



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

Newton Fund Evaluation

Final Report: Assessing progress towards
impact.

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Contents

List of acronyms	6
Executive summary	9
Key findings	10
Long-term outcomes and impacts	10
Strategic and operational findings	10
Conclusions and recommendations	12
Conclusions	12
Recommendations	13
Introduction	16
Defining impact in this context	19
Newton Fund: objectives and scope	20
Methodology	23
The approach	23
Outcomes module approach	26
Impact module approach	26
Value for Money	27
Data Science module	28
Limitations of the approach	30
Findings	31
Strength of evidence	32
Long-term outcomes and impact	34
Capacity strengthening	34
Policy and practice influence	44
Commercialisation	47
Strategy and operational considerations	51
Matched funding	51
Government-to-government collaboration	52
Equitable partnerships	54
Value for Money	60
Enabling and constraining factors in Newton Fund success	64

Constraining factors	67
Conclusions and recommendations	70
Introduction	70
Conclusions	70
Long-term outcomes and impacts	70
Strategy and operational considerations	71
Recommendations	73

Figures

Figure 1. Newton Fund ToC	18
Figure 2. The Fund's delivery architecture	21
Figure 3. Map denoting spend (GBP – rounded to the nearest pound) per country (Financial Quarter – FQ1 2014/15-FQ2 2023/24)	22
Figure 4. Summary of the evaluation approach, methods and data sources	23
Figure 5. Approach to operationalising VfM	28
Figure 6. Data Science module methodology	29
Figure 7. Publications associated with recipient countries	36
Figure 8. Publication metrics for recipient countries including Normalised Citation Impact (NCI) and percentage of Highly Cited Papers (HCP) (those in the top 1%)	37
Figure 9. Publication co-author collaboration between institutions in India	39
Figure 10. Collaboration outcomes	49
Figure 11. Publications with authors from collaborating countries	59

Tables

Table 1. Summary of enabling and constraining factors	11
Table 2. EQs	17
Table 3. Evidence base across the modules	24
Table 4. EQs	31
Table 5. Strength of evidence rubric	33
Table 6. Summary of enabling and constraining factors	72

Boxes

Box 1. Impact definition _____	19
Box 2. Examples of career progression _____	38
Box 3. A centre for interdisciplinary research _____	40
Box 4. Interdisciplinary approaches _____	41
Box 5. Examples of policy change _____	45
Box 6. Commercialisation potential _____	48
Box 7. UK–India biorefinery platform _____	48
Box 8. Importance of pre-existing partnerships _____	55
Box 9. Example of South–South cooperation across Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines	58

List of acronyms

AHRC	Arts and Humanities Research Council
AMR	Antimicrobial Resistance
AMS	Academy of Medical Sciences
BBSRC	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council
BEIS	Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BIRAC	Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council
COP27	2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference
Co-I	Co-Investigator
CRE	Carbapenem-Resistant Enterobacterales
DOI	Digital Object Identifier
DSIT	Department of Science, Innovation and Technology
DST	(Indian) Department of Science and Technology
ECR	Early Career Researcher
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
FAPESP	São Paulo Research Foundation
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
FQ	Financial Quarter
GBP	Great British Pounds
GCRF	Global Challenges Research Fund

GRI	Global Research and Innovation
GtR	Gateway to Research
HCP	Highly Cited Papers
HMG	His Majesty's Government
ICAI	Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IP	Intellectual Property
ISPF	International Science Partnerships Fund
KII	Key Informant Interview
KT	Knowledge Translation
MICs	Middle-Income Countries
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MRC	Medical Research Council
NCI	Normalised Citation Impact
NERC	Natural Environment Research Council
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee
PPB	Parts per Billion
PI	Principal Investigator
PO	Partner Organisation
R&I	Research and Innovation
RAEng	Royal Academy of Engineering
RODA	Reporting Overseas Development Assistance
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

STFC	Science and Technology Facilities Council
TEAG	Technical Expert Advisory Group
ToC	Theory of Change
TRC	Translation Research Collaboration
TÜBİTAK	Science and Technological Research Council of Türkiye
UK	United Kingdom
UKRI	United Kingdom Research & Innovation
US	United States of America
VfM	Value for Money

Executive summary

The Newton Fund supported partnered research between UK researchers/institutions and counterparts in 16 middle-income countries. It spent GBP 641,667,065¹ from financial quarter (FQ) 1 2014/15 to FQ2 2023/24. The Fund, administered through the UK government's Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) (at that time, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy – BEIS), was delivered by 15 UK research funding agencies². It covered a wide range of research topics and focused on priority research needs of the middle-income countries (MICs) that participated. It was defined by three pillars which underpin development research: people (strengthening research capacity in researchers and their institutions); research (understanding development challenges and exploring solutions); and translation (translating research into useful products for policy and commercial use).

This final evaluation aims to assess whether (and how) its intended long-term outcomes and impacts have been achieved. It focuses on three core objectives: (1) evidencing the Fund's longer-term results to support accountability; (2) assessing value for money (VfM) to inform both accountability and learning; and (3) generating insights to guide the design and delivery of future research and innovation (R&I) funds, particularly those with official development assistance (ODA) funding. This study builds on the four phases of external evaluation conducted between 2015 and 2020, and addresses gaps in the evidence base by extending the time frame to cover years seven to ten of the Fund's Theory of Change (ToC). With the Fund's final granting year in 2021, this evaluation provides a timely opportunity to synthesise a decade of learning.

The evaluation was designed around six evaluation questions (EQs), reframed from the original specification to better reflect the Fund's long-term ambitions. These cover: the outcomes achieved (EQ1); progress towards intended impacts (EQ2); contributions to R&I systems in the UK and partner countries (EQ3); enabling and constraining factors (EQ4); VfM and its evolution (EQ5); and key learning (EQ6). Each question is addressed through dedicated evaluation modules, with detailed sub-questions mapped against the ToC.

The evaluation is theory-based, equity-focused, and designed for utilisation. It draws on the Newton Fund's ToC to guide design, data collection and analysis, and to support cross-module synthesis. It is based on a sample of projects purposively drawn to reflect the diversity across partner organisations (POs), research domains and geographies.

¹ This figure is rounded to the nearest pound when adding the spend per country. See Figure 3 for a breakdown of spend per country.

² Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS), Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), British Academy, British Council, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Innovate UK, Medical Research Council (MRC), The Met Office, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng), Royal Society, Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), and UK Research & Innovation (UKRI).

Key findings

The findings are structured around the two main areas that address the mandate of this evaluation – long-term outcomes and impacts, and strategic and operational findings.

Long-term outcomes and impacts

Research capacity strengthening stands out as a significant achievement of the Newton Fund, particularly with regard to support to early career researchers (ECRs). In parallel, support to the institutional management of research was an important contribution, as were efforts to strengthen the research ecosystem, through both active participation of government agencies and the development of networks within and across MICs supported by the Fund. These were foundational to furthering policy and practice as well as commercialisation contributions of Newton-funded research.

Policy and practice influence has been limited to this point however the Fund has been effective in laying the foundation for policy influence by improving the enabling conditions. Overall, the Fund strengthened capacity for policy engagement but fell short of delivering systemic influence. Future programmes will need longer funding horizons, dedicated resources for translation, and institutional mechanisms to sustain engagement. The successes that have been identified through our sample have tended to be among research partnerships with pre-existing relationships who were building on earlier research. It is unclear if the Fund is on track to achieve its objectives, given the limited relationships established with relevant policy and practice decision makers and communities.

Commercialisation outcomes and impacts have been limited. As with policy and practice influence, short time frames and the limited resources dedicated to research translation have inhibited success. Proof-of-concept has been achieved in a number of research partnerships, but links to the communities who can bring innovations to market were not a priority in the short project cycles (24-36 months). It is unclear if those that achieved proof-of-concept are on track to deliver commercially viable products based on their innovations.

Strategic and operational findings

Matched funding was found to be valuable in increasing ownership of the research agenda by institutions in partner countries and in the UK. Matched funding also supported equity in participation in the implementation of awards, where it could be achieved. Matched funding was more likely in higher middle-income countries, whereas matched effort was more likely in lower middle-income countries.

Government-to-government collaboration was an important contributor to ensuring the relevance of the research and to ensuring access to relevant agencies and data.

Partnership management did not always demonstrate equity in decision making in design, implementation and oversight of R&I awards. Imbalances and lack of transparency in management processes sometimes weakened the participation of the MIC research partners. Partnership management tended to be stronger where there was matched funding. Partnership achievements tended to be stronger where there were pre-existing relationships among members of the research teams.

The VfM assessment of the fund, based on the data available, showed the Newton Fund to deliver good VfM.

Enablers and constraints to success were identified across the evaluation modules and are listed in Table 1. These factors operated at individual, institutional and national ecosystem levels, and their influence varied across contexts. The factors are explained in detail in the section titled Enabling and constraining factors in Newton Fund success.

Table 1. Summary of enabling and constraining factors

Enabling factors	Constraining factors
Fund-level context	
Capacity strengthening set the foundation for policy and innovation impact	Short project duration limited depth and sustainability
Alignment with national priorities increased traction with government stakeholders	Asymmetries in administrative resource between UK POs and partner country institutions undermined equity
Government-to-government collaboration unlocked systems access	Lack (or limited) account of contextual variation, limited ability to tailor support and respond to local needs
Interdisciplinary approaches addressed complex challenges	Lack of strategic planning limited the potential for success
Matched funding promoted ownership and equity in partner relationships and research implementation	Underinvestment in the translation pillar limited the potential to translate research into policy or commercial ventures
Formalised partnerships helped foster collaboration	Lack of follow-on funding stalled innovation
Partner context	
Institutional readiness and leadership commitment made impact more likely	Political and regulatory barriers delayed delivery
Pre-existing partnerships accelerated progress	
Shared interests and opportunities for exchange were important for successful partnerships	

Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions are presented against the two main areas of the report. They are followed by four recommendations which we see as important considerations in future funds that rely on the ODA envelope and are geared to strengthening research, especially equitable research partnerships.

Conclusions

Long-term outcomes and impacts

Strengthening national research ecosystems requires engagement at the researcher, research institution and research ecosystem levels.

Building capacities at all three levels of a research system is foundational to furthering development contributions (policy and practice as well as commercialisation) of Newton-funded research.

The Newton Fund is on track³ in contributing to stronger R&I systems through its system-wide approach to capacity strengthening.

Limited progress was made in contributing to policies and practices.

Inadequate support to build the connections and relationships with policy makers, limited resources applied to research translation, and structural challenges within the Fund mitigated against policy and practice influence. Where successes were identified, these tended to be among the research teams that had pre-existing relationships and were building on existing research efforts.

It is unclear if the Fund is on track to achieve the intended policy and practice impacts.

As with efforts to influence policy and practice, limited progress has been made in commercialisation.

The reasons stated above for the limits to policy and practice influence also largely apply in this case. Without the active involvement of the investment and commercialisation actors who could realise the potential of innovations that achieved proof-of-concept, the likelihood of success and contributions to trade and foreign direct investment remains low.

It is unclear if the Fund is on track to achieve the intended commercialisation of innovations.

Strategic and operational considerations

The Newton Fund was a partnership fund which sought equitable partnerships between UK research institutions and middle-income country institutions. The design of the Fund

³ 'On track' refers to the 15-year mark at which the Newton Fund ToC proposes that long-term outcomes and impacts should be achieved.

had features that supported its successes and features that limited its potential. In terms of strategic and operational considerations that strengthened the awards:

- matched funding enhanced ownership by all parties, leading to more equitable partnerships
- government-to-government collaboration ensured relevance and eased access to data and government agencies
- capacity strengthening across the research system played an important role in setting the foundations for policy and practice influence, and the potential for commercialisation
- interdisciplinary approaches promoted by the Fund supported the ability of the awards to focus on complex development challenges.

These design features of the Fund were especially important where there was partner readiness and leadership commitment, where there were clear shared interests and goals, where partnerships were formalised, and in pre-existing partnerships where policy and practice influence or commercialisation was the goal.

Some structural features of the Fund made success more challenging:

- short time frames and underinvestment in the translation pillar limited progress
- contextual variation across countries, including regulatory and administrative barriers, was not adequately considered in the design of the Fund
- asymmetries in administrative resources between UK POs and partner country institutions were not sufficiently considered in the design of the Fund.

Finally, a lack of strategic planning and the absence of a VfM framework at the launch of the Fund (later rectified for VfM) limited the potential for adequate data gathering and for monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Recommendations

We focus on four key recommendations that emerged from the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. Because the Newton Fund is closed, these recommendations are targeted at future ODA R&I funds.

Support stronger research ecosystems

Strengthening research ecosystems means working at all three levels of a research system – individual, institutional, and national ecosystem.

Funder

Continue to explicitly include support for capacity strengthening at all three levels of a research ecosystem that especially values the contributions of early career researchers and the strengthening of institutions and networks.

Partner organisation

Collaborate in design with MIC partners on an approach to capacity strengthening that accommodates the needs of the country and is informed by an assessment of the institution's leadership, research systems and ways of working. Expectations and indicators of success should match the capacities and priorities of the country.

Prioritise knowledge translation

The absence of a deliberate strategy and resources applied to knowledge translation, whether of policy influence, practice influence or commercialisation, meant limited focus on an aspect of the Newton Fund that is central to its goals of contributing to economic and social development.

Funder

Make knowledge translation an explicit requirement in the design of a fund. Provide support to POs for its development. Ensure that an exit plan or sustainability strategy is in place before the end of an award, to enhance the potential for follow-up.

Partner organisation

In collaboration with the MIC partner, develop a clear and resourced knowledge translation plan, and monitor and adapt it as needed over the life of the award.

