stronger investment in positioning for use (SD2.3) is linked to research excellence and positioning for use (SD3.1), because awards with dedicated communication plans, engagement strategies and higher funding often performed better in translating research into outputs usable by wider audiences. |
| **Equitable partnerships** | SD1.4, SD2.2, SD3.2 | • Sustainable partnerships (SD3.2) were linked to early investment in equitable collaboration (SD1.4, SD2.2), including co-design, shared decision making and equitable responsibilities across award activities. Awards with strong post-award partnerships also showed these early investments, fostering long-term collaboration. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | • Conversely, awards with poor investment in equitable partnerships (SD1.4) often had inequitable funding distribution (SD2.2), with LMIC researchers contributing in kind without compensation, limiting their research engagement and long-term benefits.<br>• Longer award duration and higher funding did not consistently enable sustainable partnerships, although network awards were an exception, where increased funding supported more equitable collaboration. |
| **Capability building** | SD2.1, SD3.3 | • There is no clear link between investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1) and performance in challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3). Higher ratings were more common in well-funded, long-duration innovation grants and early and mid-career awards, but investment did not always translate into sustained capabilities.<br>• Larger-scale and network-based initiatives performed better, benefiting from shared resources, flexible funding and longer project durations. Short-term funding cycles and institutional constraints in LMICs limited long-term capacity gains, despite strong initial investment.<br>• Some awards with lower capacity-building investment (SD1.2) still performed well in challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3), suggesting that strategic partnerships and external funding also play a role. Strengthening follow-on funding and institutional support is key to sustaining LMIC research capacity. |
| **EDI** | SD1.3, SD2.2, SD3.2 | • Awards with strong investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) often showed more equitable funding distribution (SD2.2) and sustainable partnerships (SD3.2), although outcomes |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | varied by funding level, project duration and regional context. Shorter, lower-funded projects struggled to sustain EDI efforts.<br>• High-performing awards had clear EDI strategies and inclusive decision-making and capacity-building efforts; weaker projects cited lack of funding, weak institutional capacity, and unclear objectives. Investment in EDI also correlated with stronger performance in positioning for use, challenge-oriented capabilities and stakeholder networks.<br>• Higher funding supported better EDI outcomes, and longer projects tended to build more sustainable partnerships. Early EDI investment often led to more equitable outcomes; but overall, EDI was not a strong initial focus in most GCRF projects. |
| **Stakeholder mobilisation and networking** | SD1.2, SD3.2, SD3.4 | • There was no clear link between investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) and positioning research for use (SD3.1), because some awards with poor interdisciplinarity still performed well in research translation. Strong stakeholder engagement, structured management and end user involvement were key enablers.<br>• Similarly, strong interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) alone did not ensure strong stakeholder networks (SD3.4). High-performing awards focused on cross-sectoral engagement and structured networking; weaker ones remained limited to academia, with little external collaboration.<br>• No clear link emerged between investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) and sustainable partnerships (SD3.2), but high-scoring awards shared strong management |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | structures, cross-sectoral collaboration and proactive engagement, reinforcing the role of structured processes in sustaining partnerships. |

## Theme 1: Challenge-led research excellence, relevance and positioning for use

Challenge-led research excellence, relevance and positioning for use are central to ODA R&I excellence and played a key role in the selection of awards in GCRF. These aspects ensure that research is high-quality, interdisciplinary and accessible to key stakeholders, supporting the translation of activities into outputs, outcomes and impacts. These themes are embedded in the VfM rubric, particularly in subdimensions on research innovation and originality (SD1.1), interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2), positioning research for use (SD2.3), and high-quality research positioned for use (SD3.1).

**A clear link was observed between investment in research innovation and originality and realisation of high-quality research that is positioned for use (SD1.1 and SD3.1).** All awards rated good or excellent in terms of their investment in challenge-led research excellence (SD1.1) also performed well in high-quality research outputs (SD3.1), and no awards with adequate investment scored excellent in their outputs. This suggests that investment in challenge-led research excellence is important for achieving high-quality, relevant outputs. Most awards rated excellent in high-quality research outputs (SD3.1) were research or applied innovation grants within the highest funding quintiles, indicating that an explicit focus on excellence in R&I and higher investment supports realisation of high-quality research outputs. However, no clear pattern emerged regarding award duration, suggesting that longer project timelines may not be necessary to deliver challenge-led research excellence.

**Qualitative evidence from this sample indicates a difference in performance among awards which had a strong understanding of challenge-led research excellence as encompassing different elements from research excellence in non-development settings.** Awards which established and developed their research aims and activities with key LMIC stakeholders, integrating LMIC expertise and experience to define challenges and build appropriate solutions, tended to generate research outputs that were relevant and appropriate, supporting their positioning for wider use. Similarly, research which tackled key gaps and challenge areas, as defined by LMIC stakeholders, performed well in positioning for use. This suggests that appropriate problem definition and collaborative solution-building are key components of challenge-led research excellence and are enabled by early stakeholder engagement.

**The link between investment in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2) and high-quality research outputs (SD3.1) was weaker, although many awards rated good or excellent in interdisciplinarity also performed well in high-quality research outputs.** Awards rated good or excellent in interdisciplinarity

(SD1.2) were funded at higher levels (£2.1 million on average) than those rated adequate or poor (£846,000 on average). This suggests that interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research, often requiring larger teams and more collaboration, may require greater financial support.

**A strong relationship was observed between challenge-led research excellence (SD1.1) and interdisciplinarity (SD1.2): all awards rated good or excellent in one also performed well in the other. This suggests that within the context of ODA challenge-led research, interdisciplinarity and research quality or originality are closely linked.** Similarly, a relationship was observed between investment in positioning for use (SD2.3) and realisation of high-quality research outputs positioned for use (SD3.1): most awards rated good or excellent in terms of their investment also performed well in their outputs. Higher funding levels were again associated with stronger performance, suggesting that effective positioning for use may require higher levels of resources. Awards that were best able to leverage investment in positioning for use often had dedicated communications plans and engagement strategies and involved key stakeholders from the outset.

Overall, awards that demonstrated strong investment in challenge-led research excellence performed well across the rubric, except in subdimensions where overall performance was weak, such as EDI (SD1.3). This suggests that investment in challenge-led research excellence, encompassing a focus on the relevance and impact of research, supports good VfM across multiple areas.

## Theme 2: Equitable partnerships

Fostering new collaborations and strengthening existing relationships between UK and LMIC stakeholders is a key component of GCRF's aims and value proposition. Collaborations between researchers in the Global North and Global South can be affected by cultural differences, risk of exploitative research projects, and power imbalances inherent in different regions of the world. GCRF awards' impact on international partnerships thus depends on their ability to establish and sustain equitable relationships within the team. Within the GCRF VfM rubric, equitable partnerships are a focus of several subdimensions, namely investments made into establishing equitable partnerships (SD1.4), overall balance of funding between partners (SD2.2), and the resulting sustainability of developed collaborations (SD3.2).

**At the award level, projects that successfully built longer-term partnerships featured investments into specific pathways for equitable project teams.** Of the awards that led to sustainable research partnerships (SD3.2), nearly all aimed to address power imbalances between UK and LMIC researchers by directing resources towards co-design and joint decision making within the team (SD1.4 and SD2.2). Awards that scored highly on sustainable partnerships often established specific processes and structures to support equitable collaboration. These included: budgeted time to build relationships with new partners, establish ways of working and co-develop work plans; involving LMIC researchers in project leadership and across multiple research components, not restricting their participation to on-the-ground data collection; and equity in dissemination activities, including organising communication activities in LMIC regions.

Awards showing signs of strong post-award partnerships (SD3.2) also featured these investments in the initial project stages. These factors have potential to play a role in ensuring positive collaborative experiences between UK and LMIC researchers, enhancing their willingness to apply for and conduct further research together.

**In contrast, lack of early-stage investments in equity is reflected in a similar inequity in the overall distribution of funding.** Some awards performing poorly in investment in equitable partnerships (SD1.4) were also characterised by highly unequitable allocation of GCRF funding (SD2.2). In particular, LMIC researchers in these awards financed their participation in the project through in-kind contributions, receiving no compensation for their time on the project. Such imbalances in project planning mirrored a similar imbalance in research. This curtailed the extent to which LMIC researchers engaged with different areas of research, impacting any longer-term benefits which would have been achieved through these collaborations.

Across the sample, longer award duration and higher levels of funding did not seem to enable equitable or sustainable partnerships. Network awards are a positive exception to this trend, where greater funding has translated into greater investments for equitable partnerships, more balanced distribution of finances, and improved and sustained collaborations between stakeholders.

## Theme 3: Capacity building

Capacity building is a key component of GCRF's aims and value proposition. Capacity building strengthens local research ecosystems, equipping researchers and institutions in LMICs with the skills, infrastructure and resources needed to conduct high-quality sustainable research. By fostering long-term knowledge exchange and collaboration, capacity building enhances the impact and relevance of research, ensuring that locally driven solutions can effectively address development challenges. Within the GCRF VfM rubric, equitable partnerships are a focus of several subdimensions, namely investments made into establishing equitable partnerships (SD1.4), overall balance of funding between partners (SD2.2), and the resulting sustainability of developed collaborations (SD3.2).

**Performance in investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1) and enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3) subdimensions ranged drastically**, with average scores of 2.53 and 2.4 respectively. Most awards were rated adequate or good, suggesting moderate investment in LMIC capacity building and challenge-oriented capabilities. Ratings of good and excellent were more common among applied/innovation grants and early/mid-career fellowships, particularly in awards with higher funding levels and longer durations. Scores suggested a mixed impact of capacity-building investments on enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities. Although some projects with good performance in investment in capacity building (SD2.1) also demonstrated strong capacity-building outcomes (SD3.3), others did not maintain this level of performance; this highlights inconsistencies in translating investment into sustained capabilities.

**Higher-performing awards tended to be larger-scale initiatives or network-based collaborations, which benefited from shared resources and expertise**. Lower-performing awards often cited insufficient initial investment or short project durations as barriers to efficiency. Longer-duration projects (those longer than 24 months for example) demonstrated more consistent capacity-building outcomes, suggesting that time is an enabler. Collaborative networks between LMIC institutions and UK partners contributed to better performance in Efficiency and Effectiveness. Flexibility in funding allocation, such as allowing budget shifts towards training and institutional strengthening, was another success factor.

**On the other hand, short-term funding cycles limited long-term capacity gains, even where initial investment was strong.** Institutional constraints in LMIC

settings, such as administrative delays and infrastructure gaps, impacted efficiency despite good initial investment. Lack of follow-on funding was a recurring issue, affecting the sustainability of capacity-building efforts. Some projects that were deemed to have less investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1) showed higher than expected performance in attaining enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3). This suggests that other factors, such as strategic institutional partnerships or external funding, play a role in challenge-oriented capability enhancement.

Overall, there is no evidence of the direct translation of investment in LMIC capacity building (SD1.4) into enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3). Strengthening mechanisms for follow-on funding and institutional support will improve the sustainability of challenge-oriented capabilities in LMICs.

## Theme 4: EDI

EDI is crucial in ODA research for development, because it ensures that research is representative, accessible, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities, including those in LMICs. By fostering inclusive partnerships and amplifying underrepresented voices, EDI strengthens the quality, relevance and impact of research, leading to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes. Within the GCRF VfM rubric, EDI features in several subdimensions, namely investment in EDI processes (SD1.3), equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), and sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2).

**Projects that scored well in investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) tended to also perform well in equitable balance of research funding (SD2.2) and sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2).** This suggests that early investment in EDI processes often translates into more equitable funding distribution and stronger partnerships. However, this pattern is not consistent across all awards. Some projects with moderate scores in investment in EDI (SD1.3) showed mixed performance in equitable balance of research funding (SD2.2) and sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2), often influenced by factors such as funding level, project duration, and the specific country or region where the project was implemented. Shorter-duration projects and those with lower funding levels struggled to turn initial EDI investments into sustainable partnerships, as reflected in lower scores in the equitable partnerships dimension.

**Projects that performed well across EDI-related subdimensions generally had strong enabling factors, such as clear EDI strategies, active capacity-building efforts for local partners, and inclusive decision-making structures.** These projects used their early EDI investments to build long-term collaboration and ensure that funding was distributed more equitably between UK and LMIC partners. On the other hand, projects that struggled to have an equitable balance of research funding and sustainable and equitable partnerships often cited barriers such as lack of funding for EDI efforts, weak institutional capacity in partner countries, and difficulty maintaining partnerships after funding ended. Some projects also lacked clearly defined EDI objectives from the start, making it harder to track progress and sustain impact.

**Investment in EDI also supported strong performance in non-EDI-related areas.** Awards rated good or excellent in investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) performed better, on average, in investment in positioning for use (SD2.3), enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3) and establishment of user-side stakeholder networks (3.4) than awards rated adequate, poor or unacceptable. This suggests that investment in EDI may support stronger performance across areas relevant to GCRF's value proposition.

**Award characteristics also played a role in shaping EDI outcomes.** Projects with higher funding levels were more likely to score well in all three EDI-related subdimensions, likely because they had the resources to invest in EDI processes and long-term partnerships. Longer-duration projects tended to perform better in forming sustainable and equitable partnerships, which makes sense given that sustainable partnerships take time to develop.

Overall, the analysis shows that investing in EDI processes early on tends to lead to more equitable partnerships and funding distribution, but this is not guaranteed. Context matters, and projects need the right conditions – such as sufficient funding, clear objectives, and long-term commitment – to turn initial investments into sustainable and equitable outcomes. Addressing regional challenges and designing EDI strategies that account for different project settings could help improve future performance in this area. On the whole, EDI was not a strong initial consideration in GCRF awards, despite a few standout examples.