Consider multiple delivery modalities

The Newton Fund was developed largely as a one-size-fits-all fund (with some exceptions, such as the Newton Prize).⁴ Adaptations were made by POs and their MIC partners, but the overall design placed common structures and goals on all awards. A more flexible approach that meets different needs in countries does not mean a less rigorous approach but rather a more rigorous approach, with careful monitoring and evaluation of progress.

Funder

Consider a portfolio approach in a fund strategy that accommodates different priorities and partnership experience. Monitor progress to ensure the goals are being met.

Partner organisation

Together with POs, assess the priorities that can be addressed in awards or award programmes to build an appropriate portfolio.

Improve data and knowledge management

The gaps we note throughout have limited DSIT, POs⁵ and partner countries in their management of the Fund resources, and they limit what we can say about the outcomes

⁴ The Newton Prize was not included in the evaluation sample.

⁵ Some POs had more data available than others, but the gaps remain at all levels.

and impacts of the Fund. In terms of both management of public resources and ODA compliance, it is crucial to continue to improve data management and use.

Funder

Prioritise a strategy and a monitoring and evaluation plan from the start. Monitor progress on an ongoing basis. Anticipate new funding programmes with skeleton data frameworks and guidance. Ensure ODA requirements are integrated into any strategy for an ODA-supported fund.

Explicitly aim to reduce the structural barriers and asymmetries of partnerships by supporting institutions with the processes, systems and resources to deliver the research partnership effectively.

Partner organisation

Research funded through ODA is focused on supporting development improvements. As such, it has different reporting requirements and expectations from research funding through programmes for foundational research. This should be taken into account in programme design and management, and it may require new data and knowledge management systems.

Introduction

This report on the impact evaluation of the Newton Fund was commissioned by the UK government's Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) at the 10-year mark since the Fund was established. The objective is to understand the progress Fund-supported research has made towards the expected impacts over a 15-year period, as seen in the Newton Fund Theory of Change (ToC) in Figure 1. The Newton Fund supported research in 17 countries⁶ from 2014 to 2021. Funding was disbursed to and spent by 15 academies and research councils⁷ for partnered research.

The evaluation aims to assess whether (and how) its intended long-term outcomes and impacts have been achieved. It focuses on three core objectives: (1) evidencing the Fund's longer-term results to support accountability to the donor; (2) assessing value for money (VfM) to inform both accountability and learning; and (3) generating insights to guide the design and delivery of future research and innovation (R&I) funds, particularly those with official development assistance (ODA) funding.

This study builds on the four phases of external evaluation conducted between 2015 and 2020, and addresses gaps in the evidence base by extending the time frame to cover years 7–10 of the Fund's ToC. The Fund's final granting year was 2021. This evaluation, running from May 2024 to November 2025, provides a timely opportunity to synthesise a decade of learning. Evidence is synthesised from across four modules of the evaluation: Outcomes, Impacts, VfM, and Data Science. Each module makes a unique contribution to the overall assessment, and the findings are based on the triangulation of this evidence. This is signalled through the strength of evidence assessments (see Table 5). The evaluation aims to answer the evaluation questions (EQs) (see Table 2).

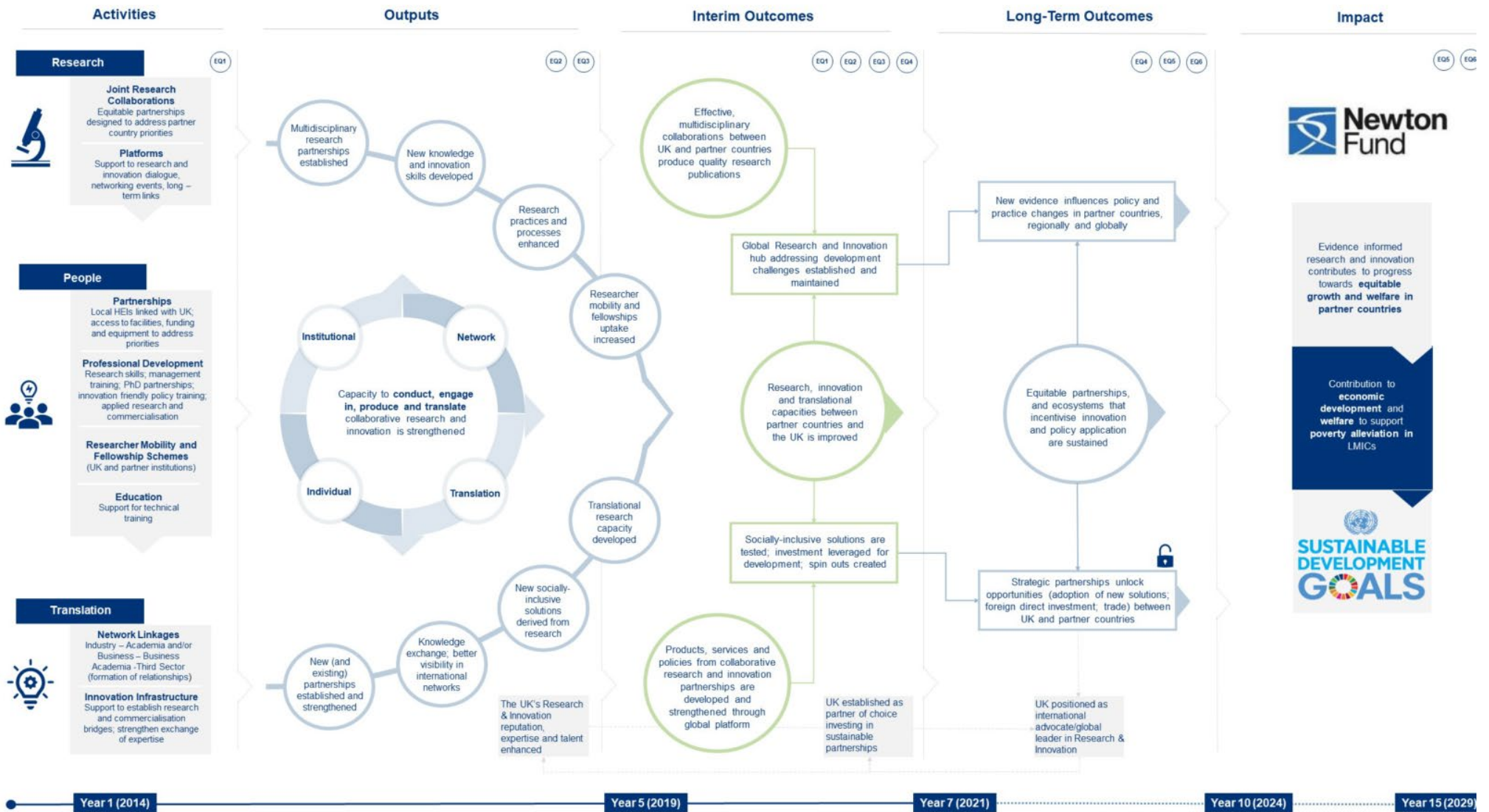
⁶ Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Kenya, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey, and Vietnam. Kazakhstan was intended to be the 18th country in the Fund (and approximately £3m was invested in early partnership development), but arrangements could not be finalised between the UK and the government of Kazakhstan. Not all Newton Fund partner countries remain ODA-eligible today, as ODA classifications and policies evolve over time. Chile left the Fund when it achieved high-income country status.

⁷ Academy of Medical Sciences (AMS), Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC), Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), British Academy, British Council, Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC), Innovate UK, Medical Research Council (MRC), The Met Office, Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), Royal Academy of Engineering (RAEng), Royal Society, Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC), and UK Research & Innovation (UKRI).

Table 2. EQs

No.	Question
EQ1	What long-term outcomes (intended and unintended) has the Newton Fund contributed to?
EQ2	How far is the Newton Fund on track and likely to contribute to the intended impacts, as set out in the ToC?
EQ3	How far has the Newton Fund contributed to R&I systems in the UK and partner countries?
EQ4	What factors have supported or hindered the Newton Fund from contributing to long-term outcomes and impacts?
EQ5	Has the Newton Fund demonstrated VfM? Has this changed over time?
EQ6	What are the key learning points from the Newton Fund?

Figure 1. Newton Fund ToC



The report is structured as follows:

- The remainder of this section provides an overview of the Fund and defines how ‘impact’ is understood.
- The *methodology* section summarises the methodology and its limitations. Methods are briefly outlined in this main report and are detailed in the annexes.
- In the next section, the *findings* of the evaluation are set out, structured around two key components:
 - achievement of the Fund objectives (addressing EQ1 and EQ2)
 - strategic and operational considerations required to achieve these (addressing EQs 3–5).
- The final section captures the key learnings from the evaluation (EQ6) and draws together the final *conclusions and recommendations* that could inform future ODA research funds.

Defining impact in this context

The Newton Fund ToC proposes impact being visible at the 15-year mark (see Figure 1). As defined in Box 1, impact may be seen in many ways. Enhanced capacity of individuals and institutions, innovative products with potential for scale, and changing policies and practices all contribute to the potential for impact over time. Without those changes in behaviour, practice and knowledge, sustainable change is less likely to occur. Some negative effects of change may also result from an intervention, and these are presented where appropriate.

Box 1. Impact definition

Impact identifies the long-term effects resulting from an intervention.

They may be positive or negative effects, and they may be intended or unintended.

Impact seeks to identify the sociotechnical, environmental and economic effects of an intervention that suggest long-term effects (or sustainability) of the outcomes of an intervention. Impact is both context-dependent and audience-dependent.

Adapted from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development - Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) definition.⁸

⁸ OECD (n.d.) ‘Evaluation Criteria’. <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/development-co-operation-evaluation-and-effectiveness/evaluation-criteria.html>

After 10 years, a focus of this evaluation is therefore on whether the conditions are in place that suggest an impact at 15 years is likely. We explore this by documenting the outcomes that have already been identified that are consistent with the Newton Fund's ToC and whether they suggest plausible progress towards impact.⁹

Newton Fund: objectives and scope

The Newton Fund represents a significant UK government investment in R&I.¹⁰ When it launched in 2014, UK government policy sought to invest in R&I as part of its wider ODA, with the objective of using the UK's R&I strengths to help achieve economic and social gains for partner countries while building the UK's international reputation as partner of choice for R&I.¹¹

As set out in the Newton Fund Operational Framework:

“The primary objective of the Newton Fund is the economic, sustainable and social development of partner countries which is achieved through a bilateral partnership that centres research and innovation collaboration around that country's development needs and aims to strengthen their research and innovation capacity. Alongside this, the programmes we fund through the Newton Fund contribute to the continued strength of the UK's research and innovation system and support the UK's wider prosperity and global influence.”¹²

The Newton partner organisations (POs) designed and implemented programmes working within three pillars – people, research, and translation. An overview of the pillars and the Fund's delivery architecture is set out in Figure 2.

⁹ An assessment of whether progress was plausible was based on whether there was clear change in a positive direction from the starting point and whether the evidence of progress was logically consistent.

¹⁰ GBP 641,667,065 was invested between 2014 and 2023.

¹¹ Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (2019) Newton Fund: building science and innovation capacity in partner countries. Policy paper.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/newton-fund-building-science-and-innovation-capacity-in-developing-countries/newton-fund-building-science-and-innovation-capacity-in-developing-countries>. BEIS

(2020) The Newton Fund: Operational Framework.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165497/newton-fund-operational-framework.pdf

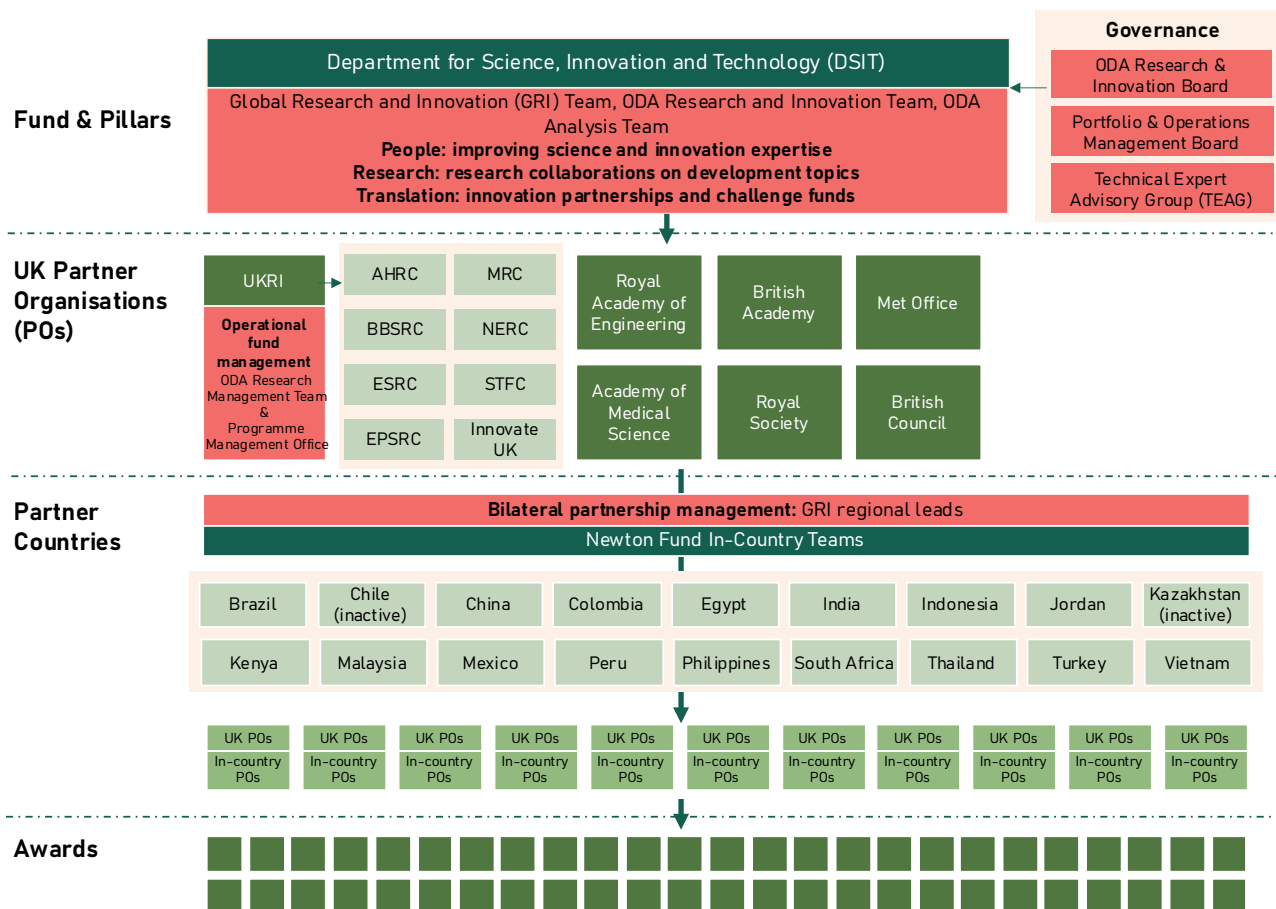
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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81adae40f0b623026989a0/ODA_strategy_final_web_0905.pdf

¹² BEIS (2020) The Newton Fund: Operational Framework.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165497/newton-fund-operational-framework.pdf, p.6.