## Theme 5: Stakeholder mobilisation and networking

Creating, mobilising and sustaining stakeholder networks is a key element of GCRF's value proposition. Broad and diverse stakeholder networks bring interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral expertise and contextual understanding to the research process, enabling research aims, activities and outputs to be more informed, relevant and appropriate, thereby generating outputs and outcomes with greater value in the contexts in which they are relevant. The theme of network creation and development and stakeholder mobilisation is reflected throughout the VfM rubric but is a specific focus of the following subdimensions: interdisciplinary research (SD1.2), positioning research for use (SD3.1), and establishment of user-side stakeholder networks (SD3.4).

**Within this sample, there was no clear link between investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) and positioning research for use (SD3.1).** All awards rated excellent in investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) also performed well in positioning for use (SD3.1), with most scoring excellent or good. However, the opposite was also true, with some awards rated poor in investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) still achieving good or excellent performance in positioning for use (SD3.1). This suggests that although interdisciplinarity can support effective research translation, other enabling factors also play a role.

**High-scoring awards in both areas were characterised by regular engagement with stakeholders, including end users.** Some awards had dedicated management structures to support interdisciplinarity and cross-sectoral collaboration; other awards formalised stakeholder involvement through advisory boards. Additionally, others incorporated methodologies such as crowdsourcing to engage stakeholders indirectly. Success was also associated with the involvement of end users in research design and implementation, driven by having team members with expertise in positioning research for use and dedicated PI time for communication, coordination, knowledge-sharing and leadership. In contrast, lower-scoring awards in both subdimensions often exhibited limited interdisciplinarity and lacked evidence of research uptake. This suggests that beyond interdisciplinarity itself, strong engagement strategies and structured management support may enable positioning for use.

**Similarly, no strong link was found between investment in interdisciplinarity (SD1.2) and the establishment of stakeholder networks (SD3.4).** Although some

awards performed well in both areas, interdisciplinarity alone did not guarantee strong networks. Awards that established strong stakeholder networks (SD3.4) often invested in cross-sectoral engagement rather than interdisciplinarity alone and actively supported relationship building through structured activities such as workshops and networking events. These awards also demonstrated a clear strategy for engaging with the right stakeholders and ensuring that research findings were communicated effectively.

**Conversely, awards that did not successfully establish stakeholder networks (SD3.4) tended to limit interdisciplinarity to academic collaboration without extending engagement to non-academic stakeholders.** These awards lacked structured processes to support interdisciplinarity beyond standard team meetings, making it difficult to establish meaningful networks. Among awards rated poor in establishing stakeholder networks (SD3.4), some had strong interdisciplinarity but limited cross-sectoral collaboration, highlighting that interdisciplinary research within academia alone is insufficient for building broader stakeholder relationships. These findings suggest that investment in cross-sectoral collaboration may be more effective for establishing stakeholder networks than interdisciplinarity confined to academic disciplines. Furthermore, structured mechanisms for relationship building, such as networking sessions and stakeholder engagement initiatives, are key to fostering long-term connections.

**Similarly, no clear link was found between investment in interdisciplinarity and the development of sustainable partnerships (SD3.2).** However, the characteristics of high-scoring and low-scoring awards mirrored those described above. High-performing awards tended to have dedicated management structures, a strong cross-sectoral component, and proactive stakeholder engagement; lower-scoring awards lacked formal mechanisms to support interdisciplinarity beyond academic collaboration. These findings reinforce the importance of structured processes and relationship-building strategies in enabling sustainable partnerships.

# 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Overall, GCRF awards that have undergone VfM assessment deliver VfM, supported by wider investments in GCRF-funded work. Future funds could learn from the findings of the GCRF VfM assessment to identify ways for awards to not just meet but exceed their VfM performance. As part of the learning function of this assessment, we identified recommendations for driving VfM in future ODA funds.

**Funders can leverage strengths and weaknesses across award types to create a balanced set of outcomes by creating a balanced portfolio of awards and aligning award types to strategic Fund objectives.**

We observed variation in objectives and activities across GCRF awards, reflecting variation in PO funding calls. Different award types target distinct aspects of the GCRF ToC; some prioritise networking and others prioritise innovation. This variation is reflected in the variable performance of awards across VfM subdimensions, with few awards excelling in all areas. Although awards demonstrate some degree of specialisation, overall, they perform at an adequate level across subdimensions, indicating that specialisation does not necessarily come at the cost of poor performance in some areas. Variable performance at the award level may be efficient, allowing different award types to focus on generating different types of GCRF-relevant value, supporting a portfolio that, overall, generates value in line with GCRF's strategic aims.

For funders, this highlights the value of a portfolio approach, ensuring that diverse award types contribute to a balanced set of outcomes that align with the Fund's strategic aims. It also underscores the importance of aligning funding mechanisms with intended objectives, whether focused on partnership development, capacity building, or other key areas identified in the rubric.

*Recommendation:* Future investments should align award types with specific Fund objectives, such as network awards for fostering collaboration, considering the aways in which these award types may be complementary. Maintaining a diverse portfolio will help address the breadth of the Fund's strategic aims.

**Awards demonstrate strong investment in research excellence and positioning for use, but translating this into high-quality, relevant outputs and broader outcomes depends on early and sustained stakeholder collaboration.**

Evidence across VfM assessments indicates that GCRF awards provide the greatest value in subdimensions related to research excellence and positioning for use, providing important assurance that GCRF awards are delivering high-quality, relevant research. Although the majority of awards show strong investment in research excellence, findings from the thematic analysis in this assessment indicate that early and sustained collaboration with key stakeholders enables translation of investments into outputs and outcomes that align with GCRF's value proposition. Engaging key stakeholders, particularly in LMICs, enhances research relevance, facilitates uptake and supports broader value generation.

Awards that co-developed research aims with LMIC stakeholders, integrating local expertise to define challenges and build solutions, produced more relevant outputs positioned for wider use. Research addressing key gaps identified by LMIC stakeholders also performed well in positioning for use, suggesting that problem definition and collaborative solution-building are central to challenge-led research excellence. This underscores the need for an inclusive and equitable approach to setting research agendas.

Effective stakeholder engagement requires dedicated resources. Future funds should consider supporting early-stage research ideas and allocating larger award sizes to sustain engagement activities, such as employing dedicated engagement specialists, hosting events and expanding research networks.

*Recommendation:* To facilitate early stakeholder engagement, future funds may consider small grants to 'spin up' projects, providing resources at the stage of problem definition. Larger award sizes may also be considered to sustain stakeholder engagement throughout the research life cycle.

**There is considerable scope for improvement in EDI, including investment in co-design and equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners, which may enable improved performance across subdimensions, including those not explicitly focused on Equity.**

Investment in EDI, including investment in co-design and equitable balance of research fundings between UK and LMIC partners, was a weakness across GCRF VfM assessments. Awards with good or excellent EDI investment often outperformed those with lower investment in areas beyond EDI, including positioning for use, capacity building and network development. This suggests that investment in EDI may support stronger performance across areas relevant to GCRF's value proposition. Therefore, to improve EDI and broader performance, future investments

should set clear expectations on EDI investment, including investing directly in LMIC researchers where possible.

*Recommendation:* Future funds should consider making EDI strategic priorities clear in funding calls, providing support to award holders in integrating EDI considerations into their work and requiring justification for any funding allocation where less than 50% is directed to LMIC partners.

**Enhancing challenge-oriented capabilities requires sufficient time and dedicated but flexible resources.**

Performance in enhancing challenge-oriented capabilities varied across awards. Stronger outcomes were more common in applied and innovation grants and early/mid-career awards, particularly those with higher funding levels and longer durations, suggesting that time and resources are key enablers of capacity building. Furthermore, large-scale initiatives and network-based collaborations tended to perform better, benefiting from shared resources, flexible funding and strong institutional partnerships. These findings suggest that collaboration may enable capacity building and that shared, flexible funding supports responsive and effective capacity-building activities. Additionally, these findings indicate that investment in capacity-building efforts should be coupled with sufficient time to realise meaningful outcomes.

*Recommendation:* Where capacity building is a key objective, future funds should consider longer funding durations and dedicated, flexible resources that can be tailored to the emerging needs of the research team and local research ecosystem. Strengthening mechanisms for follow-on funding and institutional support will improve the sustainability of challenge-oriented capabilities in LMICs.

**Awards that focus on networking and stakeholder engagement perform well and appear to offer particularly good VfM, in line with GCRF's value proposition.**

Findings from this assessment indicate that awards that focus on networking activities, including non-network awards which prioritise stakeholder engagement, typically have strong performance across the VfM rubric. Notably, network awards outperform other award types in many subdimensions, underscoring the value generated by an explicit focus on stakeholder engagement. Such awards also appear to offer good VfM at lower funding levels, emphasising their value as a useful complement to other award types within a portfolio approach.

*Recommendation:* Future funds should consider dedicated networking awards within the funding portfolio as well as allocating additional resources for networking activities and stakeholder engagement activities within other award types.

**Performance in Effectiveness, representing the value generated by the Fund's outputs and early outcomes, is expected to improve as the Fund matures, although enhanced data capture is needed to provide evidence of this.**

The Year 5 sample shows improved performance in Effectiveness compared to Year 4, aligning with expectations that GCRF awards will generate value over time, as articulated in the timescales of research uptake and impact outlined in the GCRF ToC. Although differences in the sample may have influenced results in Effectiveness, the enhanced evidence base in Year 5 likely played a key role. The GCRF evaluation's Research Into Use study, from which the Year 5 sample was selected, conducted extensive primary data collection, providing more evidence of outputs and short-term outcomes. This richer evidence base illuminated improved performance in Effectiveness but also highlighted a broader issue: such comprehensive data is unlikely to be captured through existing reporting systems. To systematically assess the Effectiveness of awards, future funds should invest in enhanced data collection systems that provide a more complete and ongoing record of research uptake and outcomes.

*Recommendation:* Future funds should consider strengthening systematic data collection efforts and end-of-award reporting to ensure comprehensive tracking of outputs and outcomes.

**There is limited evidence to support the assessment of Cost-effectiveness.**

Like the Year 4 assessment before it, the Year 5 assessment found limited evidence to support the assessment of Cost-effectiveness. Because of differences in endline award reporting processes across POs, evidence of follow-on funding and co-funding was patchy. We used Gateway to Research to fill this evidence gap, because it captures quantitative evidence of follow-on funding at the award level. However, Gateway to Research has several limitations. First, it only covers UKRI awards and is self-reported, typically by UK-based PIs as part of the ResearchFish return, possibly limiting data quality and comprehensiveness. The self-reported nature of Gateway to Research also poses some limitations in attributing follow-on funding directly to specific awards. Importantly, because Gateway to Research is a UK-focused system, it was a poor evidence source for follow-on funding secured by LMIC PIs and Co-Is, severely limiting assessment of the extent to which LMIC researchers leveraged GCRF funding to support future research.

*Recommendation:* Future funds should consider establishing consistent endline reporting requirements across POs and enhance tracking mechanisms for follow-on funding to support more comprehensive collection of funding secured researchers, including LMIC PIs and Co-Is.

**Generation of greater VfM in ODA R&I funds relies on building a culture of VfM in UK R&I funders.**

The findings from this study and from similar studies of VfM in other ODA R&I funds provide important evidence of present VfM in ODA R&I funds. Furthermore, these studies provide valuable learnings on how greater VfM can be generated and how R&I ecosystems can be better equipped to assess VfM in future funds. Evidence from the GCRF evaluation VfM module indicates that overall, the Fund provides good VfM; but generation of greater VfM in ODA R&I funds depends on bringing VfM insights about the drivers of VfM to commissioning, ensuring that the foundations for generating value are resourced through implementation, and then gathering consistent data on results, outcomes and follow-on investments.

*Recommendation*: Enhancing VfM in ODA R&I funds requires embedding a culture of VfM within UK R&I funders. This means developing an understanding of the drivers of VfM in R&I funding in general, as well as the specific drivers for each programme based on its value proposition. This would contribute to acknowledging that VfM extends beyond the monetisable outcomes of a programme.

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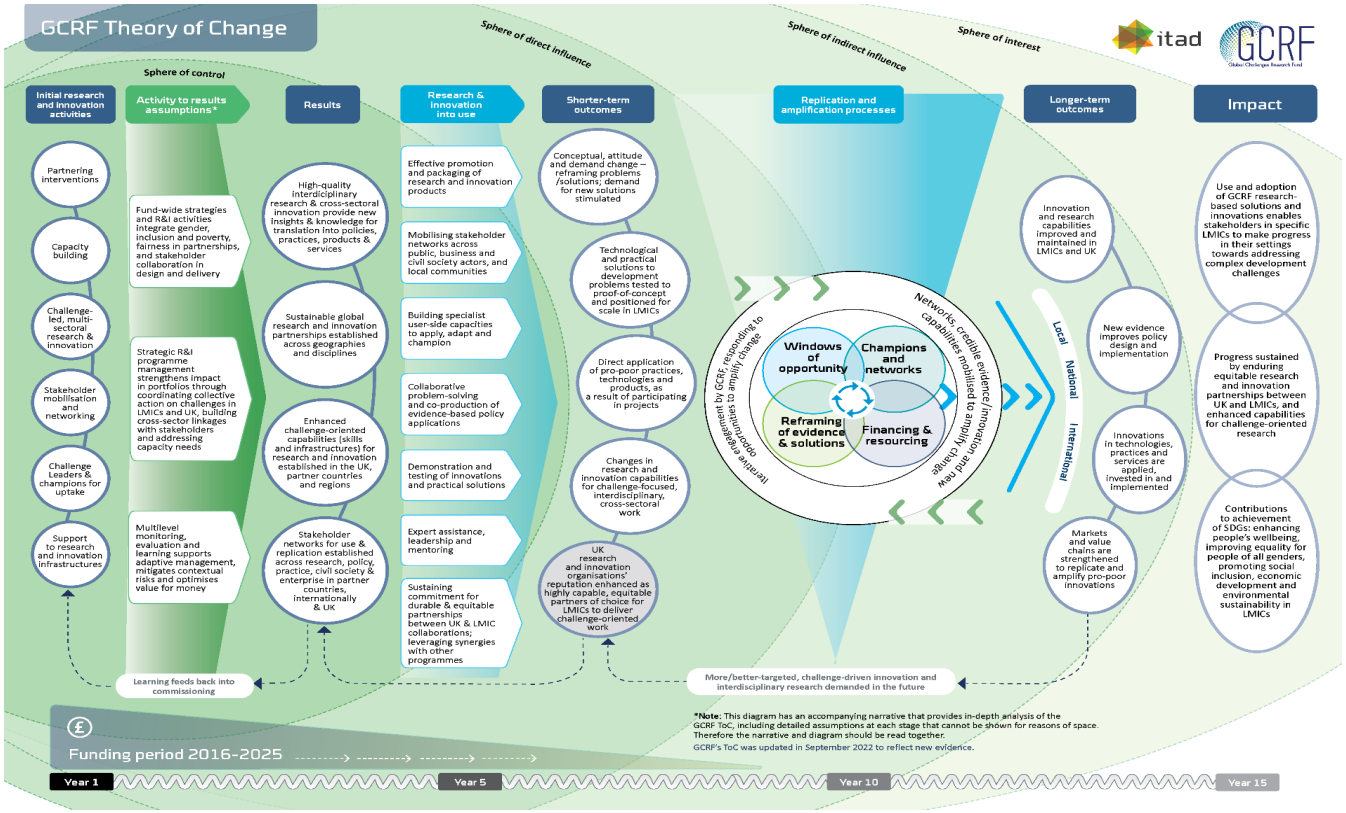
# Annex A: GCRF Theory of Change



# Annex B: GCRF VfM assessment rubric

**VfM assessment template**

Project information

| | |
|---|---|
| Grant ID/ref number | |
| Name of reviewer and date of review | |
| Project title | |
| Countries | |
| Institutions | |
| Project start date | |
| PO (e.g. funder) awarding | |
| Project duration and whether complete | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Project value (£) | |
| Brief description of project<br><br>Please include one brief paragraph | |

**VfM assessment summary**

When you have completed the whole assessment, please complete this table, giving an overview of the ratings.

| | |
|---|---|
| Summary of award features and considerations<br><br>Please note the award type, duration, completion status, date completed and amount of funding, and indicate implications for subdimension relevance. | |

| 1. Economy (Investments in foundations for development impact) | Rating | Confidence in evidence |
|---|---|---|
| 1.1 Research innovation/originality | | |
| 1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design | | |
| 1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes (Equity) | | |
| 1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design (Equity) | | |
| 2. Efficiency (stakeholder engagement and willingness to invest in outputs) | Rating | Confidence in evidence |
| 2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building (Equity) | | |
| 2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (Equity) | | |
| 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) | | |
| 3. Effectiveness (potential to act on results to deliver outcomes) | Rating | Confidence in evidence |
| 3.1 High-quality research and innovation positioned for use | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships (Equity) | | |
| 3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (Equity) | | |
| 3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established | | |
| 4. Cost-effectiveness | Rating | Confidence in evidence |
| 4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 of GCRF funding | | |
| 4.2 LMIC PIs secure further research funding per £1 of GCRF funding (Equity) | | |
| 4.3 Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding | | |

**Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact: Economy**

| 1.1 Research innovation/originality | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| This subdimension refers to the perceived importance and value of the knowledge and understanding generated by the research/innovation to key intended users. Importance is defined here in terms of (i) the perceived relevance of research processes and products to the needs and priorities of potential users and (ii) the contribution of the research to theory and/or practice. | The research/ innovation fails to build on and extend existing knowledge. It does not break new ground or make improvements in existing technologies and/or methods. | The research/ innovation marginally adds to what is already known in the field. The research is not innovative, is not well connected to what is already | Research adds to existing evidence base in some dimensions, brings limited innovation, and is relevant to user needs and priorities in | The research/ innovation presents fresh ideas, brings an innovative approach to solving existing challenges, and/or deals with a new, emerging issue worth pursuing. It is relevant | The research/ innovation is innovative and groundbreaking. It builds on existing knowledge in a substantive way, making significant advancements to technologies, methods, frameworks and techniques. It responds to user needs in | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 1.1 Research innovation/originality | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Investments to promote innovation might include scoping phases or inception phases to strengthen relevance and responsiveness to needs.<br><br>Capture costs if possible, as £/% of whole award value. | | known, and does not respond to user needs. | a broad way. | and aligned to user needs in specific contexts. It challenges taken-for-granted assumptions, builds on existing knowledge, and is well connected to what is already known. | LMICs in an explicit way. | | |

| 1.1 Research innovation/originality | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| 1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral research is promoted because most development challenges are not monodisciplinary in nature and solution. Some exceptions may apply, but these should be clearly identified and justified. | No interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral element in research where this would clearly benefit the intended research results. | Minimal investment into processes to support interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral working, and only in marginal areas of the project. | Some investment into processes to support interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral working in a few key areas of the project, but it is not a core feature of the project. | Good level of investment into processes to support interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral working as an integral way of working in the award, e.g. internal communications, investment in learning, new | Significant level of investment into processes to support interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral working as an integral way of working in the award, e.g. internal communications, investment in learning, specialist staff, new | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Capture £ of investments in interdisciplinary/ cross-sectoral approach if possible, as % of whole budget. | | | | methodologies in development. | methodologies in development. | | |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| 1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| 1.3 Investment in EDI | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| GCRF promotes research that supports diversity, equity and inclusion, facilitates empowerment of all relevant stakeholders, and builds the capacity of researchers to become leaders in diversity, equity and inclusion in research.<br><br>EDI can be addressed through measures ranging from EDI aware to EDI transformative. | EDI unaware: EDI not considered by the award in design at any stage. | EDI aware: EDI – the differentiated and intersectional experiences of all intersectional groups involved or affected by the research (sexual, religious, racial, sociocultural and socioeconomic groups) – is | EDI sensitive: EDI is addressed throughout the award but does not (yet) extend to analysis and action to address inequalities. | EDI responsive: EDI is considered in the project's rationale, design and methodology and is rigorously analysed to inform implementation and communication and to influence strategies. EDI responsiveness | EDI transformative: The project examines, analyses and builds an evidence base to inform long-term practical changes in structural power relations and norms, roles and inequalities that define the differentiated experiences of | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 1.3 Investment in EDI | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| The assumption is that EDI requires resources to implement well.<br><br>Capture £ of investments into EDI approach if possible, as % of whole budget. | | considered in the project's rationale, but is not an operative concept in the design and methodology. | | does not (yet) address structural power relations that lead to inequalities. | all groups. EDI transformative research should lead to sustained change through action (e.g. partnerships, outreach and interventions). | | |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| 1.3 Investment in EDI | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| 1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Investments of time and resources are made to ensure fair negotiations and establish-ment of structures and processes to support equitable partnerships and address power imbalances and co-design of awards. | Evidence suggests no equitable partnerships or collabora-tions. This could include project resources being used in an inequitable fashion and no evidence of co-design, fair opportunity, fair process, and fair | Evidence suggests minimal equitable partnerships or collabora-tions. This could include project resources being used in an inequitable fashion and limited evidence of co-design, | Evidence suggests an acceptable degree of equitable partner-ships or collaborations. This could include project resources being used to encourage equitable partnerships, and evidence of some co-design and some fair opportunity, fair process, and fair sharing of benefits | Evidence suggests positive equitable partnerships or collaborations. This could include project resources being used in a way that encourages equitable partnerships or collaborations, and evidence of a good extent of co-design, fair opportunity, fair process, and fair sharing of | Evidence suggests highly equitable partnerships or collaborations. For example, project resources are being used in a way that encourages strong equitable partnerships or collabora-tions, with evidence of | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Capture £ of investments into partnership approach if possible, as £ and % of whole budget. | sharing of benefits, costs and outcomes. | fair opportunity, fair process, and fair sharing of benefits, costs and outcomes. | costs and outcomes. | benefits, costs and outcomes. | significant co-design, fair opportunity, fair process, and fair sharing of benefits, costs and outcomes for all partners, including beneficiaries beyond the research partnership. | | |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |

| 1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

**Dimension 2: Stakeholder engagement and willingness to invest in outputs: Efficiency**

| 2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| There are resources dedicated to extensive planning for and implementation of activities to enhance research/innovation capabilities among LMIC partners, including (where relevant for the award): technical skill-building; mentorships; research manage-ment; PhDs, post-doctorates and early career opportunities; | There is no evidence that the research/ innovation has invested in planning or implement-ation of activities to support improve-ments in capabilities for research/ innovation | Evidence that attention to improving research /innovation capabilities was inadequate, with minimal investment towards improving individual skills or institutional | Evidence of an acceptable level of attention to enhancing research/ innovation capabilities of LMIC partners. This is present in the design and many of the activities of the project. An adequate level of investment can be seen | Evidence that significant attention was paid to the planning and implement-ation of research/ innovation capability enhancement. There is a good range of activities to support LMIC partner capacities, | Evidence that there was extensive planning for and implementation of a wide range of activities to enhance research/ innovation capabilities, including skills-building, publishing, research | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| research infrastructure.<br><br>Capture number of LMIC PhDs, number of LMIC post-doctorate researchers (FTE/headcount) and number of LMIC ECRs (FTE/ headcount), disaggregated by gender.<br><br>Capture £ of investments into capacity development | among LMIC partners. | technolog-ical and information infrastruc-tures or towards improving capacity to secure funding resources. | towards improving individual skills and institutional technological and information infrastructures. | including investments into PhDs, post-doctorates and early career opportunities to improve individual skills, publishing, management, and capacity to secure funding resources. Alongside this, there was good support | management, and capacity to secure funding resources. Alongside this, there was extensive financial support to institutional technological and information infrastructures. | | |

| 2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| if possible, as £ and % of whole budget. | | | | to institutional technological and information infrastructures. | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 2.2 Equitable balance of research funding | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| There is a significant share of funding allocated to LMIC partners as a measure of equity in partnership and support to LMIC partner benefit.<br><br>Where funding values are not available, please make a qualitative assessment based on the available evidence, but make clear in your narrative that this data was not available, and assess | Value of LMIC research funding as percentage of total = 0% | Value of LMIC research funding as percentage of total >0% but <25% | Value of LMIC research funding as percentage of total >25% but <50% | Value of LMIC research funding as percentage of total >50% but <75% | Value of LMIC research funding as percentage of total >75% | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 2.2 Equitable balance of research funding | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| the confidence in evidence accordingly. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 2.3 Effective sharing and communication of research and innovation outputs to wider audiences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| There is investment in the communication, promotion, packaging and positioning of research outputs for use above and beyond academic publishing.<br><br>Capture £ of investments into positioning for use if possible, as £ and % of whole budget.<br><br>Bibliometric information might support this assessment using the | Research outputs not aligned with national/regional/ local gaps in knowledge, and/or research outputs are not visible and tailored for stakeholder audiences.<br><br>No evidence of Altmetric | Research outputs minimal alignment with national/ regional/ local gaps in knowledge and/or that research outputs are not sufficiently visible and tailored for | Evidence that research outputs partially address national/ regional/ local gaps in knowledge and/or that outputs are tailored for stakeholder audiences and near investment-ready in part. | Evidence that research outputs mostly address national/ regional/ local gaps in knowledge and/or that outputs are tailored for stakeholder audiences and mostly near investment-ready. | Evidence that research outputs meet the full range of national/ regional/local gaps in knowledge and that the outputs are tailored for stakeholder audiences, investment-ready and implementable. | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 2.3 Effective sharing and communication of research and innovation outputs to wider audiences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Altmetric Attention Score.[41] | attention – score of 0. | stakeholder audiences.<br><br>Low rates of Altmetric attention – score of 0<n<10. | Average levels of Altmetric attention - score of 11<n<20. | Above average levels of Altmetric attention – score of 20<n<30. | Top levels of Altmetric attention – score of 30<n. | | |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

[41] The Altmetric Attention Score for a research output provides an indicator of the amount of attention (social and traditional media, policy documents and patents) that the output has received. In general, a score above 20 means that the publication had received more attention than its contemporaries, and a score of 0 means the article received no attention.

| 2.3 Effective sharing and communication of research and innovation outputs to wider audiences | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