Figure 2. The Fund’s delivery architecture



The total actual spend on research by the Newton Fund was GBP 641,667,065¹³. This includes GBP 38,971,318 allocated to research, but where the country is not specified (see Figure 3¹⁴). In addition, GBP 10,280,218 was awarded to BEIS Finance for a total spend of GBP 651,947,281.

The Fund primarily worked across 16¹⁵ middle-income countries (MICs), with largest spend being for the benefit of China, Brazil and India (collectively GBP 321.1 million). Spend per country on Figure 3 denotes funds spent in relation to work in that country with some funds spent in the UK.¹⁶ Jordan and Kenya had the smallest Fund portfolios – each under GBP 5 million over the life of the Fund. According to our data collection, as of June–

¹³ This figure is rounded to the nearest pound when adding the spend per country. See Figure 3 for a breakdown of spend per country.

¹⁴ Spend per country in Figure 3 are rounded up/down to the nearest pound.

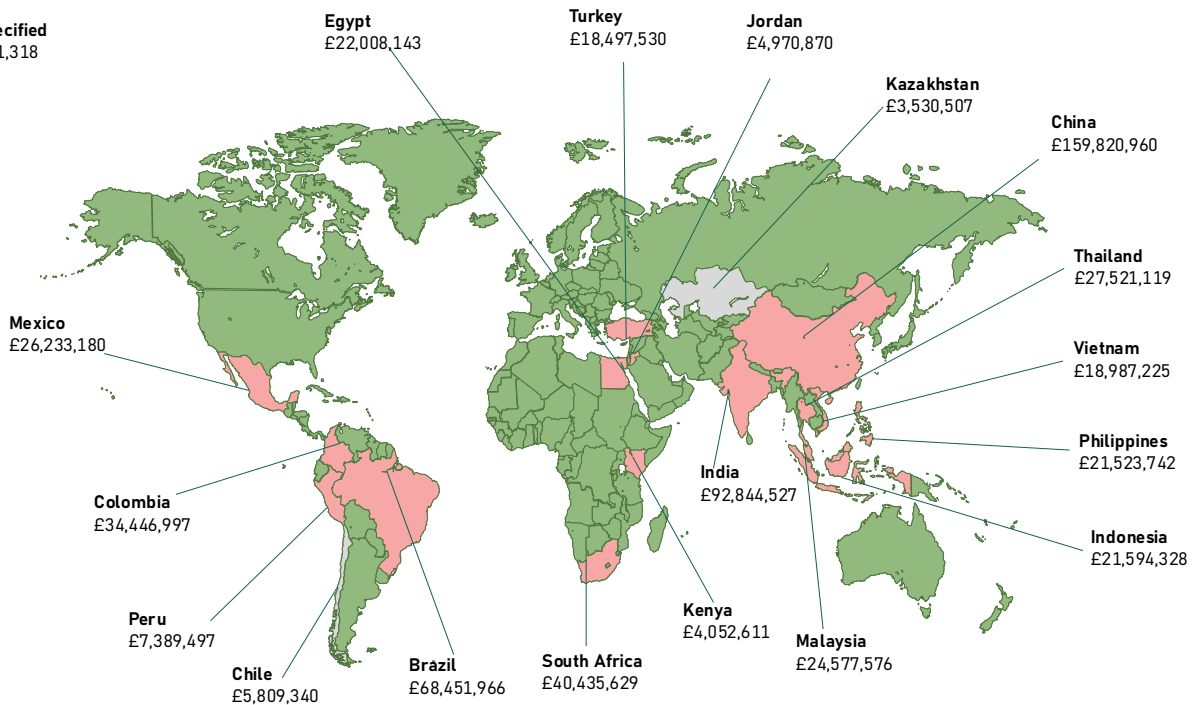
¹⁵ As noted previously, the 18 original countries were reduced to 16 because of the non-engagement with Kazakhstan and the change in status for Chile to a high-income country, making it ineligible for continued participation in the Fund. Partner country eligibility is based on ODA rules applicable at the time of funding. Several countries have since changed status and are no longer classified as ODA-eligible.

¹⁶ This map was drawn together using the RODA data collected via our Data Science module. The data was extracted June-August 2023 and is for the time frame FQ1 2014/15 to FQ2 2023/24. Based on this, the total spend allocated to specific countries is £602,695,745.70 (note the figures on the map are rounded). The total including awards where the recipient country is not known (Not specified) is £641,667,063.80.

August 2024, 19,254 publications acknowledged support from the Fund; further publications may have appeared since.

The Fund was built on UK–MIC bilateral partnerships. It required matched funding from partner countries and was designed to focus on priorities identified by the middle-income partner countries. As will be discussed later in the report, the matched funding requirement was later revised to matched effort, to recognise resourcing challenges in some countries.

Figure 3. Map denoting spend (GBP – rounded to the nearest pound) per country (Financial Quarter – FQ1 2014/15-FQ2 2023/24)



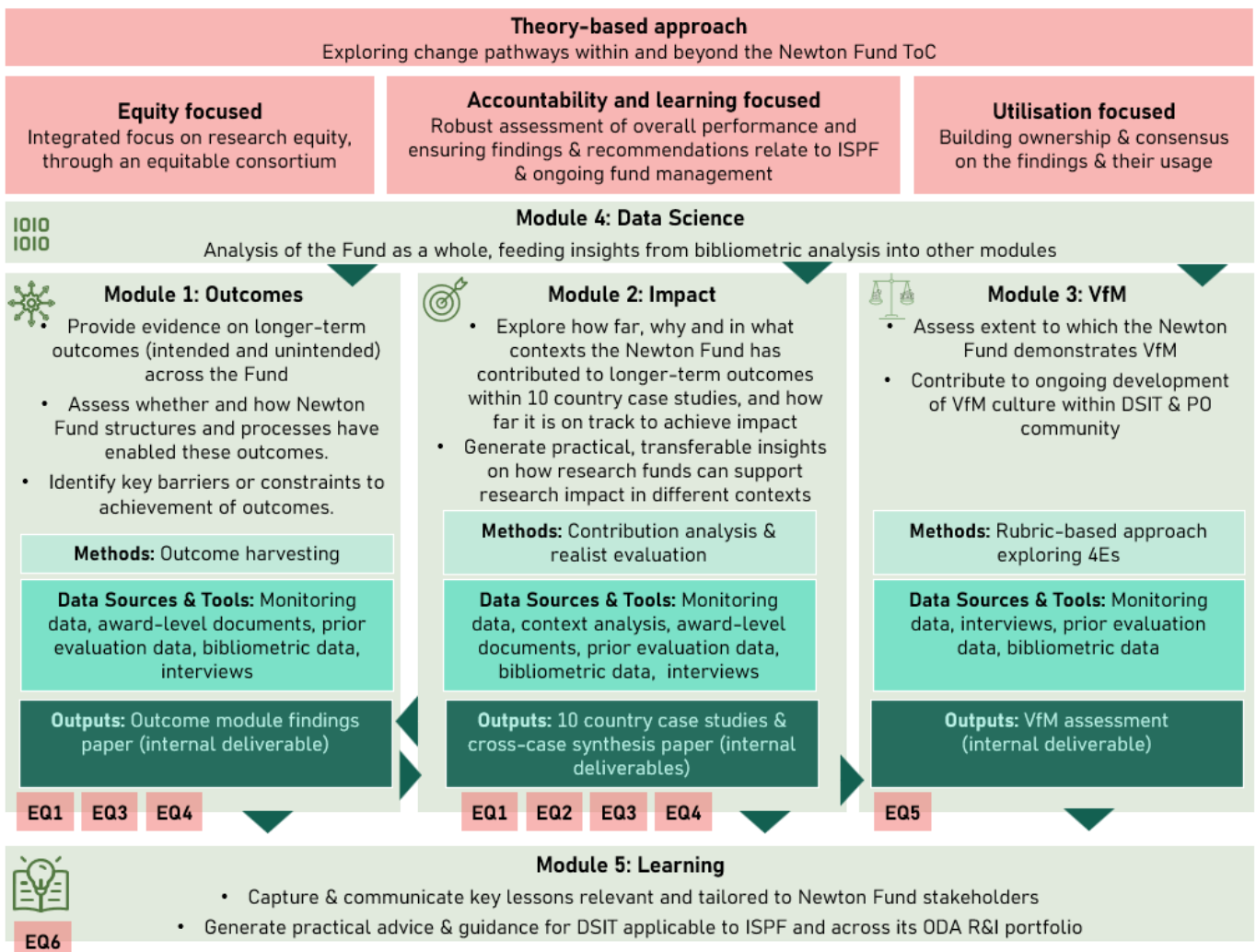
As reported in earlier evaluations and in the assessment of the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI), the limited strategic planning in the Fund resulted in limited success in unlocking opportunities. No documentation exists of a clear strategy for the Fund or any data collection requirements. An interview with a senior official who was part of the launch of the Fund noted that the strategic intent of the Fund was to use research support as a tool for strengthening the UK partnerships with MICs. As we will discuss in the Findings section of this report, the appreciation for the Fund in many countries and the new partnerships built speak to success on this dimension of the Fund but have not yet extended to enhanced economic relationships. This was confirmed in the VfM assessment, which also noted the lack of a clear strategy and absence of sustainability or exit plans.

Methodology

The approach

The overarching approach to the evaluation is theory-based, equity-focused, and designed for use in policy, practice or commercial innovation. It draws on the Newton Fund’s ToC to guide design, data collection and analysis, and to support cross-module synthesis. By interrogating change pathways, the evaluation has aimed to generate credible, actionable insights into how and why impact has occurred. Equity, as a priority in ODA,¹⁷ is embedded throughout; this includes examining the Fund’s partnership model (EQ4), equity within R&I systems (EQ3), and equity as a dimension of VfM (EQ5).

Figure 4. Summary of the evaluation approach, methods and data sources



¹⁷ ‘Equity’ refers to fairness and justice in a relationship or set of decisions or actions. It implies differential participation and contributions, based on the needs, resources and capacities of each partner, that lead to a fair role and participation in the decision making and actions of the partnership. It implies taking account of different starting points to ensure that all parties have a voice in the decisions and actions of all involved.

The evaluation has been delivered through five interrelated modules, designed to generate both breadth and depth of insight across the Newton Fund. Table 3 illustrates the data sources for each module. This report includes summaries of the methodologies used for each module. The full details can be found in the Annexes.

Table 3. Evidence base across the modules

<p>Module 1: Outcomes (see Annex 1: Outcomes Module)</p> <p>The Outcomes module combined data science and outcome harvesting to build a Fund-wide picture of longer-term outcomes (both intended and unintended), supported by deep dives into 38 awards across 16 partner countries¹⁸.</p> <p>The Outcomes module invited 112 interviewees across 38 awards. In all, 41 interviews were conducted.¹⁹ The module further analysed an additional 23 interviews from the Impact module for 38/50 awards.</p> <p>The evidence base drew on a mix of grant management systems, internal records and formal programme documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grant and outcome reporting systems – Researchfish and Gateway to Research (GtR) (primarily UK Research Council-funded awards), plus Reporting Overseas Development Assistance (RODA). - Stakeholder submissions – additional relevant awards were submitted by Programme Officers if they held evidence that an outcome had been achieved (to supplement Researchfish/GtR coverage). - Structured document review of Newton Fund materials – key programme documents were reviewed to identify potential outcomes, including evaluation reports (from baseline through to final); annual reports – Newton/Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and BEIS; ICAI Performance Review; and selected academic papers relevant to Newton Fund activities and outcomes.
<p>Module 2: Impact (See Annex 2: Impact Module)</p> <p>The Impact module explored progress towards impact through case studies covering 52 awards in 10 countries, using contribution analysis with realist evaluation to understand how and why change occurs. The module drew on a robust evidence base comprising qualitative interviews and document review. It was informed by 130 key informant interviews (KIIs), including 92 interviews with principal investigators (PIs) and co-investigators (Co-Is), 18 with early career researchers (ECRs), 15 with project partners and five with national stakeholders, including representatives from ministries and research councils.</p> <p>For the country context analyses across the 10 countries, 1,055 peer-reviewed and grey literature sources were reviewed, including national strategies, policy documents, sector</p>

¹⁸ Kazakhstan was intended to be the 18th country in the Fund (and approximately £3m was invested in early partnership development), but arrangements could not be finalised between the UK and the government of Kazakhstan. Not all Newton Fund partner countries remain ODA-eligible today, as ODA classifications and policies evolve over time. Chile left the Fund when it achieved high-income country status.