**Dimension 3: Potential to act on results to deliver outcomes: Effectiveness**

| 3.1 High-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation positioned for use | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| R&I that has been designed, delivered and promoted in ways that help address key development challenges is considered high-quality. Interdisciplin-arity is promoted because most development challenges are | The research/ innovation was not carried out with a multidisciplinary, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary team or lens, where this would have been beneficial to the challenge being addressed, and did not provide new insights or | The research/ innovation included minimal representation of the disciplines that should have been represented to address the development challenge. Any insights, although potentially novel, were | The research/ innovation was carried out by an appropriate interdisciplinary approach and/or team. It produced some new insights and knowledge in at least one of policy, practice, institutional, organisational, systems, technology, | The research/ innovation was carried out by a good interdisciplinary approach and/or team. It produced several new insights and knowledge in at least two of policy, practice, institutional, organisational, systems, technology, | The research/ innovation was carried out by an exceptional interdisciplinary approach and/or team. It provided important new insights and knowledge for translation into policies, practices, institutional, organisational or other | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 3.1 High-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation positioned for use | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| not monodisciplin-ary in nature and solution. Positioning for use is key. May be assessed looking at using (i) associated publications or (ii) associated non-formal outputs (e.g. patents, art installations). | advance the field. There is little to no likelihood of solutions to significant development challenges emerging.<br><br>No evidence of (i) associated publications or (ii) associated non-formal outputs. | poorly presented and could not be effectively used for policy, practice, institutional and organisational, systems, product or service development.<br><br>Little evidence of (i) | product or service development. These were presented in a manner(s) suitable to most key audiences.<br><br>Some evidence of (i) associated publications or (ii) associated | product or service development. These were presented in a manner(s) tailored to key audiences/next users.<br><br>Good evidence of (i) associated publications or (ii) associated | systems development, technology, products or services, of value to and potential use by the intended stakeholders.<br><br>A high degree of evidence of (i) associated publications or (ii) associated | | |

| 3.1 High-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation positioned for use | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Capture £ value of any innovations if applicable/ possible.<br><br>Bibliometric information might support this assessment where appropriate. Where bibliometric measures are used, we would consider the Field | | associated publications or (ii) associated non-formal outputs.<br><br>FCR of associated publications 0<n<0.5. | non-formal outputs.<br><br>FCR of associated publications 0.5<n<1. | non-formal outputs.<br><br>FCR of associated publications 1<n<1.5. | non-formal outputs.<br><br>FCR of associated publications 1.5<n. | | |

| 3.1 High-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation positioned for use | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Citation Ratio (FCR) of the associated publications.[42] Journal-level metrics will not be used. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |

[42] Field Citation Ratio (FCR) "is a citation-based measure of scientific influence of one or more articles. It is calculated by dividing the number of citations an article has received by the average number received by documents published in the same year and in the same Fields of Research (FoR) category." See: Digital Science. 'What is the FCR? How is it calculated?' 2022 (viewed on 12 June 2024). An FCR value of more than 1.0 shows that the publication has a higher-than-average number of citations. Highly cited publications are those which rank in the top 1% per year within the same FoR.

| | |
|---|---|
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 3.2 Sustainable global research and innovation partnerships established across geographies & disciplines | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Partnerships are expected to sustain over time, working through multiple funding cycles and projects over time. In terms of sustainability, elements to consider include: likely sustainability of the partnership beyond the duration of the award; alignment of interests and purposes among the partners; clear value to all parties | The teams were unsuccessful in developing sustainable research/ innovation partnerships.<br><br>No evidence of post-award partnerships. | Some international partnerships were established, but these were very limited in scale and scope and are unlikely to continue past completion of the project, or are limited to pre-existing partnerships | International interdisciplinary research/ innovation partnerships were established, with some limitations in scope and scale, e.g. academic partners only. With some effort to sustain collaboration, these show potential to continue to | International interdisciplinary research/ innovation partnerships were established successfully, including many of the key stakeholders. With some effort to sustain collaboration, these show good potential to continue to provide value beyond the | International interdisciplinary research/ innovation partnerships were established successfully, with broad engagement across relevant disciplines and geographies, and they focused on important development challenges. They show | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 3.2 Sustainable global research and innovation partnerships established across geographies & disciplines | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| in the partnership; etc.<br><br>Bibliometric information may support this assessment, including evidence on partnerships continuing post-award. Examples of this may include co-funding or co-authored publications | | when the challenge calls for a broader dialogue and exchange.<br><br>Little evidence of post-award partnerships. | provide value beyond the end of the project (i.e. in terms of policies and/or products to address a development or other global challenge).<br><br>Some evidence of post-award partnerships. | end of the project (i.e. in terms of policies and/or products to address a development or other global challenge).<br><br>Good evidence of post-award partnerships. | strong promise for sustainability and continue to seek funding to continue their efforts.<br><br>Very good evidence of post-award partnerships. | | |

| 3.2 Sustainable global research and innovation partnerships established across geographies & disciplines | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| following the award end date. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities for R&I | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Institutional and individual capabilities to address challenge-oriented problems call for capacities to work in respectful partnerships across countries and disciplines; in addition, they call for infrastructures that support equitable and fair partnerships that share decision making as well as | The research/ innovation did not lead to improvements in capabilities for research/ innovation among UK and LMIC national/ regional/local stakeholders to drive practice and/or policy change. Stakeholders continue to lack access to | Some minimal improvement in skills and/or technological and information infrastructures to drive practice and/or policy change can be observed among UK and LMIC national/ regional/local stakeholders. There are signs of marginal | There is evidence of some enhancement of capabilities in a limited set of partners, UK and LMIC national/ regional/local stakeholders to lead adoption of practice and/or policy change, but significant gaps remain. There is some evidence of | There is evidence of enhanced capabilities in some partners, UK and LMIC national/ regional/local stakeholders to lead adoption of practice and/or policy change, with some gaps remaining. There is evidence of improvements | There is clear evidence of enhanced capabilities across the research/ innovation partnership as a result, including national/ regional/local stakeholders to lead adoption of practice and/or policy change. There is good evidence of | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities for R&I | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| action. These include administrative and decision systems (management, decision making, fundraising, financial management and fairness, and technological and information management systems) as well as communications | managerial ability, financial, technological and information resources and/or political influence required to bring about change.<br><br>No linked LMIC PhDs have been completed. | improvements in communication between organisations, greater community engagement with decision making and/or improved capacity to secure funding resources. | improvements in individual capacity, for example increased knowledge and skills, some institutional capacities (e.g. technology and information infrastructures), improved communication between organisations, greater community engagement | in individuals' increased knowledge and skills' institutional capacity, for example technology and information infrastructures, improved communication between organisations, greater community engagement with decision | durable improvements in individual and institutional capacity, for example increased knowledge and/or skills, improved communication between organisations, greater community engagement with decision making, | | |

| 3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities for R&I | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| that are equitable and fair.<br><br>Expected to be reflected in results such as:<br><br>number of LMIC PhDs completed;<br><br>LMIC lead authors in published research outputs;<br><br>LMIC research infrastructure enhancement (new research facilities, | LMIC authors are not discernible in award-linked publications.<br><br>No evidence of increased capabilities to mobilised follow-on funding. | | with decision making, and/or limited improved capacity to secure funding resources. | making, and/or improved capacity to secure funding resources. | measurement, standards and targets, and improved capacity to secure funding resources. | | |

| 3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities for R&I | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| equipment, labs, information infrastructure, support, etc.). | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 3.4 Stakeholder networks established across research policy and practice, civil society & enterprise in partner countries, internationally & in UK | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Use of findings from research or innovations is the goal of challenge-oriented R&I. The global – or at least multinational – nature of development challenges calls for networks to promote and support use. Networks will include stakeholders from policy, practice and business, together | No evidence that stakeholders external to the research process have engaged with research/ innovation process or outputs. It is highly unlikely that results will make a contribution to addressing a | Stakeholders external to the research process have engaged to a very limited extent with the research/ innovation process and outputs. Potential for use of the results | Stakeholders from an adequate mix of backgrounds have engaged in networks to develop next steps, strategies and/or implementation plans. There is evidence that some of the sought-after results are beginning to | Stakeholders from most relevant backgrounds have engaged in networks to develop next steps, strategies and/or implementation plans. There is good evidence of progress in achieving the intended applications and/or next | Stakeholders from all relevant backgrounds have engaged in networks to develop next steps, strategies and/or implementation plans. There is good evidence of progress in achieving the intended applications and/or next | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 3.4 Stakeholder networks established across research policy and practice, civil society & enterprise in partner countries, internationally & in UK | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| with researchers/ innovators, engaged in promoting and advocating for use.<br><br>Capture also any £ data on the benefit that networks could generate. | development challenge. | remains very low. | emerge in ways that could be used in policies, practices, products or services. | steps of the research/ innovation activities, and potential for use and replication of these is high. | steps of the research/ innovation activities, and potential for use and replication of these is high, including to new sites that could also benefit. | | |
| Assessment: Please enter your rating 0–4 (or N/A): | | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

**Outcomes achieved to date**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Summary of award expectations**<br><br>Briefly summarise the award's expectations and aims, as described in proposal-stage evidence. | |
| **Summary of outcomes to date**<br><br>Briefly describe outcomes achieved to date. Also note any pivots or adaptations in | |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| award focus or aims during implementation. | | | | | | |
| **Confidence in evidence**<br><br>Briefly comment on the evidence available for both award expectations and outcomes achieved to date. | | | | | | |
| | Outcome(s) substantially did not meet expectations to date | Outcome(s) moderately did not meet expectations to date | Outcome(s) met expectations to date | Outcome(s) moderately exceeded expectations to date | Outcome(s) substantially exceeded expectations to date | Too early to assess |
| Assessment (select rating from above): | | | | | | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | | | | | | |

**Dimension 4: Cost-effectiveness ('How many units of benefit would the intervention have to generate before the value of the benefits outweighs the costs?')**

| 4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources in implementation per £1 GCRF | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| Other, non-GCRF funders or businesses are willing to invest in the ideas/knowledge outputs from GCRF projects.<br><br>Capture value of £ leveraged.<br><br>For assessments, please write down the value leveraged if you have it, and make your assessment of the rating with | No consequent investment as a result of the research £0 leverage | Bottom quartile £ leveraged per £1 GCRF | Third quartile £ leveraged per £1 GCRF | Second quartile £ leveraged per £1 GCRF | Top quartile £ leveraged per £1 GCRF | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources in implementation per £1 GCRF | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| justification. We can consider whether it is appropriate to calculate quartiles later. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please provide the value of £ leveraged here (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give a brief description/rationale. If values aren't known but qualitative evidence is available please provide it, with some comments on a potential rating. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 4.2 LMIC PIs/Co-Is secure further research funding per £1 of GCRF funding | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| LMIC researchers have gained sufficient profile and capacities to mobilise follow-on funding for the work.<br><br>For assessments, please write down the value leveraged if you have it, and make your assessment of the rating with justification (qualitatively if necessary). We can consider | No consequent investment as a result of the research £0 leverage | Bottom quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Third quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Second quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Top quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 4.2 LMIC PIs/Co-Is secure further research funding per £1 of GCRF funding | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| whether it is appropriate to calculate quartiles later. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please provide the value of £ leveraged here (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give a brief description/rationale. If values aren't known but qualitative evidence is available please provide it, with some comments on a potential rating. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 4.3 Matched funding achieved from other sources per £1 of GCRF | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable<br>0 | Poor<br>1 | Adequate<br>2 | Good<br>3 | Excellent<br>4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| For a subset of awards that are explicitly focused on innovation and market-oriented, matched funding.<br><br>For assessments, please write down the value leveraged if you have it, and make your assessment of the rating with justification. We can consider whether it is appropriate to | No consequent investment as a result of the research – £0 leverage | Bottom quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Third quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Second quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | Top quartile £ leveraged per £1 of GCRF funding | | High<br>Medium<br>Low<br>No evidence |

| 4.3 Matched funding achieved from other sources per £1 of GCRF | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Unacceptable 0 | Poor 1 | Adequate 2 | Good 3 | Excellent 4 | Not applicable | Confidence in evidence |
| calculate quartiles later. | | | | | | | |

| | |
|---|---|
| Assessment: Please provide the value of £ leveraged here (or N/A): | |
| Comment: Give a brief description/rationale. If values aren't known but qualitative evidence is available please provide it, with some comments on a potential rating. | |
| Confidence in evidence (high/medium/low/no evidence): | |
| Comment: Give brief rationale for choice. | |

| 4.4 Additional cost-effectiveness information | |
|---|---|
| Please capture qualitatively – including any quantitative information available – any additional information on cost-effectiveness available in relation to the award. | |

# Annex C: Summative findings: Performance by dimension

In this annex we present findings from the summative sample across the rubric dimensions: Economy, Efficiency, Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness.

Dimension 1, Economy, assesses the extent to which awards invested in foundations for development impact. It examines whether awards developed and invested in inputs, such as personnel, resources and processes, that create the foundations for driving impact in challenge-led, interdisciplinary and international research for development. This is incorporated into four subdimensions of Economy, described in Table 7. These four components are derived from the initial R&I activities and the assumptions about activity-to-results outlined in the GCRF ToC; thus we have established these as indicators of Economy in this VfM assessment.

## Findings in Economy: Willingness to invest in foundations for impact

**Box 12: Key findings in "willingness to invest in foundations" (Economy)**

- Of 81 awards, 26 (32%) offer excellent or good VfM in Economy, 40 (49%) offer adequate VfM, and 15 (19%) offer poor or unacceptable VfM.
- Within Economy, sampled awards perform best in research innovation and originality (SD1.1) and investment in interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral research (SD1.2), indicating that overall, GCRF invested in awards that demonstrated research excellence, interdisciplinarity/cross-sectoral research, and relevance to key intended users.
- Performance was somewhat weaker in equity-related subdimensions of Economy, namely in investment in EDI (1.3) and equitable partnerships (SD1.4), with 35 (43%) and 13 (16%) awards respectively scoring poor and unacceptable, reflecting inadequate investment into equity-related structures and processes among a subset of awards.
- Network awards perform better than other award types in investment in interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2), EDI (SD1.3), and equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4); early and mid-career fellowships and strategic awards perform less well than other award types in these subdimensions.