¹⁹ A significant number of interviewees (71) declined to participate, either because they had moved agencies or felt they did not recall enough about the research to comment.

reports, government publications, donor reports and programme evaluations. In addition, for the award-level analyses, 107 project-level documents were analysed, including project proposals and applications, cases for support, pathways to impact and final reports.
Module 3: Value for Money (See Annex 3: Value for Money)
<p>The VfM module applied the approach used by DSIT, a rubric-based approach to assess VfM. The VfM module used existing evaluation data from the Outcomes, Data Science and Impact modules, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 50 award-level assessments. - Data Science summary (used client-facing deck output) including evidence on financial data, timelines and outcomes (e.g. publications, spinouts, intellectual property – IP) for the award-level VfM assessments, and evidence from the summative analysis, to provide insights on Fund-level trends. - Outcomes summary output (Outcome Harvesting narratives only). - Impact summary output (internal document). - Programme documentation – Fund-level ToC, project proposals, financial reporting, interim and final & evaluative reporting. <p>Additionally, VfM-specific questions were included in 14 high-level KIIs from 50 awards.</p>
Module 4: Data Science (See Annex 4: Whole Fund Analysis)
<p>The Data Science module provided cross-cutting analysis of Fund-level data and publications, supporting Modules 1–3 with insights to identify outcomes and substantiate findings. The Data Science module drew from the following sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awards: RODA data. - Publication links: Researchfish, Web of Science, OpenAlex, DSIT. - Policy documents: Overton.
Module 5: Learning
A fifth learning module synthesised insights and supported ongoing learning with DSIT and stakeholders through tailored learning products.

In addition, high-level interviews were conducted at the Fund level with those who had been in senior leadership positions

The high-level nature of the Newton Fund's ToC limits its utility in tracking progress and assessing change. Therefore, rather than revising the ToC, this evaluation has developed more detailed pathways for the key components of the Fund. The three impact pathways are summarised in the cross-case synthesis (Annex 2) and cover:

- strengthening national R&I ecosystems²⁰

²⁰ A national research ecosystem is comprised of researchers (publicly or privately funded), research institutions and laboratories (public and private), research funding agencies, governmental research agencies and agendas, the policies and culture that drive research, and networks with other national research ecosystems carrying out like-minded research.

- research-driven policy and systems change
- inclusive innovation and economic growth.

Following is a summary of the methodology used in each of the first four modules.

Outcomes module approach

The Outcomes module uses an outcome harvesting approach, based on gathering evidence of where outcomes have been realised rather than predefining where we expect (or would like) them to be. This approach is well suited to an *ex-post* evaluation, because it starts with the achievements and works backwards.

The final list of 30 outcomes was narrowed down from a longlist of 181 outcomes (based on the document review and consultations with DSIT). The sample of awards was based on positive deviance,²¹ selecting projects where there was evidence of an outcome being achieved. This enables the analysis to explore the mechanisms that contributed to the achievement of the outcome.

In total, 50 awards were included in the outcome sample, with narratives developed for 35 awards (we were unable to secure interviews with 15 awards). The evidence of outcomes for each award is based on a triangulation of documented evidence and interviews.

In summary, the evidence from the Outcomes module is the result of a multi-stage selection process conducted in collaboration with DSIT. The sample has been narrowed down (based on selection criteria) to focus on where there is evidence of significant outcomes. Therefore, the sample is positively biased towards demonstrating results. As a result, whilst the findings are robust enough to draw conclusions, there may be some variability in the strength of these findings. We would therefore expect to see high coverage from this selection methodology which is based on the intended outcomes across Newton Fund award proposal documents. These judgements are transparently set out in Annex 1: Outcomes module.

Impact module approach

The Impact module takes a case study approach, drawing on evidence from our sample of 10 partner countries. To provide focus, and for each country, the evaluation focuses on a single sector in which the Newton Fund has made substantial investments, such as environment, medical research or research capacity strengthening. This allows in-depth analysis of impact pathways within the specific context of the R&I ecosystem.

Within each country, a small sample of awards (typically between three and seven) has been purposively selected, in consultation with DSIT, to reflect the diversity of research areas and countries in which the Fund engaged. The goal was to enable a detailed exploration of pathways to change – drawing together evidence from data science,

²¹ Positive deviance is an evaluation methodology that identifies good outcomes, particularly in settings where failure is common, and from there uncovers what led to these outcomes. See Positive Deviance Collaborative (n.d.) 'What is Positive Deviance?' <https://positivedeviance.org>.

documents and stakeholder interviews. In total, 52 awards were included in the sample. Award-level findings were then aggregated and interpreted at the country level, with the impact pathways providing the analytical foundation (mid-range theory) for the case study research and a means of testing the extent to which observed change aligned with the Fund's intended pathways.

Generalisation is based on theoretical transferability rather than statistical representativeness, which is a credible approach in realist evaluation. To ensure transparency and consistency across the 10 countries and 50 awards, we applied structured rubrics to assess the strength of evidence and the Newton Fund's contribution to outcomes at each stage of analysis. The result is a composite judgement (e.g. "important contributor with sufficient confidence") that balanced the contribution of the Fund with the strength of the underlying data. These judgements are set out in Annex 2: Impact module.

Value for Money

Using the VfM approach adopted by DSIT, the purpose of the VfM assessment in this evaluation was to provide a summative view of the Newton Fund. We aimed to add to the existing evidence base by assessing awards included in the evaluation's Outcomes module.

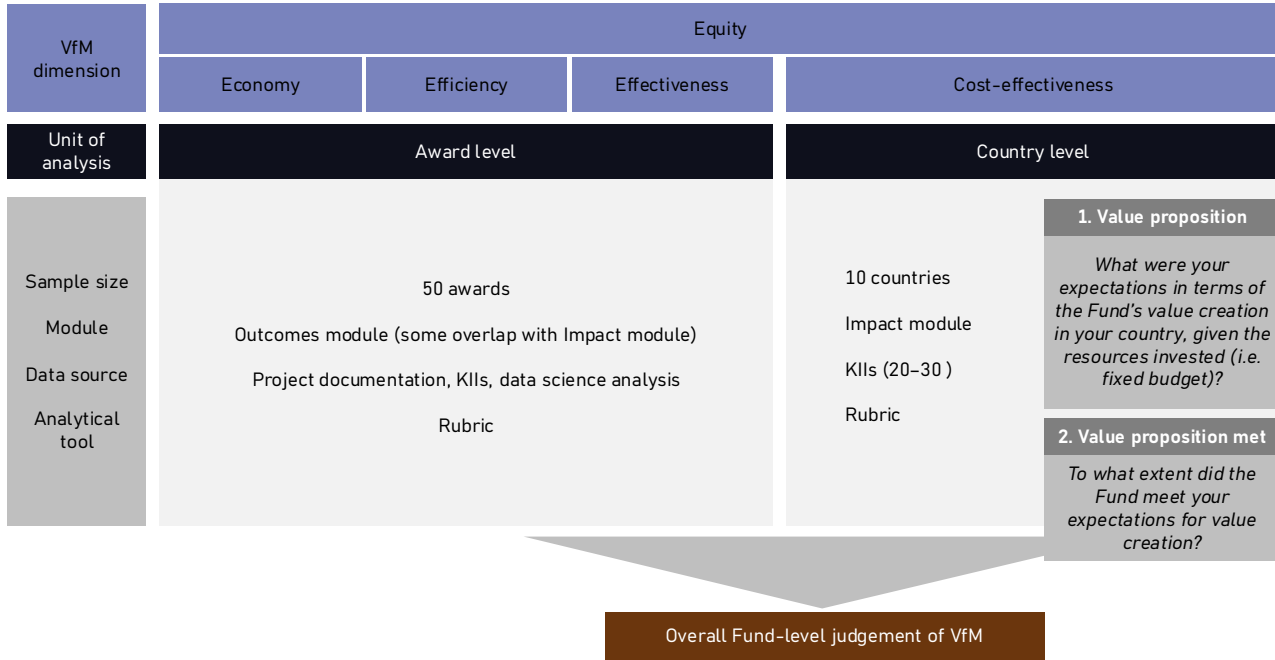
The VfM assessment was implemented through a two-pronged approach at the award and country levels, and it drew from evidence from the Impact and Outcomes modules:

- Award-level: We used a rubric²² to assess a sample of 50 awards from the Outcomes and Impact modules against the 4Es (economy, efficiency and effectiveness, with equity cross-cutting), and each award was assessed along 12 criteria ('sub-dimensions'), each of which is rated along defined standards of performance (i.e. poor, adequate, good, excellent).
- Country-level: Where possible, we incorporated country-level evidence to supplement analysis for cost-effectiveness. This was assessed by a stakeholder value assessment in the 10 Newton Fund countries that were reviewed as part of the Impact module. Stakeholders were asked about (1) what their expectations were in relation to the value creation with the given resources, and (2) the extent to which these expectations were met. The Fund's activities in the given country will exhibit cost-effectiveness if they are found to have created enough value to justify the resources invested.

Where possible, we incorporated country-level evidence to supplement analysis at the award level for cost-effectiveness. The precise means of undertaking these analyses is further elaborated on below. A visual summarising this approach to VfM is shown in Figure 5.

²² A rubric is a standard evaluation approach to defining what different levels of quality ('poor', 'excellent', etc.) mean in the context under study.

Figure 5. Approach to operationalising VfM



Data Science module

The Data Science module had two streams of activity. First, it provided data on publications related to the samples of each module that is integrated into the analysis and reporting of each module. Second, it presents a fund-wide analysis of the Newton Fund publications data. The unique contribution of this component of the module is its coverage across the full scope of the Fund, including all partner countries and areas of support. The Fund-wide analysis was carried out through a review of the data science indicators collected from the awards. Where possible, results were aggregated using POs, recipient country,²³ Newton Fund pillar, policy marker, sector, and years (start and end dates).²⁴ Publications data was also provided to each of the Outcomes, Impact and VfM modules in relation to their samples.

Data from several sources was extracted in June–August 2024 and was combined for this analysis, as depicted in Figure 6. RODA data about Newton Fund awards is linked to Researchfish outcomes based on the PO identifier field listed in RODA. RODA awards are also linked to publications based on three sources:

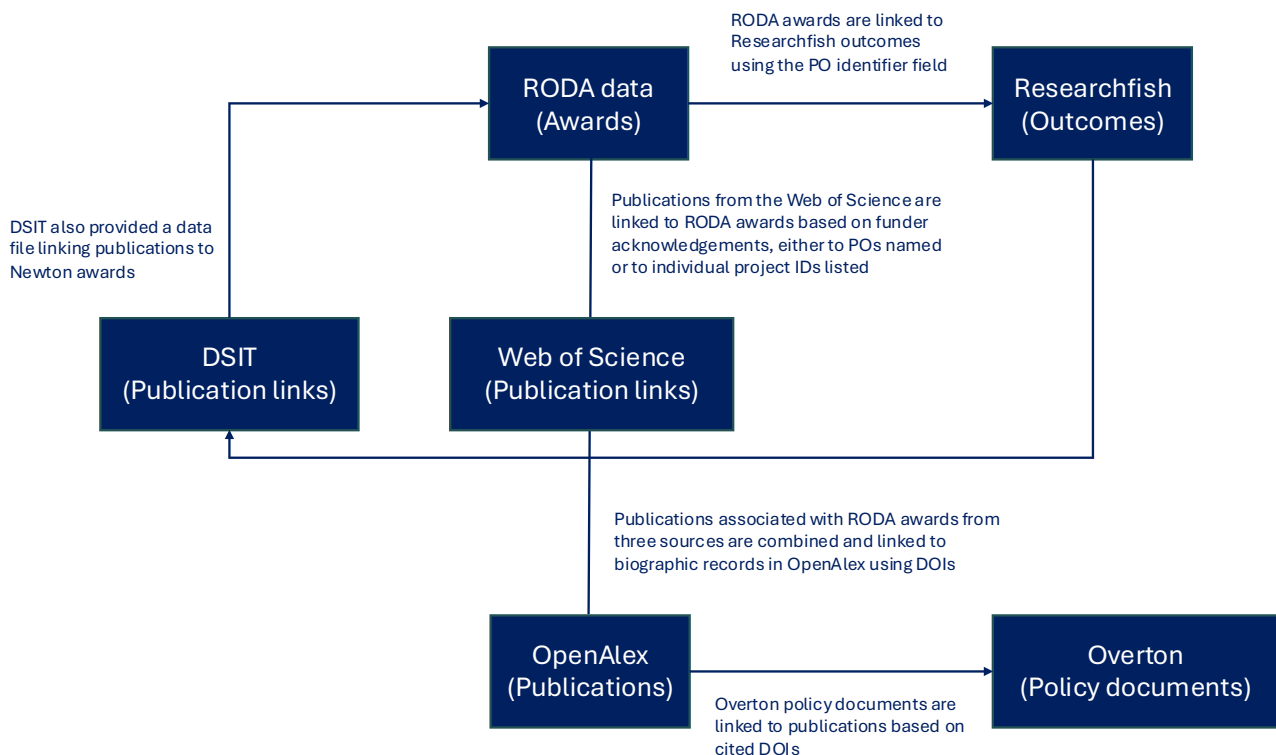
²³ For the purposes of analysis for this evaluation, “Recipient Country” was used in place of “Benefiting Country”. Where there was no value in the row, it was referred to as missing, or an assumption was made based on the available grant names and/or descriptions. Usually, where ‘Recipient Country’ was missing, the grants were administrative costs and were not related to a project. We note that now DSIT use ‘Benefiting Country’ to clarify where the grant is intended to have an effect, rather than focusing on the institution to which the grant funding is distributed.

²⁴ Analysis on start and end dates only included the data that existed in the dataset, as the analysis examined delays to grants distribution or commencement.

- DSIT – a file listing the publications associated with Newton Fund awards (n=17,344)
- Web of Science – based on the funder acknowledgements query (n=10,812)
- Researchfish – publication outcomes associated with Newton Fund awards (n=9,635).

Using digital object identifiers (DOIs), publications were linked with bibliographic records in OpenAlex. These were subsequently linked to Overton policy documents based on the publications they referenced. The results of these analyses were shared and discussed among the wider project team.

Figure 6. Data Science module methodology



The Fund-wide analysis was one of the few opportunities to show insights across the full set of POs, because POs outside UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) do not collect outcomes data via the Researchfish platform. Analyses where this was possible were publication metrics, investment (actual spend), innovation and commercialisation, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), further funding, national collaboration, institutional collaboration, topic modelling, and policy influence.

Limitations of the approach

The evaluation was conducted following the closure of the Fund, with the final granting year in 2021. As such, it faced several constraints that shaped both the scope and depth of available evidence. These limitations are detailed in each module annex (Annexes 1-4), and they are summarised here to support transparency and to contextualise the findings.

A core challenge was the limited availability of data. The Newton Fund was launched rapidly, without systems in place to support consistent monitoring across POs. Reporting varied significantly, with more complete data available from UK research councils than from other POs, whose systems did not require reporting in all areas relevant to this evaluation. Post-award follow-up was particularly constrained, because country offices established to deliver the Fund awards had been dismantled and staff redeployed following the end of the funding period, leaving no institutional mechanism for tracking longer-term outcomes, and no one in either the partner countries or the UK had been tasked with follow-up monitoring.

Data collection was hampered by difficulties in tracing and engaging stakeholders. Many researchers and delivery staff were no longer contactable or declined to participate. In some cases, interviews relied on recall of projects completed several years earlier, introducing potential bias. As a result, the Outcomes module was unable to reach its intended sample sizes.

Overall, the evaluation takes a theory-based approach, using the methods and sources as outlined for each module above to generate findings that are generalisable across the Fund. In the Impact module, the sample was purposively selected to reflect diversity across partner organisations, research domains and geographies. The Outcomes module used a positive deviance approach based on outcomes achieved (outlined in more detail above). In this approach, it should be noted that when fewer examples are identified, this is more significant, because of the purposive nature of the sample. Although individual data sources and modules may be limited in isolation, the strength of the evaluation lies in its triangulation of evidence from across the modules. Evidence was drawn from multiple perspectives – interviews, document reviews, data science analysis and case studies – and synthesised to build a credible picture of the Fund's contribution to longer-term impact.

The evaluation provides valuable insights into the Newton Fund's legacy. Through triangulation of evidence from documents, data science, the impact cases and the outcomes explored in depth, the evaluation offers a robust, qualitative assessment of progress towards impact, grounded in a transparent methodology and designed to inform future R&I investments.

Findings

This section presents the findings of the evaluation. These are organised based on (i) achievement against the objectives of the Fund, as outlined in the Operational Framework, and (ii) the strategic and operational considerations to enable achievement against the objectives. As such, there are two main areas of findings, each of which focuses on the key issues that emerged from the evidence:

- long-term outcomes and impacts, addressing EQs 1 & 2
 - capacity strengthening
 - policy and practice influence
 - commercialisation
- strategic and operational findings, addressing EQs 3–5
 - matched funding
 - government-to-government collaboration
 - equitable partnerships
 - VfM
 - enablers and barriers to success.

Table 4. EQs

No.	Question
EQ1	What long-term outcomes (intended and unintended) has the Newton Fund contributed to?
EQ2	How far is the Newton Fund on track and likely to contribute to the intended impacts, as set out in the ToC?
EQ3	How far has the Newton Fund contributed to R&I systems in the UK and partner countries?
EQ4	What factors have supported or hindered the Newton Fund from contributing to long-term outcomes and impacts?
EQ5	Has the Newton Fund demonstrated VfM? Has this changed over time?
EQ6	What are the key learning points from the Newton Fund?

As will become clear from the evidence, strengthening capacities of researchers and research institutions was an important outcome of Fund awards. Strengthened capacities was found to be a prerequisite for making progress towards the Fund's long-term impacts.

This section is followed by a discussion of conclusions, lessons and recommendations of the evaluation for future ODA research funds; this responds to EQ6.

The evidence is triangulated across all four modules, their documents and interviews. The strongest evidence is presented first in each finding, and the strength of evidence for each finding is noted.

Each finding includes a summary statement in bold at the beginning of the finding. This is followed by the related evidence.

Strength of evidence

As outlined above, we describe our findings in the sections below. The strength of evidence for each finding has been assessed according to the rubric in Table 5 and is shown next to each finding.

Table 5. Strength of evidence rubric

Score	Rationale
Limited	<p>Evidence to support this finding is limited to one module only. The evidence is deemed to be limited because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) is demonstrated by only one module; ii) emerges from less than 33% of outcomes (in the Outcomes module, if relevant) iii) or less than 30% of countries (in the Impact module, if relevant); iv) OR demonstrates a high level of inconsistency within or across modules.
Emerging	<p>Evidence exists within (at least) one module to support this finding. The evidence is deemed to be emerging because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) is demonstrated by only one module; ii) emerges from between 33% and 50% of outcomes (in the Outcomes module, if relevant); iii) or between 30% and 49% of countries (in the Impact module, if relevant); iv) OR demonstrates a degree of inconsistency within or across modules.
Moderate	<p>Evidence exists across more than one module to support this finding. The evidence in each (contributing) module is deemed to be moderate because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) is triangulated from more than one source within the module; ii) emerges from between 51% and 74% of outcomes (in the Outcomes module, if relevant); iii) or between 50% and 69% of countries (in the Impact module, if relevant); iv) AND demonstrates a good level of consistency within and across modules.
High	<p>Evidence exists across more than one module to support this finding. The evidence in each (contributing) module is deemed to be strong because it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) is triangulated from more than one source within the module; ii) emerges from more than 75% of outcomes (in the Outcomes module, if relevant); OR iii) 70% of countries (in the Impact module, if relevant); iv) AND demonstrates a high level of consistency within and across modules.

Long-term outcomes and impact

The evaluation looks at the outcomes and impacts through the lenses of capacity strengthening (individual, institutional and ecosystem strengthening); policy and practice influence of the Newton Fund awards; and outcomes and impacts on commercialisation efforts. This is followed by a discussion of the strategic and operational findings that have both helped and hindered success of the Fund; this includes key features of the Newton Fund operating model, such as government-to-government collaboration and matched funding.

Capacity strengthening

Capacity strengthening took place at three levels in the Newton Fund. Individual capacity strengthening occurred across the sample in both impact and outcome modules (Finding 1). Below we also see evidence of capacity strengthening at the levels of research institutions (Finding 2) and national research ecosystems (Findings 3 and 4).

Finding 1	Strength of evidence
Capacity strengthening, particularly for ECRs, stands out as one of the Newton Fund’s most significant achievements.	High

The Fund’s investment in people has created a strong foundation for future research leadership and influence on policy and practice. Across all 10 country case studies (Impact module) and five outcomes examined (Outcomes module), ECRs supported by Newton have advanced their careers, often moving into leadership roles nationally and, in some cases, internationally. These achievements position them to contribute meaningfully to R&I systems over time.

“One of the researchers took a big leap through this project – she went from doing rudimentary work to developing applied technologies. Now she’s started her own venture. That transition came from the hands-on innovation exposure we gained.”

PI, India

Interviews with PIs and POs across 35 awards across all 10 countries in our sample highlight the benefits of Newton’s approach: mentorship through pairing with UK researchers, exposure to cutting-edge science, engagement with policy platforms, and development of transnational networks and leadership experience through co-leading initiatives. In nine of 10 countries, these outcomes were most durable where projects intentionally embedded support structures such as mentoring, flexible roles, and opportunities for policy engagement. Indian projects provide strong examples, with ECRs transitioning into PI

roles, leading national consortia, and pursuing advisory or entrepreneurial paths. Similar patterns were observed in Egypt, China and Thailand, where researchers progressed by leading experiments, securing independent grants and establishing new research centres.

“The Newton project helped me transition from postdoc to leading my own work. I now coordinate with national agencies and contribute to regional climate services. Without this exposure and support, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

Early career researcher, India

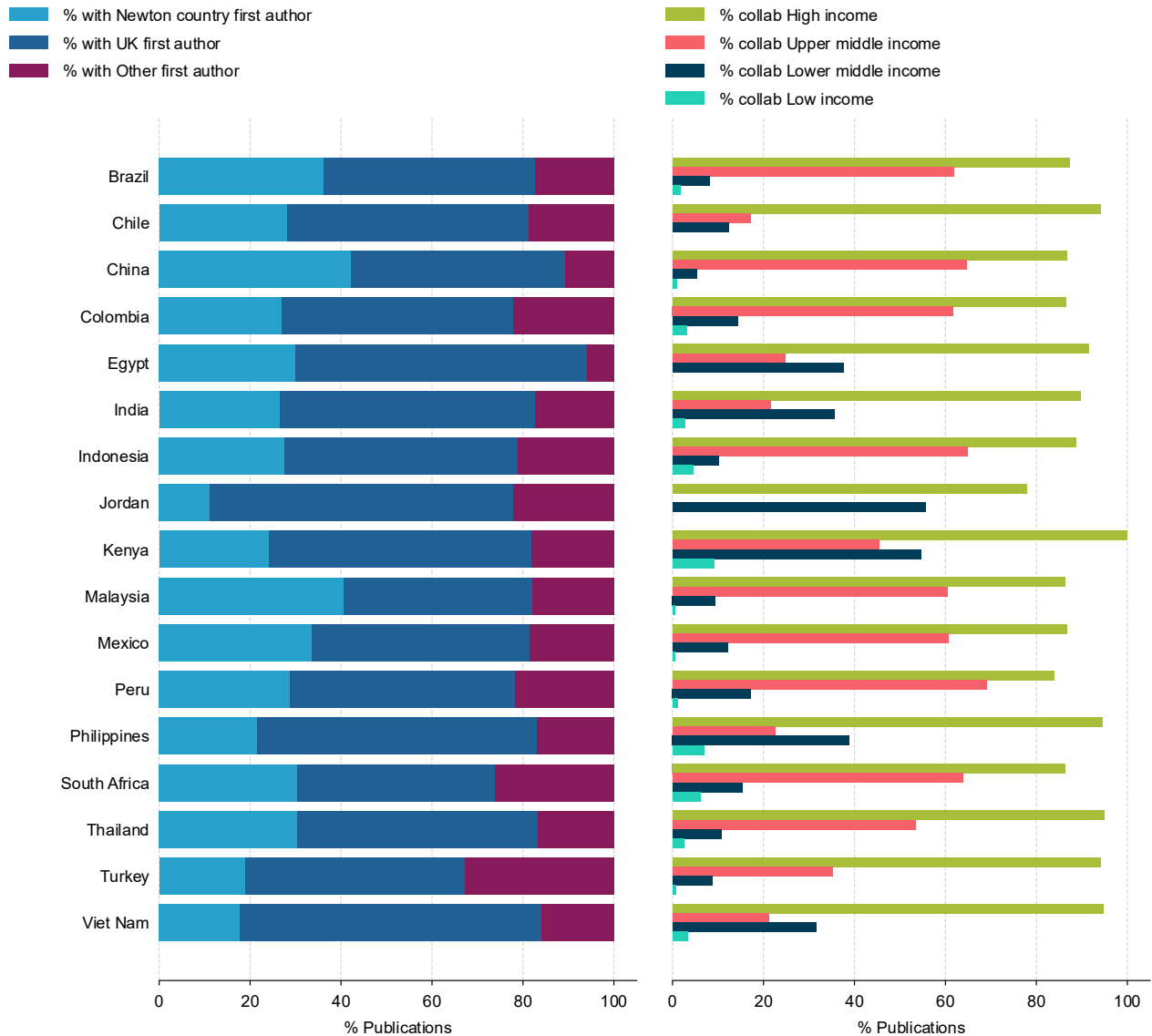
In contrast, in Vietnam, although researchers gained technical skills and international exposure, progression into leadership was more limited. Interviews suggest that the absence of structured support to identify opportunities weakened institutional anchoring, leaving capacities vulnerable to erosion over time. Sustained career development is critical for enabling researchers to engage effectively with policy and decision-making communities.

Publication data also supports this finding, providing a proxy for strengthened capacity across the Fund. Newton-funded research generated a significant share of outputs with MIC first authors – a notable achievement given historically low rates of lead authorship in these contexts (see Figure 7).²⁵ China (42%), Malaysia (41%) and Brazil (36%) recorded the highest proportions; Jordan (11%), Vietnam (18%) and Turkey (19%) were lowest. These figures also reflect the Fund’s role in expanding partnerships beyond the UK and MICs to include other high-income and some low-income countries, demonstrating integration into global research networks.