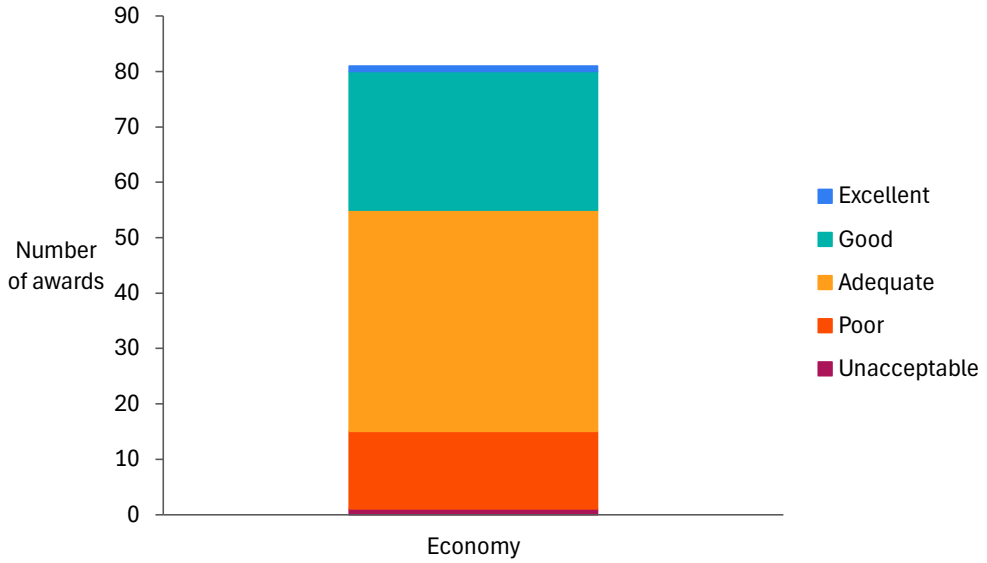
**Table 4: Description of subdimensions within Economy**

| **Dimension 1 – Economy:** willingness to invest in foundations for impact. | |
|---|---|
| 1.1 – Research innovation and originality | This subdimension refers to the perceived importance and value of the knowledge and understanding generated by the research/innovation to key intended users. Importance is defined here in terms of (i) the perceived relevance of research processes and products to the needs and priorities of potential users and (ii) the contribution of the research to theory and/or practice. |
| 1.2 – Investments in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design | Interdisciplinary/cross-sectoral research is promoted because most development challenges are not monodisciplinary in nature and solution. Some exceptions may apply, but these should be clearly identified and justified. |
| 1.3 – Investment into EDI | GCRF promotes research that supports EDI, facilitates empowerment of all relevant stakeholders, and builds the capacity of researchers to become leaders in EDI in research. |
| 1.4 – Investment into equitable partnerships and collaborations | Investments of time and resources are made to ensure fair negotiations and establishment of structures and processes to support equitable partnerships and address power imbalances and co-design of awards. |

Overall, the summative sample performs well in Economy, with 26 awards (32%) offering excellent or good VfM, 40 awards (49%) offering adequate VfM, and 15 awards (19%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM. This provides assurance that sample awards have, on the whole, demonstrated adequate investment in foundations for impacts, in alignment with GCRF's value proposition.

**81% of GCRF awards from the summative sample show adequate, good or excellent willingness to invest in foundations for impact (Economy).**

**Figure 25: VfM performance of 81 awards in Economy**

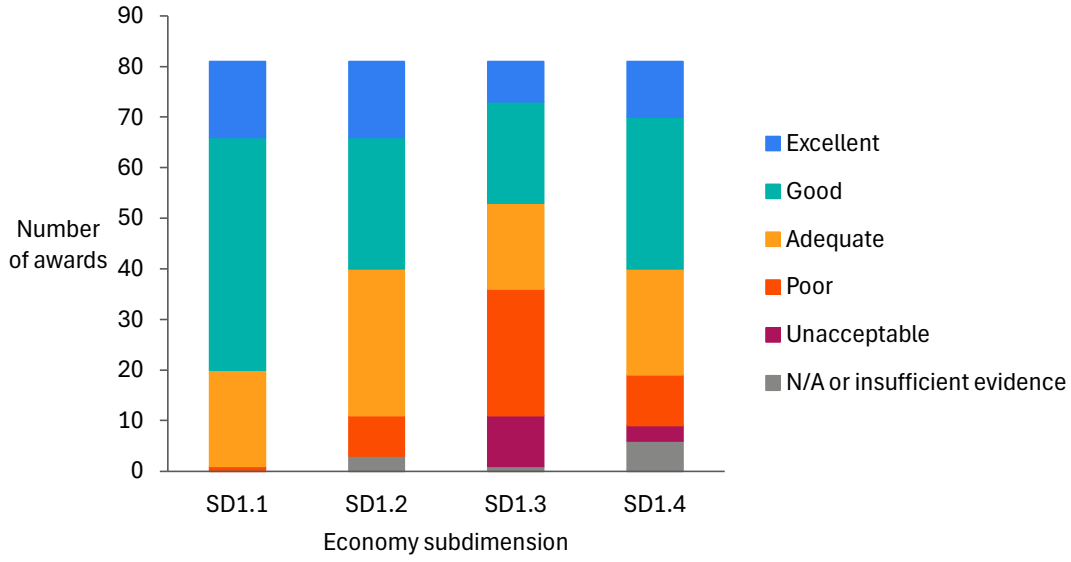



Although this sample performs well in Economy overall, some variation in performance is observed at the subdimension level. Within Economy, sampled awards perform best in research innovation and originality (SD1.1) and investment in interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral research (SD1.2), indicating that overall, GCRF invested in awards that demonstrated research excellence, interdisciplinarity/cross-sectoral research, and relevance to key intended users.

Within this sample, performance was somewhat weaker in equity-related subdimensions of Economy, namely in investment in EDI (SD1.3) and equitable partnerships (SD1.4), with 35 (43%) and 13 (16%) awards respectively scoring below poor or unacceptable. Although more than half of the awards offer adequate, good or excellent VfM in investment in EDI and equitable partnerships, the numbers of poor and unacceptable ratings reflect inadequate investment in equity-related structures and processes among a subset of awards, indicating a potential weakness in this set of awards. Performance across subdimensions of Economy is presented in Figure 24.

**GCRF has supported research innovation and originality (SD1.1) but award performance in investment in EDI processes (SD1.3) varied across the summative sample.**

**Figure 26: VfM performance of 81 awards in Economy subdimensions**



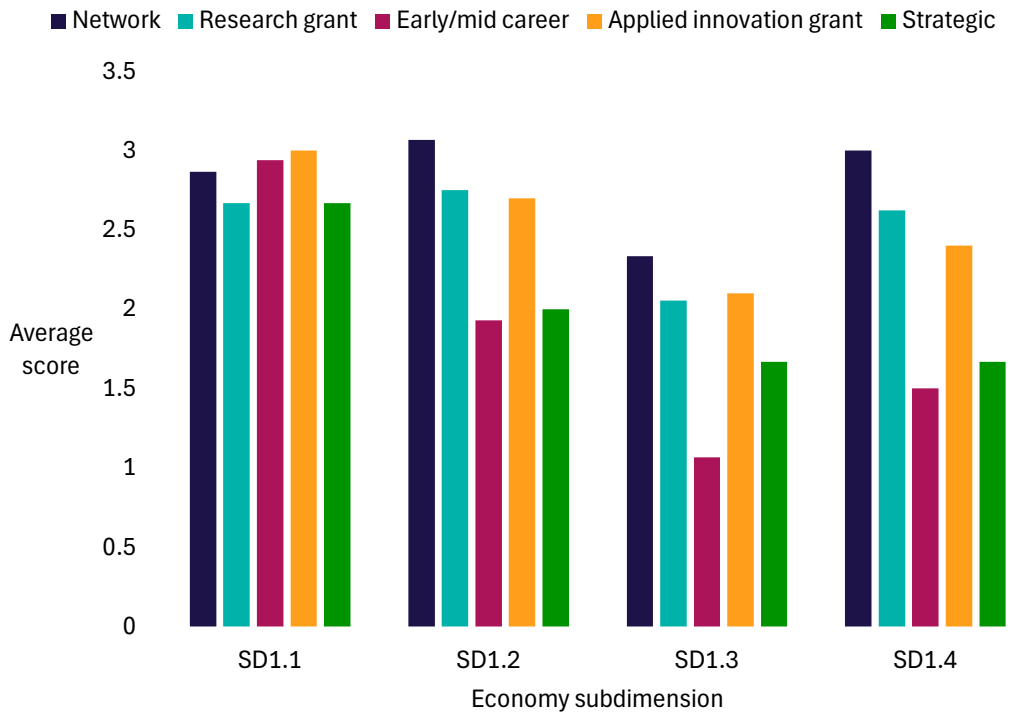

| Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy) |
|---|
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality: |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |

We also observe variation in performance by award type within Economy in the summative sample. Consistent with the findings above, research innovation and originality (SD1.1) is a strength of all award types, and all types perform relatively weaker on investment in EDI (SD1.3). This indicates that relatively poorer performance in investment in EDI (SD1.3) is common among all award types within this sample, although it is a particular weakness of early and mid-career awards.

Network awards perform better than other award types in investment interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research (SD1.2), EDI (SD1.3), and equitable partnerships and collaborations (SD1.4), and early and mid-career and strategic awards perform less well than other award types in these subdimensions. Research grants and applied innovation awards show limited variation in performance across the subdimension. The strong performance of network awards across Economy suggests that their emphasis on inclusivity, diversity and equitable representation is reflected in strong investment in structures and processes that support interdisciplinarity and equity. Performance across Economy subdimension by award type is presented in Figure 25.

**All award types have scored highly on research innovation and originality (SD1.1), while scoring the lowest on investment in EDI processes (SD1.3).**

**Figure 27: Average performance of the full sample (n = 81) within four subdimensions of Economy based on type of award**

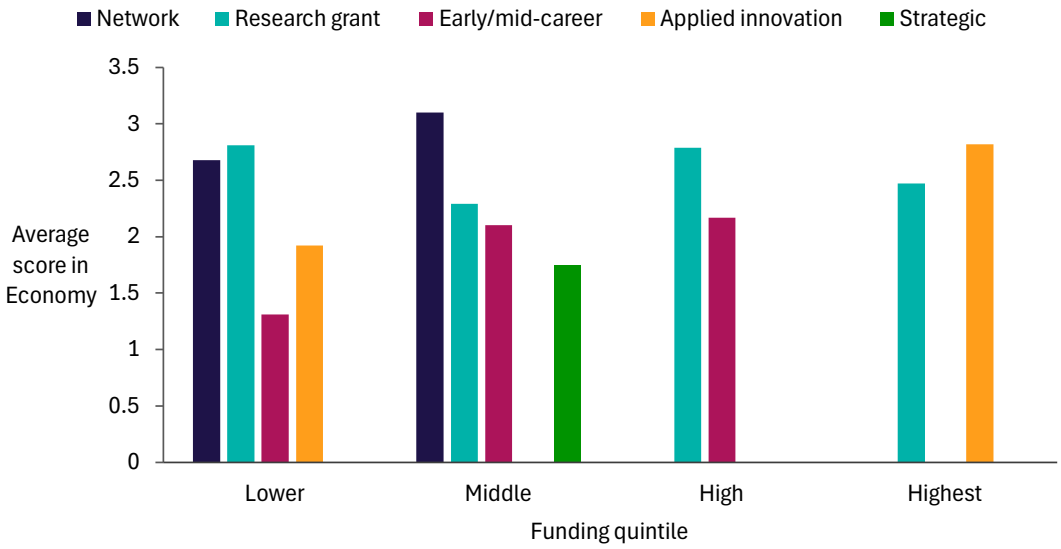



| Dimension 1: Investments in foundations for development impact (Economy) |
|---|
| SD1.1 Research Innovation/originality: |
| SD1.2 Investment in interdisciplinary cross-sectoral research in design |
| SD1.3 Investment in equality, diversity and inclusion processes *(Equity)* |
| SD1.4 Investment in equitable partnerships and collaborations in design *(Equity)* |

Finally, we observe differences in performance in Economy by level of investment. Middle quintile network awards outperform all other award types across funding quintiles, indicating that they may offer particularly good VfM. Similarly, lower quintile network awards and research grants perform well, offering VfM at low levels of investment. Highest quintile awards, which in this sample include research grants and applied innovation awards, perform well on Economy, providing assurance that large investments have delivered good VfM on Economy. Performance in Economy by award type and funding level is presented in Figure 26.

## Network awards and research grants perform well in Economy, even at lower funding levels.

### Figure 28: Average performance of the full sample (n = 81) in Economy dimension by award type and funding level



# Findings in Efficiency: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs

Dimension 2, Efficiency, assesses the extent to which planned resources are utilised to support collaboration and dissemination. This includes assessing the processes that facilitate the transformation of inputs into outputs and outcomes. Consistent with the underlying assumptions in the GCRF ToC, which connects R&I activities to their intended results, this dimension emphasises the importance of ensuring that investments promote the fair distribution of both financial and non-financial benefits with LMIC partners. Establishing and maintaining equitable partnerships depends on such investments. Additionally, this principle extends to collaborations with non-academic stakeholders, encouraging their active participation in research through the development of accessible and context-appropriate communication channels and formats. Descriptions of the subdimensions within Efficiency are provided in Table 8.