²⁵ See for example North, M.A. et al. (2020) Out of Africa: The underrepresentation of African authors in high-impact geoscience literature. *Earth Science Reviews* 208, 103262. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0012825220303081>; Amarante, V. et al. (2022) Underrepresentation of developing country researchers in development research. *Applied Economics Letters* 29:17. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13504851.2021.1965528>

Figure 7. Publications associated with recipient countries

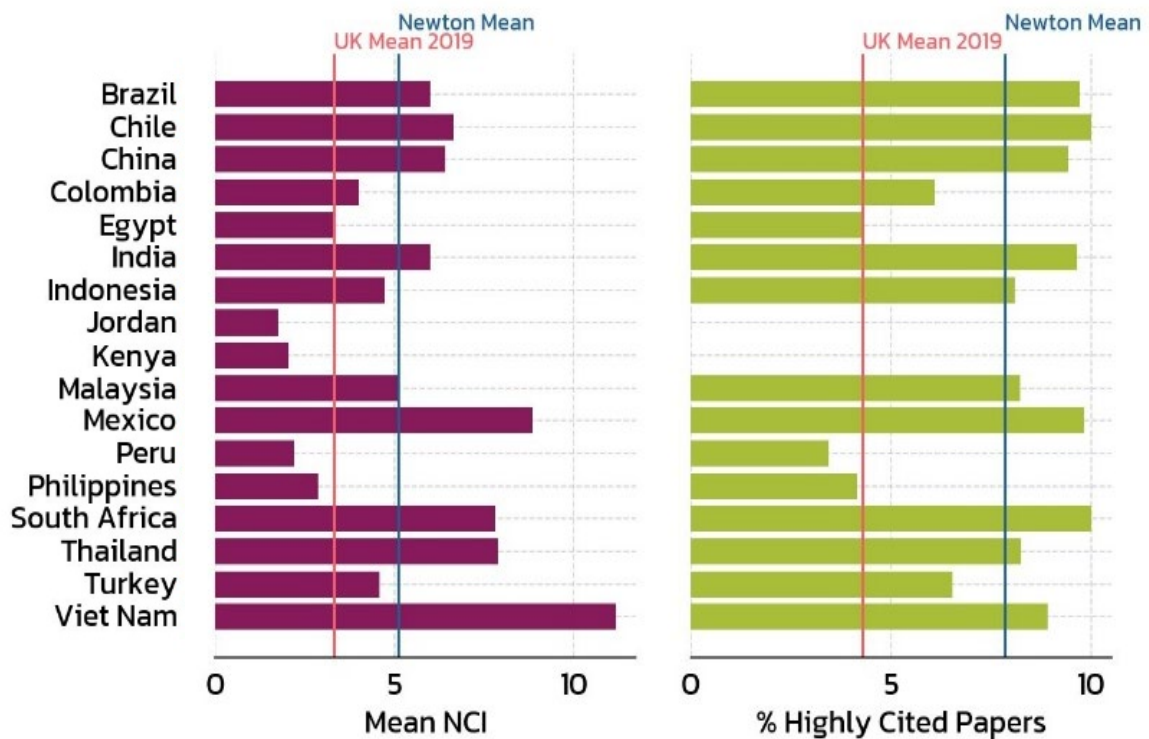
Based on publications associated with each Recipient country, the percentage of first authors by location category is shown (left) alongside a profile of the collaborating countries according to World Bank income category (right)



The Newton Fund appears to be well respected, as indicated by the level of interest in its publications, which are much more highly cited than the UK average. Figure 8 summarises the normalised citation index (NCI) for Newton Fund publications as compared with the UK average. The Newton Fund mean in 12 of 17 partner countries²⁶ is higher than the UK average; in the top 1% of papers (Highly Cited Papers), Newton Fund publications are also above the UK mean in 12 of its partner countries. This may be taken as a proxy for the quality of the research as well as its relevance.

²⁶ Chile is included in this table for publications from the research funded in early stages of the Newton Fund. Kazakhstan was excluded from this analysis.

Figure 8. Publication metrics for recipient countries including Normalised Citation Impact (NCI) and percentage of Highly Cited Papers (HCP) (those in the top 1%)



Data Source: RODA, Researchfish, Web of Science, OpenAlex, DSIT

Overall, the Newton Fund has made a substantial contribution to building research capacity, particularly for ECRs. However, without ongoing monitoring and follow-on support, it will become increasingly difficult to attribute long-term achievements to the Fund as researchers engage with other initiatives.

Finding 2	Strength of evidence
The Newton Fund supported capacity gains at the institutional level, particularly in research institutions embedded in strong research ecosystems.	High

Beyond individual skills, the Fund contributed to institutional capacity gains, especially in settings where research ecosystems were already well developed. Investments in research management training enhanced technical and relational skills, building confidence and legitimacy among staff and fostering internal accountability for high-quality research delivery. Interviews with POs and PIs in 36 awards across the Impact module across seven countries (Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Kenya, Malaysia and South Africa)

emphasised that these improvements created a stronger sense of ownership and readiness for institutional reform.

Box 2. Examples of career progression

In India, a researcher who started as a PhD student on a Newton-funded project led the development of a hydrological model. Presenting findings to government and working with UK researchers gave them to confidence to apply for major grants. They have now secured research funding and lead their own research group.

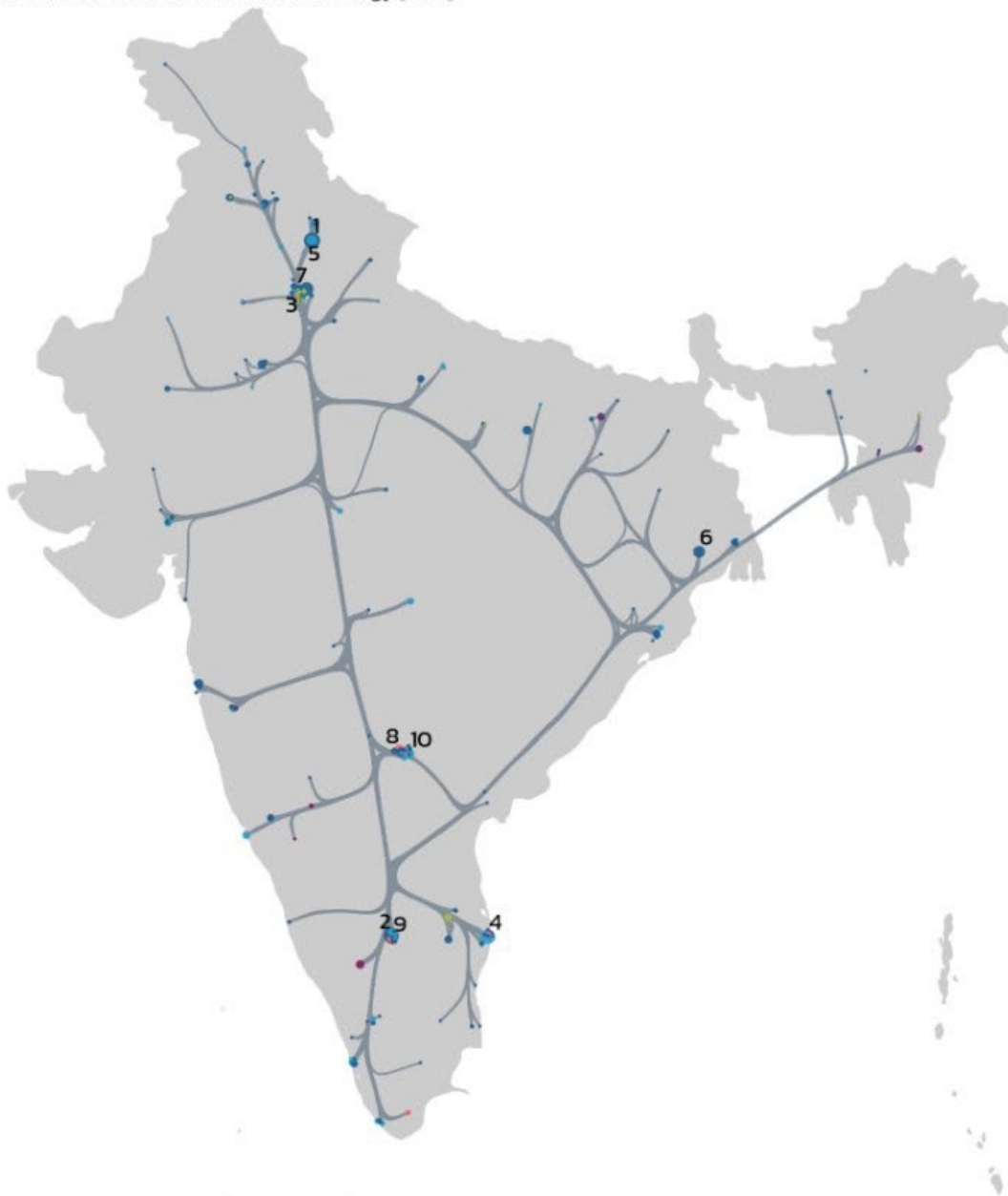
Another PhD student advanced to lead a component of a research project in Malaysia and submitted papers as first author. In their own words: “It was really a turning point – from being a student to seeing myself as a researcher who can shape the agenda, not just follow it.”

Through a Newton award, the Brazil-based co-I was able to engage in a series of international collaborations and academic speaking events that allowed them to interact with other members of the sector, building networks and visibility as an academic in this field. Since completion of the award, the researcher has transitioned to the UK academic sector, where they secured a permanent position, established their own research group, and was appointed deputy of the Translation Research Collaboration (TRC), raising the group’s international profile and leadership within the field. This further enhanced the TRC’s opportunities and capacities to focus on policy and practice influence.

Evidence from these case studies shows that Newton-supported institutions adopted new practices to promote interdisciplinary research, expand pathways for research support, and introduce mechanisms to incentivise research uptake. Examples include joint doctoral training, collaborative research projects, and research management programmes. Data science analysis further illustrates that benefits extended beyond leading institutions, creating new connections with local and regional research bodies and strengthening national networks. By way of example, Figure 9 illustrates the multiple connections created through Newton Fund awards throughout India. Although the map cannot show the details of each connection, and although it lists only the top 10 Newton-supported institutions (of 237 institutions in India involved in at least one award), it illustrates the breadth of connections, with some of the awards bringing together institutions that have not previously worked on international research teams (see Annex 4).

Figure 9. Publication co-author collaboration between institutions in India

- 1: Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee [n=50]
- 2: Indian Institute of Science Bangalore [n=45]
- 3: Indian Institute of Technology Delhi [n=44]
- 4: Indian Institute of Technology Madras [n=39]
- 5: Academy of Scientific and Innovative Research [n=35]
- 6: Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur [n=25]
- 7: Council of Scientific and Industrial Research [n=23]
- 8: International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics [n=21]
- 9: National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences [n=20]
- 10: Indian Institute of Chemical Technology [n=18]



Data Source: RODA, Researchfish, Web of Science, Open Alex, DSIT

Box 3. A centre for interdisciplinary research

In Brazil, the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Resilience project funded the development of permanent experimental infrastructure such as greenhouses in Mato Grosso. This enabled year-round, in-country research on biodiversity and ecosystem function, and also integrated Brazilian researchers into global data platforms such as ForestPlots.net. The project coupled infrastructure delivery with training in open access data tools, ensuring long-term usability and institutional ownership. The facility has since become a hub for ongoing ecosystem monitoring and interdisciplinary collaboration, demonstrating the potential of infrastructure investments to deliver lasting institutional benefits.

Although the depth and sustainability of these changes varied, interviews with PIs, Co-Is and ECRs confirm that the Fund acted as a catalyst for institutional innovation where autonomy, leadership buy-in and alignment with national priorities were present. These findings are corroborated by the VfM assessment, which highlights the Fund's role in embedding collaborative models and encouraging experimentation with institutional practices.

The Newton Fund's contribution to institutional strengthening demonstrates the importance of pairing technical capacity building with systemic incentives for research uptake.

Finding 3	Strength of evidence
The Newton Fund is on track to contribute to strengthening R&I ecosystems in middle-income countries.	High

Evidence across multiple modules and country case studies shows that Newton investments have enhanced researcher skills, advanced leadership capacity and strengthened institutional systems. These are key building blocks for resilient R&I ecosystems. These changes were most visible in countries with strong research foundations, such as Brazil, India, Malaysia and South Africa, where stakeholders reported improvements in individual capacity, institutional processes and collaborative ways of working.

Interviews with PIs and Co-Is in 45 awards across eight countries (under the Impact module) highlight the role of ECRs as catalysts for institutional change. Newton-supported initiatives provided mentorship, exposure to international networks and entrepreneurial training, which boosted confidence and equipped researchers to navigate complex research and commercialisation pathways. In India, South Africa and Vietnam, institutions

adopted new practices to foster interdisciplinary research, expand career development pathways and introduce incentives for research uptake. These shifts were reinforced by collaborative models such as joint doctoral training, co-designed projects and research management programmes. Researchers in Egypt and South Africa credited Newton's support with transforming their mindsets and enabling them to pursue leadership and innovation roles.

Box 4. Interdisciplinary approaches

A UK–Colombian interdisciplinary team promoted advancement in farming practices through Sylvopastoral Systems. Follow-on work has been supported by BBSRC, suggesting the importance of the work and the continuing potential for commercialisation.

A Newton award developed interdisciplinary methods for assessing cultural heritage in Turkey. It integrated historical and environmental data in unique ways in this context and built on local knowledge and specialist knowledge to build a locally relevant assessment. No adoption has yet been seen, but the potential remains.

Participation in Newton-funded projects also increased international exposure and strengthened scientific confidence. Evidence from Brazil, China and Kenya shows that researchers gained experience in managing transdisciplinary agendas and applied research challenges. In Malaysia and Thailand, individual-level gains began translating into team-level and institutional shifts, with researchers assuming leadership roles and forming cross-disciplinary groups.