**Box 13: Key findings in "engagement and willingness to invest in outputs" (Efficiency)**

- Of 81 awards, 33 (41%) offer excellent or good VfM in Efficiency, 38 (47%) offer adequate VfM, and 10 (12%) offer poor or unacceptable VfM.
- Investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3) is a particular strength of the sample, with 59 awards (73%) offering good/excellent VfM and a further 14 awards (17%) offering adequate VfM in this subdimension.
- Performance was somewhat weaker in equitable balance of research fundings between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), with 51 awards (63%) offering adequate or better VfM and 21 awards (26%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM, although network and early and mid-career awards performed well in this area. As observed in the Equity-related subdimension of Economy, this indicates that a subset of awards lacked adequate investment in equitable partnerships, here extending to inadequate financial equity among UK and LMIC partners.
- Network and early and mid-career awards offer good VfM in Efficiency at lower funding levels.

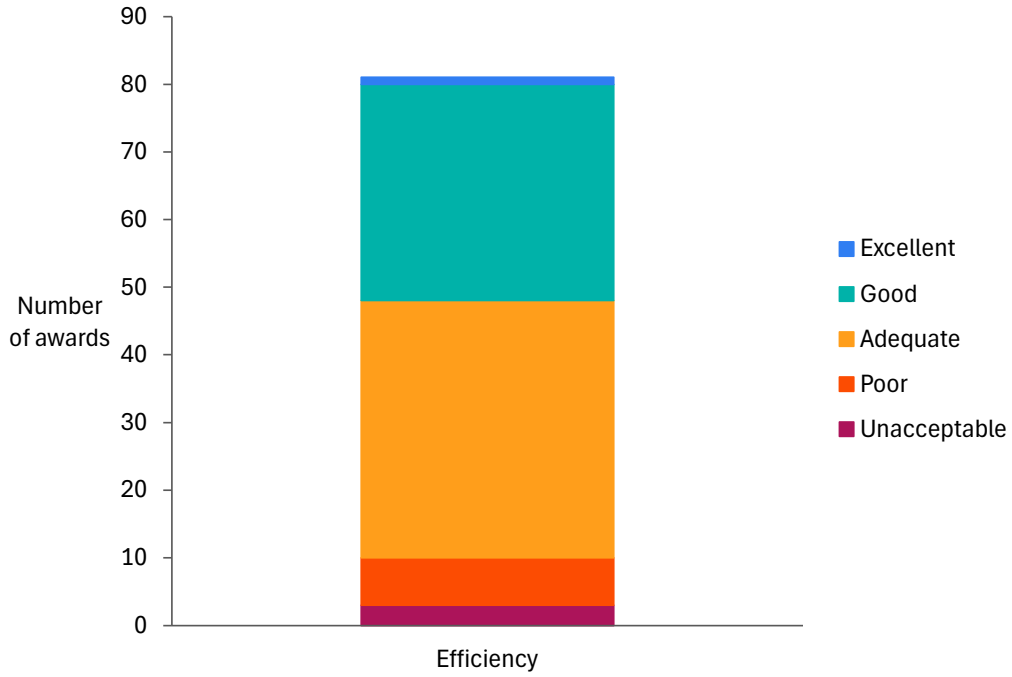
**Table 5: Description of subdimensions within Efficiency**

| **Dimension 2 – Efficiency:** engagement and willingness to invest in outputs. | |
|---|---|
| 2.1 – Investment in LMIC capacity building (Equity) | There are resources dedicated to extensive planning for and implementation of activities to enhance research/innovation capabilities among LMIC partners, including (where relevant for the award): technical skill-building; mentorships; research management; PhDs, post-doctorates and early career opportunities; and research infrastructure. |
| 2.2 – Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (Equity) | There is a significant share of funding allocated to LMIC partners as a measure of equity in partnership and support to LMIC partner benefit. |
| 2.3 – Investment in strategies to position research for use | There is investment in the communication, promotion, packaging and positioning of research outputs for use above and beyond academic publishing. |

Overall, the summative sample performs well in Efficiency, with 33 awards (41%) offering excellent or good VfM, 38 awards (47%) offering adequate VfM, and 10 awards (12%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM. This provides assurance that sample awards have, on the whole, demonstrated adequate engagement and willingness to invest in outputs, in alignment with GCRF's value proposition. A summary of award performance in Efficiency is provided in Figure 27.

**88% of GCRF awards in the summative sample show adequate, good or excellent engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency).**

**Figure 29: VfM performance of 81 awards in Efficiency dimension**

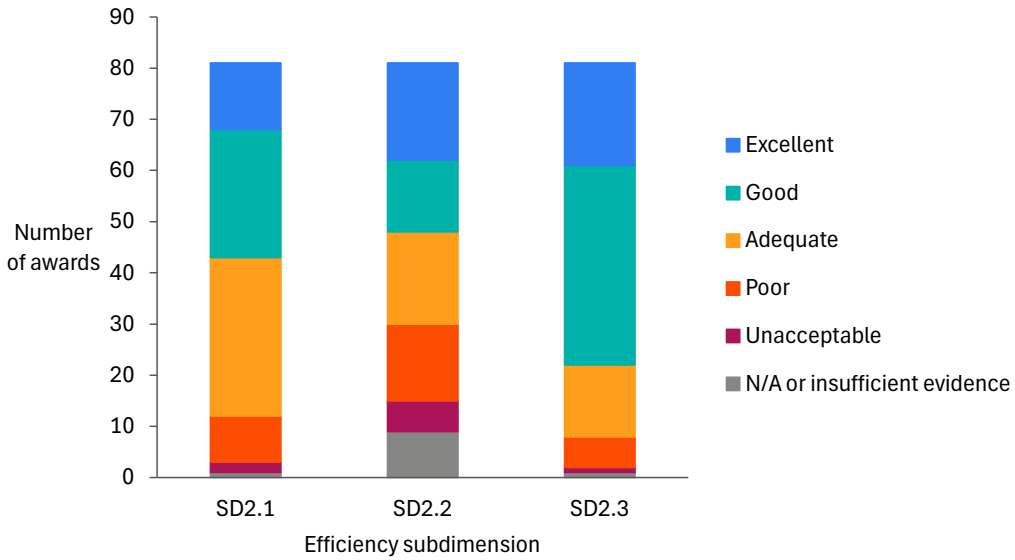



The summative sample performs well in Efficiency overall, with some variation in performance at the subdimension level. The sample performs particularly well in investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3), with 59 awards (73%) offering good/excellent VfM and a further 14 awards (17%) offering adequate VfM. This is among the best performing subdimensions across the VfM assessment, indicating a particular strength of this sample. The strong performance of the sample in this subdimension indicates that awards invested effectively in communication, promotion, packaging and strategies to position outputs for use. The sample also performed well in subdimensions related to positioning for use in Economy, which may indicate that awards were able to effectively transform investments into strategies for positioning for use.

Within subdimensions of Efficiency, performance was somewhat weaker in equitable balance of research fundings between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), with 51 awards (63%) offering adequate, good or excellent VfM and 21 awards (26%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM. As observed in the Equity-related subdimension of Economy, this indicates that a subset of awards lacked adequate investment in equitable partnerships, here extending to inadequate financial equity among UK and LMIC partners. A summary of award ratings across Efficiency subdimensions is presented in Figure 28.

**Awards in the summative sample have performed well in their investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3); however, equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2) was a relative weakness in Efficiency for some awards.**

**Figure 30: VfM performance of 81 awards in Efficiency subdimensions**




| Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency) |
|---|
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |

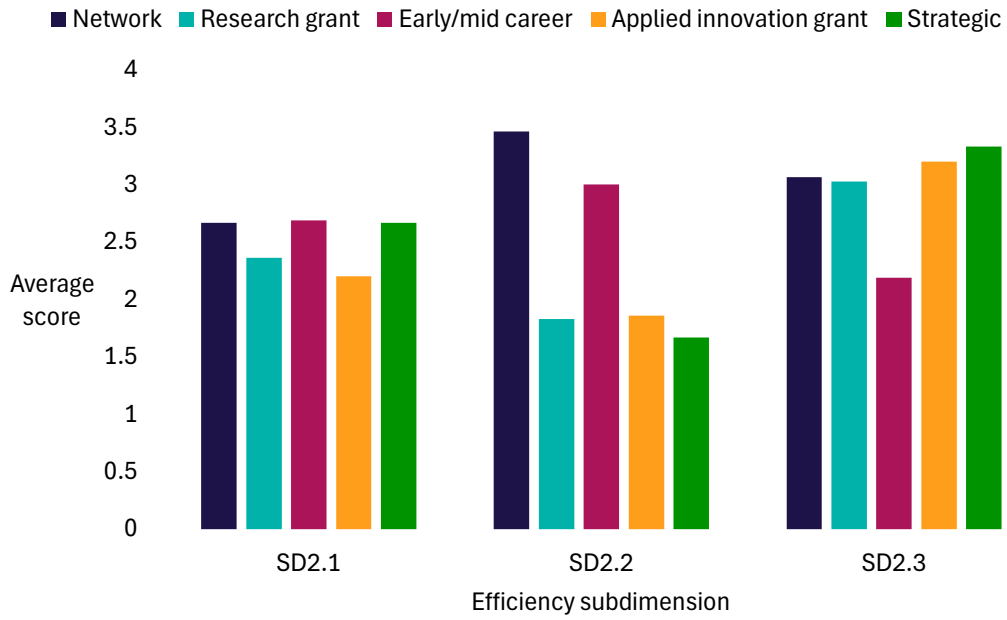
We also observe some variation in performance by award type within Efficiency in the summative sample. Award types perform similarly in investment in LMIC capacity building (SD2.1). Within Efficiency, the most variation in performance by award type is in equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners (SD2.2), with network and early and mid-career awards outperforming other award types. As with the strong performance of network awards in Economy, networks often demonstrated equitable funding arrangements among members, possibly reflecting the need for networks to investment in equitable processes and ways of working at the proposal stage. The strong performance of early and mid-career awards in this subdimension is driven by FLAIR Fellowships, which were often granted to an LMIC ECR PI, resulting in a significant share of funding allocated to LMIC partners in these awards.

Overall, the sample demonstrates strong performance in investment in strategies to position research for use (SD2.3), although there is some variation by award type, with early and mid-career awards demonstrating poorer performance relative to other award types. The relatively poor performance of early and mid-career awards in this area may reflect the relative inexperience of ECR PIs in positioning research for use or may reflect the fact that early and mid-career awards received lower levels of

funding compared to other award types. Average scores for Efficiency subdimensions by award type are presented in Figure 29.

**While no award type has outperformed others in all subdimensions of Efficiency, network and early and mid-career awards have scored higher in their investments towards capacity-building activities in LMICs (SD2.1) and equitable distribution of research funding (SD2.2).**

**Figure 31: Average performance of the summative sample (n = 81) across Efficiency subdimensions by award type**

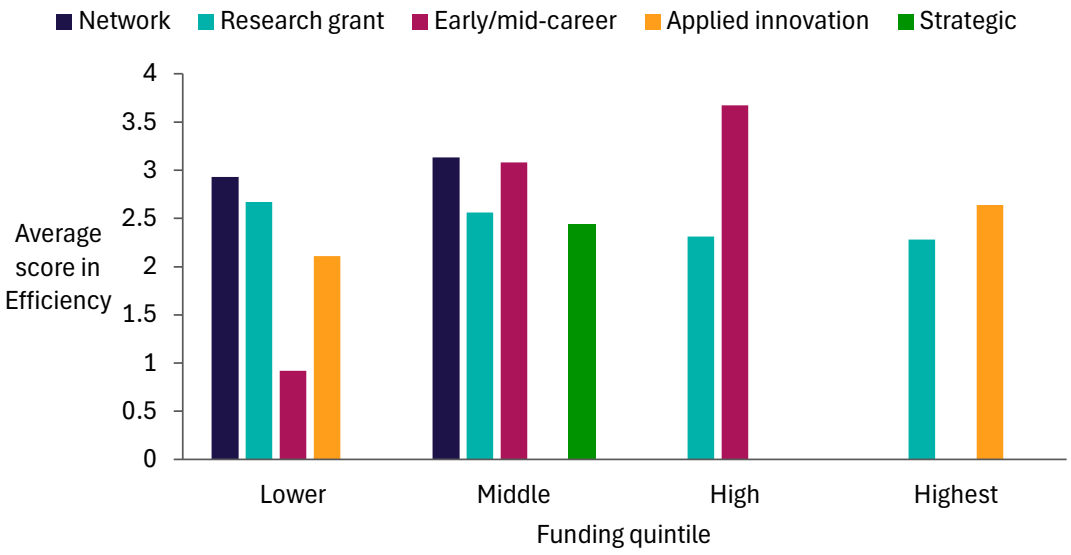



| Dimension 2: Engagement and willingness to invest in outputs (Efficiency) |
|---|
| SD2.1 Investment in LMIC capacity building *(Equity)* |
| SD2.2 Equitable balance of research funding between UK and LMIC partners *(Equity)* |
| SD 2.3 Investment in strategies to position research for use (e.g. comms) |

Finally, we observe differences in performance in Efficiency by level of investment. High quintile early and mid-career awards outperform all other award types across funding quintiles, indicating that they may offer particularly good VfM. Similarly, middle quintile early and mid-career awards perform well, but lower quintile awards perform least well, indicating that low funding levels may contribute to poor performance among some early and mid-career awards. As observed in Economy, network awards in both lower and middle quintiles perform well, indicating that they offer good VfM at lower levels of funding in Efficiency.

**Network awards and early and mid-career awards perform well in Efficiency at lower levels of funding.**

**Figure 32: Average performance of the summative sample (n = 81) in Efficiency dimension by award type and funding level**



# Findings in Effectiveness: Investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes

Dimension 3, Effectiveness, assesses investment to act on results to deliver outcomes. This includes four areas: (1) high-quality interdisciplinary R&I positioned for use; (2) sustainable global R&I partnerships spanning disciplines and geographies; (3) strengthened challenge-oriented R&I capabilities; and (4) stakeholder networks connecting research, policy, practice, civil society and enterprise across partner countries, internationally and in the UK. The subdimensions are defined in Table 9. These areas align with the expected results outlined in the GCRF ToC, which anticipates good evidence of outputs by Year 5 of the Fund. As a result, these factors serve as measures of Effectiveness in this VfM assessment.

The summative sample includes a diverse set of awards, with variations in start date, duration and end date. Additionally, a portion of the summative sample was analysed in another part of this evaluation, contributing to improved capture of outputs and short-term outcomes among these awards. This subset of awards is analysed in Section 4. Given this variation in award characteristics and data capture, assessment of Effectiveness should be considered as representative of the time of assessment, acknowledging that performance in Effectiveness may change over time.

**Box 14: Key findings in "investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes" (Effectiveness)**

- Of 81 awards, 29 (36%) offer excellent or good VfM in Effectiveness, 39 (48%) offer adequate VfM, and 13 (16%) offer poor or unacceptable VfM.
- The sample performs particularly well in high-quality research positioned for use (SD3.1), with 55 awards (68%) offering good/excellent VfM and a further 21 awards (26%) offering adequate VfM.
- As found in Economy and Efficiency, network awards outperform other award types across most Effectiveness subdimensions, with particularly strong performance in sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2).
- Research and applied innovation grants performed best in high-quality R&I and positioning for use (SD3.1), possibly reflecting a focus on R&I excellence.

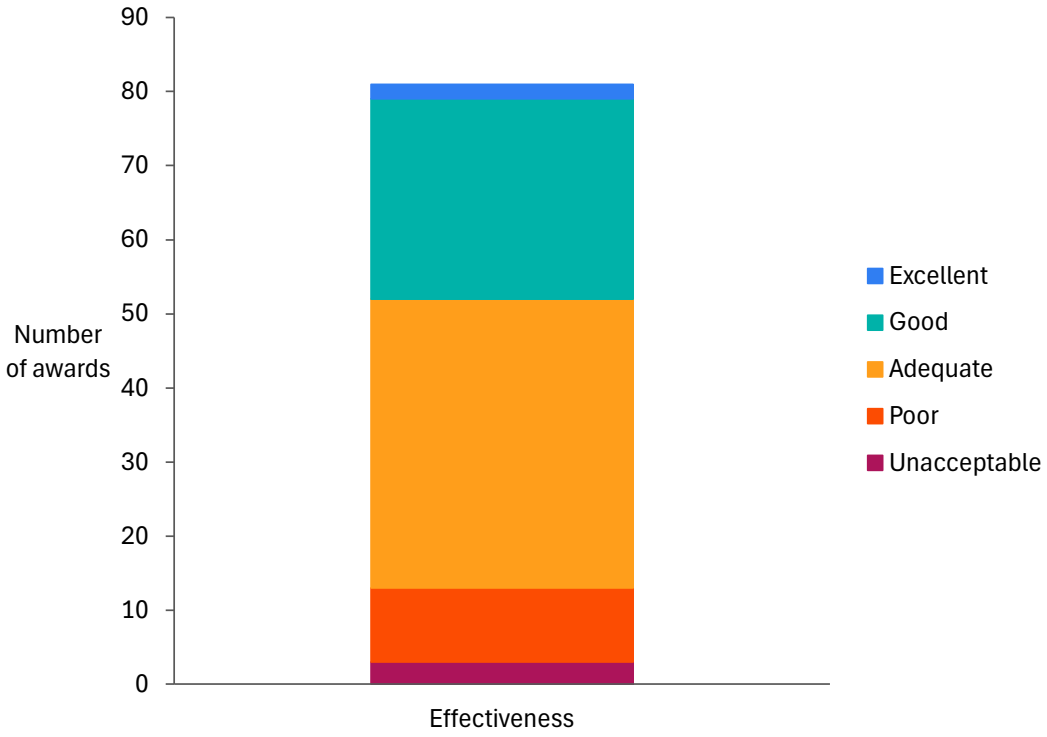
**Table 6: Description of subdimensions within Effectiveness**

| **Dimension 3 – Effectiveness:** investments to act on outputs to deliver outcomes. | |
|---|---|
| 3.1 – High-quality R&I positioned for use | R&I that has been designed, delivered and promoted in ways that help address key development challenges is considered high-quality. Interdisciplinarity is promoted because most development challenges are not monodisciplinary in nature and solution. Positioning for use is key. |
| 3.2 – Sustainable, equitable partnerships (Equity) | Partnerships are expected to sustain over time, working through multiple funding cycles and projects over time. In terms of sustainability, elements to consider include: likely sustainability of the partnership beyond the duration of the award; alignment of interests and purposes among the partners; clear value to all parties in the partnership; etc. |
| 3.3 – Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (Equity) | Institutional and individual capabilities to address challenge-oriented problems call for capacities to work in respectful partnerships across countries and disciplines; in addition, they call for infrastructures that support equitable and fair partnerships that share decision making as well as action. |
| 3.4 – User-side stakeholder networks established | Use of findings from research or innovations is the goal of challenge-oriented R&I. The global – or at least multinational – nature of development challenges calls for networks to promote and support use. Networks will include stakeholders from policy, practice and business, together with researchers/innovators, engaged in promoting and advocating for use. |

Overall, the summative sample performs well in Efficiency, with 29 awards (36%) offering excellent or good VfM, 39 awards (48%) offering adequate VfM, and 13 awards (16%) offering poor or unacceptable VfM. This provides assurance that sampled awards have, on the whole, demonstrated investment to act on results to deliver outcomes. A summary of award performance in Effectiveness is provided in Figure 31.

**84% of GCRF awards in the summative sample show adequate, good or excellent level of investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness).**

**Figure 33: VfM performance of 81 awards in Effectiveness**

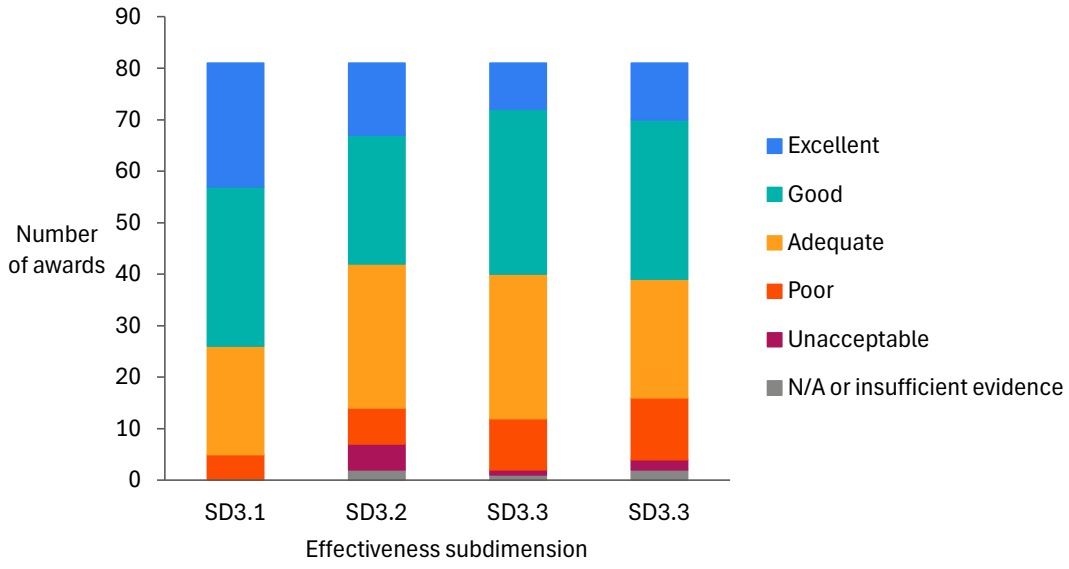


The summative sample performs well in Effectiveness overall, with some variation in performance at the subdimension level. The sample performs particularly well in high-quality research positioned for use (SD3.1), with 55 awards (68%) offering good/excellent VfM and a further 21 awards (26%) offering adequate VfM. The strong performance in this subdimension of Effectiveness continues the trend that this sample is strong in aspects of performance related to research excellence (SD1.1) and positioning for use (SD2.3). The continuation of strong performance related to this theme in Effectiveness indicates that awards within this sample have delivered on investments in high-quality research that is positioned for use.

The summative sample performs similar across Effectiveness subdimensions related to sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2), enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3), and user-side stakeholder networks established (SD3.4). Among these subdimensions, there were marginally more 'unacceptable' ratings for sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2). A summary of award ratings across Effectiveness subdimensions is presented in Figure 32.

**GCRF awards in the summative sample have performed well on High-quality research and innovation that is positioned for use (SD3.1), as 94% of awards are rated adequate, good or excellent.**

**Figure 34: VfM performance of 81 awards in Effectiveness subdimensions**



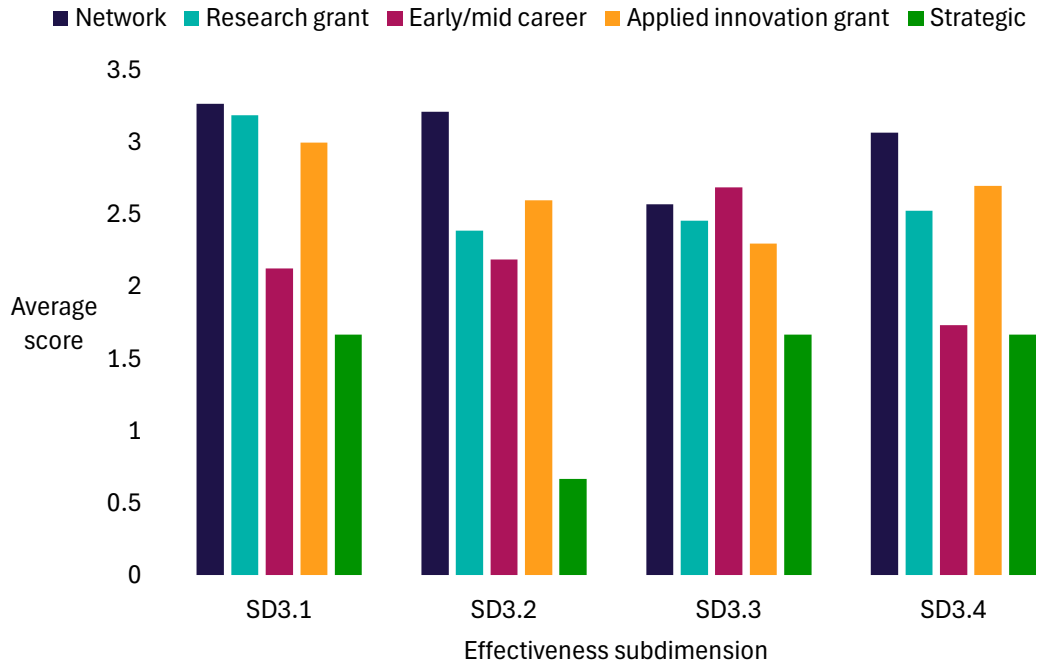

| Dimension 3: Investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |

We observed some variation in performance by award type across Effectiveness subdimensions in the summative sample. As found in Economy and Efficiency, network awards outperform other award types across most Effectiveness subdimensions, with particularly strong performance in sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2). Research and applied innovation grants performed best in high-quality R&I and positioning for use (SD3.1), possibly reflecting a focus on R&I excellence.

The summative sample demonstrated relatively poorer performance in enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities (SD3.3), with the exception of early and mid-career awards, which performed best in this area, possibly due to gains in capabilities among early career team members. Strategic investments consistently performed less well than other award types across all subdimensions of Effectiveness, with particularly poor performance in sustainable, equitable partnerships (SD3.2). The average scores for Effectiveness subdimensions by award type are presented in Figure 33.

**Strategic investments have underperformed in all subdimensions of Effectiveness when compared to other award types.**

**Figure 35: VfM performance of 81 awards in Effectiveness subdimensions by award type**




| Dimension 3: Investments to act on results to deliver outcomes (Effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD3.1 High-quality research and innovation, positioned for use |
| SD3.2 Sustainable, equitable partnerships *(Equity)* |
| SD3.3 Enhanced challenge-oriented capabilities *(Equity)* |
| SD3.4 User-side stakeholder networks established |

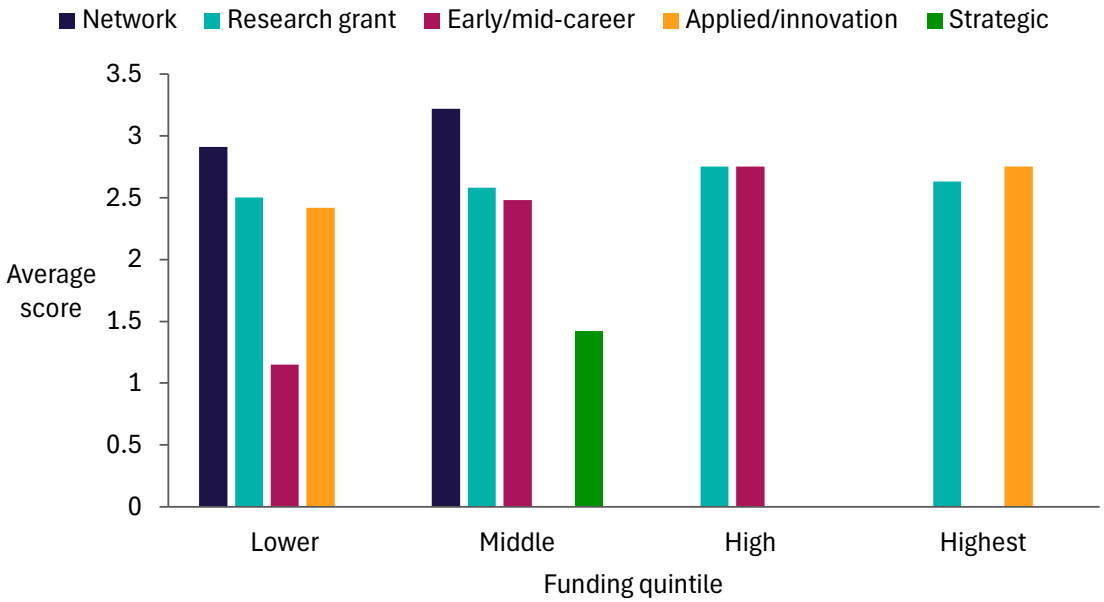
Finally, we observed differences in performance in Effectiveness by level of investment. As observed in Economy, middle quintile network awards outperform other award types, offering particularly good VfM at lower levels of investment. Lower quintile network awards perform similarly well, further illustrating the VfM delivered by network awards in the summative sample. Awards in the high and highest funding quintiles offer good VfM, providing some assurances that higher levels of investment were translated into outputs and outcomes aligned with GCRF's value proposition.