Although sustainability varies, the overall evidence suggests that Newton acted as a catalyst for institutional innovation where autonomy, leadership buy-in and alignment with national policy priorities were present. Interviews across 32 awards in nine countries confirmed strengthened institutional systems supporting high-quality research. Targeted infrastructure investments and support for ECRs built technical and leadership skills, enhanced visibility and fostered trust through collaborative partnerships. In several cases, intraregional collaborations opened new lines of inquiry and helped secure additional funding, and partnerships with UK institutions provided access to expertise and reinforced mutual trust.

Overall, the Newton Fund's contribution to national ecosystem strengthening demonstrates the value of integrated approaches that combine individual capacity building with institutional reform.

Finding 4	Strength of evidence
There is strong evidence across all 10 sampled countries that the Newton Fund laid the institutional foundations for stronger R&I systems.	High

This is particularly so in Brazil, China, India, Malaysia South Africa, and Vietnam. Formal mechanisms (such as memoranda of understanding between universities, joint PhD supervision, and co-located research offices in embassies and ministries) were central to this effort. Informal approaches, including trust-based relationships across disciplines and borders, also played a role. Newton’s contribution to UK–China partnerships illustrates the potential of this model. By supporting joint governance, academic mobility and co-designed research approaches, the Fund enabled equitable collaboration and shared responsibility for setting priorities and allocating resources.

The Impact module provides moderate to strong evidence that Newton strengthened systems, leadership and partnerships. The Outcomes module corroborates these foundations across all 12 outcomes assessed but notes limited depth of sustained change. Momentum often stalled after funding ended, and collaborations lacked continuity. Data science analysis shows some indicators of system strengthening – such as follow-on funding, commercialisation outcomes and expanded networks – but at low volumes and without clear attribution to the Newton Fund.

Among our sample of 10 countries, country-level evidence highlights significant progress in Brazil, India, South Africa and Vietnam, where stakeholders reported improvements in research capacity, institutional processes and collaborative ways of working. These changes align with Newton’s intended long-term impact. Evidence of strengthening UK systems was less pronounced, although stronger partnerships contributed to the UK knowledge base.

There is also evidence that funding has been leveraged beyond the Newton Fund (data science), with evidence from the country cases that this includes domestic funding sources.

Examples from country cases with follow-on domestic funding include:

- Brazil: Follow-on funding from the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP) sustained natural capital research with University College London and supported a major programme co-funded with the US National Science Foundation, expanding Newton-linked collaborations internationally.
- India: Projects advanced to pilot stages with BIRAC (Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council) support for applied innovation. The Indian

Department of Science and Technology (DST)–UKRI co-funding model aligned research with national priorities and facilitated future domestic and regional funding.

- South Africa: Innovators from Newton-supported programmes secured follow-on funding through The Technology Innovation Agency’s Grassroots Innovation Programme, scaling local technology development.

The VfM assessment reinforces these findings, noting the importance of formal agreements in countries such as Brazil, China, India, Malaysia, Turkey and Vietnam. Although outcomes did not directly reference systemic improvements, examples from Brazil and China show enhanced institutional capacity for equitable partnerships and innovation; for instance, a Newton-supported lab in China improved its ability to collaborate with the private sector. UK funders also reported that Newton shifted their approach to co-funding, enabling partnerships that spanned researcher-to-researcher engagement and government-level decision making. Many of these relationships persisted beyond individual awards.

Several awards attracted further funding – during or after Newton support – from domestic agencies, universities, international funders (e.g. the Wellcome Trust, the European Union Horizon, the National Institute of Health), UK bodies (e.g. UKRI, GCRF, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)) and private sector partners. The Newton Fund often acted as a platform for scaling pilots or securing follow-on grants. However, reporting on leveraged funds was inconsistent and rarely quantified, limiting assessment. Where data existed, Brazil, China and India (the Newton Fund partners that received the highest levels of funding) showed the highest volumes. All UKRI research councils reported some success in securing additional funding.

Supporting the foundations for a research ecosystem is a multifaceted effort that includes the many elements described here. Joint governance and supports to institutional processes, strengthening partnerships, researcher capacity strengthening, and supporting research teams to identify opportunities to leverage additional funding are among the efforts engaged in by the Newton Fund that helped build stronger national research ecosystems.

Strategy was largely absent at the Fund level, but at the country level, where the research followed national strategies – such as Healthy China (in antimicrobial resistance – AMR) research and policy influence), Egypt’s Vision 2030 (in water and energy research), and the 12th Malaysia Plan (such as air quality and flood risk research) – more engagement was reported with decision makers.

Policy and practice influence

Finding 5	Strength of evidence
Evidence of policy and practice influence was limited, but the Fund strengthened researcher capacity for future engagement.	Moderate

Across the Newton Fund portfolio, direct policy and practice change was modest. The most significant progress lies in building researchers' ability to engage with policy communities – setting the stage for future influence. This conclusion is supported by evidence from all four evaluation modules.

Where influence occurred, it was concentrated at national or sub-national levels and within a handful of portfolios. Policy impact was often indirect, flowing through processes such as guideline committees, citations of research findings or enhanced researcher profiles. These pathways make attribution difficult, because decisions typically emerge from collective processes rather than individual contributions.

Policy engagement was strongest in larger, better-resourced portfolios and sectors aligned with national priorities. Data science analysis shows that countries with the largest funding allocations (Brazil, China, India and South Africa) achieved a wider range of policy outcomes. In contrast, smaller portfolios, such as the Philippines and Turkey, reported few or no policy-related outcomes. Partnership maturity also mattered: newer collaborations rarely achieved policy influence within the funding time frame, reflecting the time needed to build trust and generate credible evidence.

Interviews with PIs and Co-Is across three country case studies confirm that Newton-supported projects pursued structured policy engagement. Common approaches included multi-phase stakeholder consultations, feasibility assessments and formal engagement with ministries and regulatory agencies. These were often embedded in co-designed research frameworks and joint planning exercises. For example, in India, water management research integrated technical consultations with state-level planning bodies. Some practice changes also emerged from strengthened individual capacity, as noted by PIs.

Scaling up remained a challenge, however. Although some projects achieved notable success (such as China's ban on colistin in cattle feed), broad policy shifts were rare. Policy influence requires collaboration beyond the research sector and typically exceeds the short duration of Newton Fund awards.

Box 5. Examples of policy change

In China, Newton-supported research on AMR contributed to the evidence base used by policymakers in their decision to enact a national ban on colistin in cattle feed. Success hinged on active engagement with policymakers, presenting findings as opportunities for health improvement, publishing in high-profile journals and drew on the credibility of international collaboration to enhance legitimacy. In Thailand, a project piloted a tablet-based clinical decision support system for rural health workers, which was later integrated into Ministry of Health approaches. Other examples include disaster preparedness initiatives: Peru adopted low-cost flood monitoring sensors; South Africa integrated UK flood risk assessment methods; Turkey institutionalised volcanic hazard atlases; and the Philippines applied a disaster risk framework in small island communities.

Regional and global influence was minimal. Short award durations and limited investment in knowledge translation (15% of Newton Fund resources) constrained opportunities to build relationships beyond national contexts. Future impact may emerge as Newton-supported researchers advance to senior roles and secure follow-on funding.

In summary, the Newton Fund primarily contributed to creating conditions for future policy influence rather than delivering widespread change during its lifetime. Where success occurred, it built on prior research and established relationships. Achieving systemic policy and practice shifts requires sustained engagement, longer funding cycles and greater investment in translation activities.

Finding 6	Strength of evidence
Sustained policy and practice influence remains limited, despite progress in building engagement capacity.	Emerging

The Newton Fund is not yet on track to achieve its intended long-term impact on policy and practice. Evidence of sustained or widespread uptake is minimal across most evaluated countries. This reflects structural constraints, including short funding cycles, reliance on individual champions, and weak institutional incentives for research uptake.

Despite these limitations, credible progress is evident in Brazil, China, India, Kenya, South Africa and Vietnam. Newton Fund interventions helped researchers and institutions engage more systematically with policy actors. Stakeholders reported greater confidence in working with non-academic audiences, improved dissemination skills, and growing experience in strategic policy engagement. In some contexts, this contributed to stronger institutional recognition of engagement and more routine integration of uptake-oriented practices into research design.

“The Newton Fund gave me an opportunity to work directly with government partners and understand their needs. That experience built my confidence – now I feel I can communicate my research clearly to policymakers, not just academics.”

Co-I, Malaysia

“Our research was instrumental in informing the Ministry of Agriculture’s decision to ban the use of colistin in animal feed [...] Within two years, we observed a measurable decline in human resistance levels – one of the clearest examples of research-driven policy action on AMR in China.”

Co-PI, China

Examples from Egypt, South Africa and Thailand show that participating in Newton Fund awards left the researchers better positioned to influence policy dialogues by framing research in accessible ways, leveraging relationships, and aligning outputs with policy priorities. In Malaysia and Vietnam, institutional partners began embedding dissemination and stakeholder engagement into project design and introduced mechanisms to track research impact.

However, structural features of the Fund constrained sustained uptake. Awards typically lasted for two to three years, and only limited resources were allocated to the translation pillar. In India, researchers noted that key insights often emerged late in the award cycle, leaving little time for translation or institutionalisation. Across countries, the absence of follow-on support (financial, mentoring or institutional brokerage) further limited continuity. In South Africa and Vietnam, project teams lacked access to knowledge brokers or dedicated policy engagement officers, leaving translation work as an additional burden on

already overstretched researchers. As a result, promising policy and practice findings stalled at evidence generation without the translation needed for formal uptake.

Overall, the Fund strengthened capacity for policy engagement but fell short of delivering systemic influence. Future programmes will need longer funding horizons, dedicated resources for translation, and institutional mechanisms to sustain engagement beyond individual projects.

Commercialisation

Finding 7	Strength of evidence
Newton Fund support laid early foundations for commercialisation, but progress beyond proof-of-concept was limited.	Moderate

The Newton Fund helped set the stage for future commercialisation by supporting proof-of-concept and early innovation development. Although some projects moved towards market readiness, there is no evidence of foreign direct investment or trade expansion linked to the Fund. Most innovations remained at prototype stage, with only isolated cases reaching commercial application.

Across nine of 10 partner countries (in the Impact module sample), with PIs and Co-Is in 33 awards, interventions were designed with commercialisation in mind but had gaps in industry partnerships. Support typically focused on two areas: building enabling environments within research institutions through innovation grants, entrepreneurship support and UK collaborations; and directly targeting innovators through challenge funds and innovation communities. These approaches aimed to translate research into viable products and services and strengthen locally led innovation ecosystems. Without stronger industry partnerships, progress has been limited.

Evidence of commercialisation outcomes was modest from the Impact and Outcomes modules. The Outcomes module identified six cases with sufficient progress to follow up. Two awards in Egypt and Malaysia led to the creation of new R&I centres, increasing institutional capacity but not yet achieving commercial success. Four other projects (in China, India and Peru) showed commercial potential but had not advanced beyond proof-of-concept by the end of the funding period. In addition to these, interviews with researchers identified potential commercialisation in South Africa, Thailand and Vietnam. Overall, commercialisation outcomes were limited and concentrated at proof-of-concept stage.

Box 6. Commercialisation potential

Across at least two Newton-funded collaborations, UK researchers partnered with institutions in Malaysia and Egypt to design and implement innovative projects that could meaningfully contribute to commercial innovation capacities within universities, promoting sustainable institutional growth and real-world application. One prominent example was a collaboration between Coventry University and Universiti Malaysia Sarawak around an educational innovation which involved developing gamifying teaching pedagogies. This eventually led to the establishment of a dedicated Gamification Centre and commercialisation of innovative educational tools, such as the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Bucket. Similarly, another UK–Egypt partnership developed an advanced hybrid solar energy system, which eventually led to the establishment of the Solar Live Lab and an entrepreneurship unit dedicated to technology transfer and commercialisation, eventually increasing Egypt’s institutional innovation capacity.