Lower quintile early and mid-career awards and middle quintile strategic awards perform more poorly than other award types in Effectiveness. This is consistent with the relatively poorer performance of lower quintile early and mid-career awards in Economy and Efficiency, potentially indicating that the level of investment in these awards was inadequate to support generation of value in line with GCRF's aims.

The relatively poorer performance of strategic investments may reflect their focus on desk research and secondary data analysis, which often involved limited activities and small teams, resulting in less GCRF-relevant value generation. Performance in Effectiveness by award type and funding level is presented in Figure 34.

**Network awards in the summative sample have outperformed all other award types at lower and middle quintile funding levels.**

**Figure 36: VfM performance of 81 awards in Effectiveness subdimensions by award type and funding level**



# Findings in Cost-effectiveness: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs

Dimension 4 assesses the extent to which awards were cost-effective. The dimension aims to understand how many units of benefit the intervention (i.e. the GCRF award) would have to generate before the value of the benefits outweighs the costs. A formal cost-effectiveness analysis is not feasible or appropriate for most awards, because many of the benefits derived from GCRF funding are non-monetisable. Instead, we use another measure – the level of additional investment attracted by GCRF-funded work from other sources – which serves as an indicator of the value placed on these projects by external stakeholders. To capture this, we assess three subdimensions: (1) the amount of additional investment leveraged from non-GCRF sources per £1 of GCRF funding; (2) the extent to which LMIC PIs or Co-Is secure further research funding per £1 of GCRF funding; and (3) co-funding obtained from other sources per £1 of GCRF funding. These dimensions are defined in Table 10. Where available, we also incorporate any existing assessments of cost-effectiveness conducted as part of individual awards.

**Box 15: Key findings in "compares short-term monetary benefits to costs" (Cost-effectiveness)**

- Assessing Cost-effectiveness and its subdimensions with confidence was challenging, owing to insufficient evidence. This was largely a result of limited post-award reporting and the use of UK-based reporting systems, which are likely to underreport on LMIC researchers.
- We identified follow-on funding or co-funding totalling approximately £144.3 million within the summative sample, relative to the GCRF investment in our sample of approximately £80.5 million. This value is likely to be an underestimation, because fewer than half of the awards in this sample had quantitative evidence of follow-on funding, although many more had qualitative evidence of the same.
- A sensitivity analysis found that this sample secured additional investment of between 1.0 times and 5.1 times the initial GCRF investment in the sample, indicating substantial variation across awards.
- Although the overall level of additional investment exceeds the initial GCRF investment considerably in the summative sample, only 24 awards (29%) had evidence of investment which exceeded the initial GCRF investment.
- Over half of the further investment identified (59%) came from just four awards. We did not observe any patterns in award characteristics (i.e. award size, duration or type) and the level of 'return' on investment.

- The majority (over 90%) of follow-on funding was recorded under subdimension 4.1, with limited evidence of follow-on funding awarded to LMIC PIs and Co-Is.

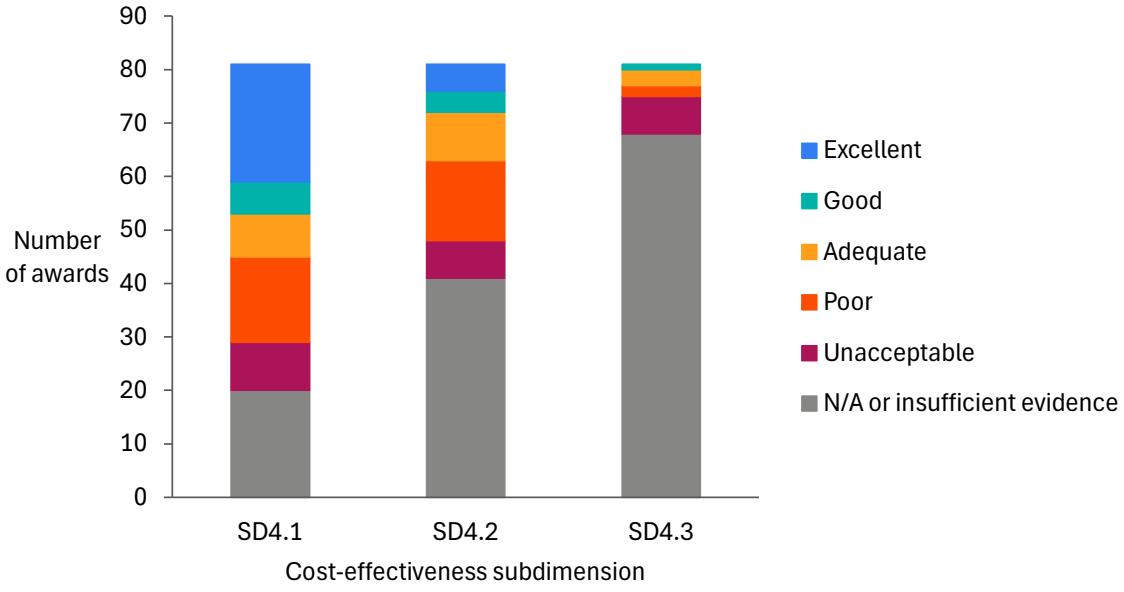
**Table 7: Description of subdimensions within Cost-effectiveness**

| **Dimension 4 – Cost-effectiveness:** compares short-term monetary benefits to costs. | |
|---|---|
| 4.1 – Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 GCRF | Other, non-GCRF funders or businesses are willing to invest in the ideas/knowledge outputs from GCRF projects. |
| 4.2 – LMIC PIs secure further research funding per £1 of GCRF funding (Equity) | LMIC researchers have gained sufficient profile and capacities to mobilise follow-on funding for the work. |
| 4.3 – Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding | For a subset of awards that are explicitly focused on innovation and market-oriented, matched funding. |

Across the summative sample, we identified follow-on funding or co-funding totalling approximately £144.3 million. This compares to the GCRF investment of approximately £80.5 million in the same awards. We calculated that the total further investment from wider sources was, on average, 4.0 times the initial investment in GCRF. However, this figure should be interpreted with caution, because it is heavily influenced by a small number of awards. Figure 35 presents the rating of award across subdimensions with Cost-effectiveness.

## Evidence on follow-on investments from GCRF awards in the summative sample has been varied.

**Figure 37: VfM performance of 81 awards in Cost-effectiveness at the subdimension level**




| Dimension 4: Compares short-term monetary benefits to costs (Cost-effectiveness) |
|---|
| SD4.1 Leverage of investment from non-GCRF sources per £1 GCRF |
| SD4.2 LMIC PIs secure further research funding, per £1 of GCRF funding *(Equity)* |
| SD4.3 Matched funding achieved by a subset of innovation, market-facing awards per £1 of GCRF funding |

We conducted a sensitivity analysis by taking the top 70 and the bottom 70 awards in terms of their level of ‘return’ as characterised by further investment from other sources. We found that our sample secured additional investment of between 1.0 times and 5.1 times the initial investment in the portfolio, indicating how much this figure varied depending on the sample of awards chosen. Although the overall level of additional investment exceeds the initial GCRF investment considerably in the summative sample, only 24 awards had evidence of investment which exceeded the initial GCRF investment, and over half of the further investment identified (59%) came from just four awards. Excluding these three awards reveals that follow-on funding was, on average, 2.9 times the initial GCRF investment.

This estimate is conservative in one respect: we identified qualitative evidence of additional awards and follow-on funding where no financial details were available. However, it is also not entirely conservative, because prior research and funding may also have influenced these future investments, making it difficult to attribute them solely to GCRF. Although this is not a formal measure of ‘return’, it provides an indication of the perceived value of GCRF-funded work based on the additional investment it has attracted.

The majority (over 90%) of follow-on funding was recorded under subdimension 4.1, with limited evidence of follow-on funding awarded to LMIC PIs and Co-Is.

# Annex D: Summary of findings across GCRF VfM assessments

**Table 8: Key findings from all GCRF VfM assessments**

| VfM assessment | Number of sampled awards | Data sources | Approach | Key findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Year 1: 2021** | 45 | Stage 1a write ups for GESIP, relevance and fairness assessments, plus additional public data. | 22 rubric criteria on a 5-point scale. | **Nine awards offered good value for money (20% of the sample), 28 of the 45 Awards (62%) were assessed as having acceptable value for money; and six poor value for money (13%).** At this stage, Hubs were assessed to have better value for money than other Awards. |
| **Year 2: 2022** | 32 awards<br>6 programmes | Signature investment award level data<br>Programme level analysis | 22 rubric criteria on a 5-point scale. | Of the 32 signature investment awards within the sample, **26 awards (81%) were assessed as offering either above average (34%) or average (47%) VfM.** |
| **Year 3: 2023** | Focus on rubric development and refining VfM approach so far, now can look to apply the rubric to produce a VfM assessment in 2024 | | | |
| **Year 4: 2024** | 50 awards | Award level RQ++ data | 14 rubric criteria on 5-point scale | **44 of 50 awards (88%) perform at the expected level or above across the three dimensions of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.** |
| **Year 5: 2024/25** | 31 awards | Award level Research into Use Case studies | 14 rubric criteria on 5-point scale | **29 of 31 awards (94%) were rated as having adequate, good or excellent performance across Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness.** |

# Annex E: Methods

This annex presents further details on the methods used for the summative assessment of VfM in GCRF. It is meant to complement the methods chapter of the main report and therefore is not comprehensive, instead providing a more detailed account of the analysis of VfM assessments and the thematic analysis conducted as part of the Year 5 (2025) Assessment.

## Analysis of VfM scores

Quantitative VfM scores and accompanying qualitative justifications were compiled and analysed across all assessed awards to examine patterns of performance at both the dimension and subdimension levels. Analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel. For each dimension and subdimension, the frequency of scores across the five-point scale (unacceptable to excellent) was tabulated, and average scores were calculated at the dimension level to provide an overview of performance.

To explore variation across different types of awards, disaggregation was undertaken by key characteristics, including:

- Award size, based on funding quintiles established in the GCRF award typology;
- Award type, such as thematic research grants, applied innovation awards, network awards, or early/mid-career fellowships;
- PI location, categorised as UK-based or LMIC-based, according to information provided in the award documentation.

To support interpretation of quantitative patterns, qualitative evidence was reviewed to identify and validate trends observed in the scoring data. This involved examining narrative justifications recorded during the scoring process, as well as reviewing relevant project documentation and data sources used in the evaluation. The integration of qualitative and quantitative evidence enabled a richer understanding of the drivers of VfM across awards.

For the summative analysis, scores from both the Year 4 and Year 5 VfM assessments were aggregated. This allowed for a cumulative view of VfM performance across a larger sample of awards and supported portfolio-level conclusions on the value generated by GCRF-funded activities.

## Thematic analysis

The thematic analysis conducted in the 2025 VfM assessment aimed to examine relationships across the VfM rubric in relation to the strategic aims and ToC of GCRF. This component of the study was designed to contribute to the learning objectives of the evaluation by identifying the conditions under which value is generated or constrained in ODA R&I funding.

The analysis had two aims:

- To what extent is investment in Economy translated into performance in Efficiency and Effectiveness, and through what mechanisms?
- What factors are associated with good or excellent performance in the Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness dimensions?

To address these questions, each subdimension was first assigned a primary theme based on the core features of its performance standards. This thematic classification was developed through internal discussions and review of the rubric criteria. Subdimensions were then grouped according to shared themes, such as equitable partnerships, capacity building or EDI, which reflect key elements GCRF's strategic aims. This enabled the analysis to trace the presence and influence of these themes across multiple stages of the value chain represented in the rubric, from early-stage investments (Economy) through implementation (Efficiency) and to outcomes (Effectiveness and Cost-effectiveness).

Scores were examined across the subdimensions within each theme to identify patterns in performance. In particular, the analysis considered whether investment in early-stage activities was consistently associated with higher performance in outcome-focused dimensions. Where such patterns were identified, they were interpreted as indicative of effective transformation of investment into later-stage value.

To further understand the drivers of performance, qualitative score justifications were reviewed. This evidence was used to identify common features of high-performing awards, including specific strategies, activities or structures that contributed to value generation. Patterns of poor performance were also examined to explore potential barriers to value generation.

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