Box 7. UK–India biorefinery platform

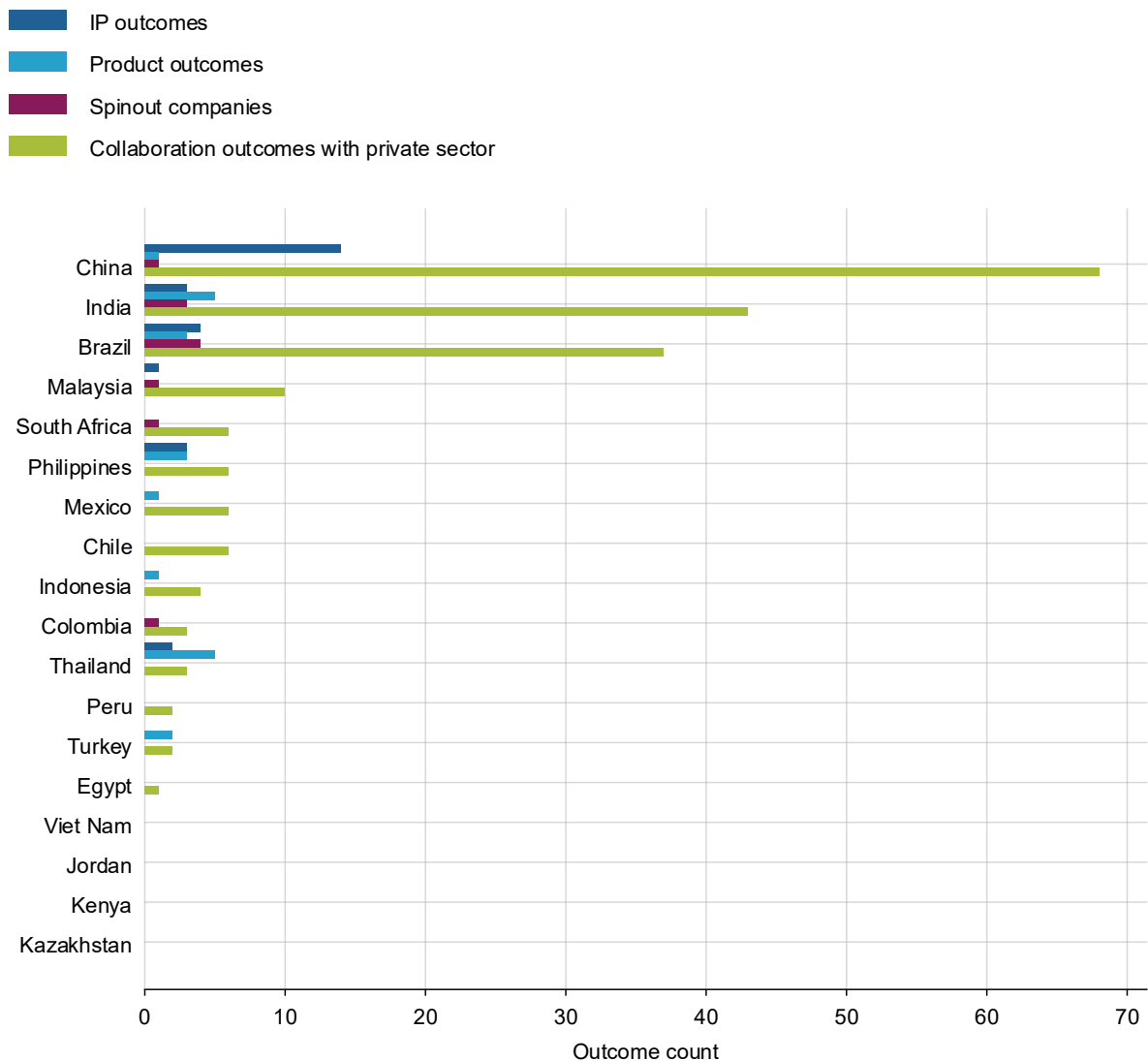
A biorefinery platform developed through the UK–India collaboration is deemed to have significant commercial potential. There are ongoing efforts to seek over GBP 20 million in attempts to scale this commercially.

Some examples illustrate partial progress. In Egypt, India and Vietnam, Newton Fund-supported projects contributed to feasibility studies, business model development and movement along innovation pipelines. In South Africa, despite COVID-19 disruptions to the Leaders in Innovation Fellowships, some fellows secured IP protection and generated employment. In China and Thailand, outputs were minimal, constrained by short project cycles, weak industry engagement or a focus on foundational research. In Malaysia, innovation translation was not central to sampled projects, and evidence from Brazil and Turkey was limited or absent.

The data science analysis (see Annex 4: Whole fund analysis) reinforces these findings. Private sector–university partnerships were reported in 14 of 18 partner countries, but most outputs were joint publications rather than commercial ventures. Across the Fund, only 11 spinout companies were identified, and one-third of partner countries reported IP outcomes. Malaysia recorded the highest share of private sector co-publications (13%), suggesting stronger collaboration. Unsurprisingly, engagement with industry was concentrated in higher middle-income countries, with the largest Newton Fund allocations (Brazil, China and India) often building on pre-existing academic partnerships (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Collaboration outcomes

Number of IP, Product, Spinout company, and Collaboration outcomes by Recipient country (UKRI Research Council awards only)



Data Source: RODA, Researchfish

Despite these efforts, most Newton-funded innovations stalled before reaching market readiness. Although some projects achieved patent filings or startup formation, only isolated cases – such as Vietnam’s carbapenem-resistant Enterobacterales (CRE)²⁷ plate diagnostic innovation – progressed to commercial sales. Structural barriers were significant: short funding cycles, lack of follow-on support, and limited infrastructure for scale-up left promising innovations at the proof-of-concept stage.

²⁷ A type of bacteria that is highly resistant to carbapenem antibiotics. These bacteria are a major cause of infections, particularly in healthcare settings, and can be difficult to treat because the infections are resistant to many common antibiotics.

Overall, Newton Fund interventions created enabling conditions and early-stage outputs but fell short of systemic commercialisation. Future programmes aiming for market impact will need longer funding horizons, dedicated resources for scale-up, and stronger industry engagement mechanisms. Without these, commercialisation outcomes will remain incremental and concentrated in early development stages.

Finding 8	Strength of evidence
Limited investment in knowledge translation constrained commercialisation of market-ready products.	Emerging

The Newton Fund aimed to support the development of market-ready products and services that address local and global development priorities through its knowledge translation pillar. However, with only 15% of Fund resources allocated to this pillar, its potential impact is significantly limited. As a result, most commercialisation outcomes remained at early stages, with few innovations progressing to market readiness.

Where success occurred, it was largely in awards that explicitly embedded translational pathways into their design. These projects reinforced a focus on strengthening innovation ecosystems and building commercialisation capacity within MICs. The translation pillar pursued long-term impact through two complementary routes: supporting institutional systems for research commercialisation and enabling innovators to sustain and scale ventures. These efforts were underpinned by enabling conditions created through the Fund's people and research pillars, including enhanced institutional capacity, leadership in research management, and cross-sector partnerships.

Finding 9	Strength of evidence
Commercialisation outcomes remain limited, with most progress confined to early-stage innovation.	Moderate

The Outcomes and Impact modules found evidence of limited successful commercialisation to date. Although some IP has been registered and early-stage innovation has been achieved, most projects have not advanced beyond feasibility studies or prototype development. Evidence across five countries presents a mixed picture. In Egypt, India and Vietnam, awardees reported contributions to feasibility studies, business model development and movement along innovation pipelines. In South Africa, despite

systemic constraints and COVID-19 disruptions to the Leadership Innovation Fund, some fellows secured IP protection and generated employment. In China and Thailand, outputs were minimal, reflecting short project cycles, weak industry engagement and a focus on foundational research. In Malaysia, innovation translation was not central to sampled projects, and evidence from Brazil and Turkey was very limited.

As with policy influence, commercialisation requires engagement beyond research teams to access resources and expertise for scaling. Short funding cycles and limited investment in knowledge translation compounded these challenges. POs often lacked specialised skills and institutional support, such as incubators, robust IP frameworks and innovation systems. Without these enabling conditions, promising innovations remained at proof-of-concept stage.

Strategy and operational considerations

This section looks at how the Fund operated, and it explores the strategic and operational opportunities and challenges that implementation of the Newton Fund faced.

Matched funding

Finding 10	Strength of evidence
Matched funding strengthened engagement and ownership in higher middle-income countries, but evidence is limited and uneven.	Emerging

The Newton Fund's matched funding principle aimed to ensure that partner countries had a stake in research priorities by requiring a 1:1 match of UK contributions. This was later broadened to include in-kind support, such as equipment, staff time and access to proprietary data, to accommodate economic differences. Although co-investment was widely observed, systematic records on the value and composition of matched contributions (funding or effort) were not available, limiting a definitive assessment of scale. Matching was not an issue in which most researchers had any awareness, so evidence in this area comes from the 14 high-level interviews which were conducted with former leaders of the Fund from governments in India, Malaysia and Turkey, as well as from UK officials in two embassies and three POs.

Five high-level interviews indicated that matched funding played an important role in fostering mutual accountability, joint priority setting and embedding ownership within national systems – particularly in higher middle-income countries, where government appropriations for research were more assured. In China, for example, matched funding

facilitated joint priority setting in several projects. In Malaysia, it enabled bilateral investment and alignment with industrial needs. In Turkey, it supported disaster risk reduction partnerships, strengthening national capabilities in volcanic emergency management. In these cases, partner countries fulfilled their commitments, giving research teams the leverage to ensure that local priorities were met.

However, equity in matched funding was less evident in lower middle-income contexts, as noted in three interviews, although in one of these cases the interviewee felt that it did not inhibit joint decision making. In one case, the interviewee felt that joint funding still led to delays or shortfalls in partner contributions. This placed financial burdens on UK organisations and created less balanced relationships. These challenges prompted a shift toward more flexible interpretations of “matched effort”, allowing in-kind contributions to count towards match requirements. This flexibility helped maintain collaboration and, in some cases, increased the effective spending power of UK investments.

Overall, the high-level interviewees reported support in UK and partner countries for the principle of matched funding as a mechanism to strengthen engagement and shared responsibility in research. Where resources were constrained, flexibility in matching requirements proved essential. Future programmes should retain this principle but ensure clearer documentation and consider differentiated approaches to reflect economic realities.

Government-to-government collaboration

Finding 11	Strength of evidence
Government-to-government collaboration was pivotal in enabling access to partner country systems, aligning investments, and building mutual accountability.	Limited

Government-to-government collaboration underpinned the Newton Fund’s ability to align investments with national priorities, embed mutual accountability, and open access to partner country systems. Documentary evidence and interviews across 50 sampled awards confirmed that bilateral arrangements helped institutionalise science and innovation partnerships in several countries. Although implementation bodies were disbanded at the conclusion of the Newton Fund – limiting direct interviews with these stakeholders – secondary evidence from PIs and Co-Is across all 10 case study countries reinforced the importance of these collaborations.

Examples illustrate how these relationships shaped strategic research agendas. In India, the Science Plan co-developed by the Met Office and the Ministry of Earth Sciences enabled joint priority setting and annual reviews that evolved with expert input. Similar high-level commitments were evident in China and Malaysia, where Newton deepened cooperation in climate science and biotechnology. These arrangements provided a

platform for policy-relevant research and early-stage innovation, even if translation and leveraged funding were uneven.

Evidence from countries cited here also shows that Newton-supported partnerships extended beyond bilateral ties although these were not formally part of the Fund expectations and requirements. They were developed using discretionary funding or separate grants that built on the Newton Fund opportunity. Thai researchers used Newton-funded work to secure memoranda of understanding with Australia, Laos and Singapore. In China, AMR research led to agreements with Japan, India and Singapore. China and South Africa leveraged Newton projects to expand collaborations across Africa and East and Southeast Asia. The project Trade-offs Sarawak became a regional environmental initiative connecting Malaysia institutions with institutions in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. Brazil's biodiversity initiatives developed into regional initiatives following a similar path.

Finding 12	Strength of evidence
Partnership management was sometimes unevenly shared, creating administrative burdens and limiting equity in decision making.	Limited

A core principle of the Newton Fund was equitable partnerships, with shared decision making and balanced management responsibilities. In practice, this was not always achieved. Evidence from one high-level interview, as well as interviews with awardees in India, Malaysia and Turkey, indicated that the burden of managing partnerships frequently fell disproportionately on MIC partners.

UK academies and councils had dedicated teams to manage relationships, whereas in most partner countries a single office (sometimes just one person) handled all Newton-related partnerships. These offices were responsible for coordinating multiple UK institutions, each with its own reporting requirements, as there were no Newton-wide standards. This imbalance made it difficult for partner countries to maintain oversight, and it limited their opportunity to participate fully in programme design. Misaligned funding cycles added further complexity, creating delays and inefficiencies, including unspent funds being returned. This finding reflects a systemic challenge in partnered research that has not been addressed satisfactorily. The requirements for rapid decision making in short funding cycles mitigates against the time needed to work across differentiated research system capacities, where the challenges in joint decision making are much higher. That this issue has not been resolved affects the ability of the Newton Fund – and future funds – to manage equitable relationships.

India provides the clearest example of this asymmetry. The Department of Biotechnology managed partnerships with 18 UK organisations using a small team, whereas UKRI had a dedicated team focused solely on India. As a result, funding initiatives were sometimes presented to Indian counterparts in near-final form, limiting opportunities for proactive input. Similar challenges were reported in Turkey, where the Science and Technological Research Council of Türkiye (TÜBİTAK) acted as the single point of contact for diverse UK partner organisations, placing a heavy administrative burden on the Turkish side. Researchers also felt disconnected from processes, particularly for mobility grants managed exclusively by UK institutions. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education monitored domestic activities but had little visibility into UK-side progress or challenges and lacked a clear contact point for troubleshooting. This fragmented approach undermined transparency and integration.

Overall, these examples highlight how asymmetries in staffing and administrative capacity affected mutuality, co-ownership and, ultimately, the delivery of partnered research. Although the Fund succeeded in fostering collaboration, future programmes should address these structural imbalances by introducing clearer reporting standards, harmonised funding cycles and mechanisms to support equitable design and decision making across the partnership.

Equitable partnerships

Finding 13	Strength of evidence
Inclusive and equitable partnerships often favoured institutions with shared agendas, pre-existing relationships, visibility or international networks.	High

Newton Fund partnerships were most durable where they built on institutional readiness, shared research priorities and pre-existing networks. Evidence from Impact module case studies show that these factors reduced coordination costs, enabled co-design, and fostered equitable roles. In India, South Africa and Turkey, partnerships with established institutions were strengthened by priorities; in Malaysia and Vietnam, recognised co-ownership of research agendas supported continuity. In contrast, in Egypt and Kenya, partnerships were largely project-bound, with little systemic impact.

Although the Fund formally allowed a wide range of institutions to participate, funding was concentrated in well-established centres with strong proposal-writing capacity and international visibility; these research centres are more experienced at submitting proposals that meet the needs of the funder and can demonstrate significant past experience in both research and research management. This led to underrepresentation of

sectors such as environmental research, which were deprioritised in the allocation process. In Malaysia, co-ownership models gave researchers decision-making authority and positioned them as regional convenors. In Turkey, calls for proposals encouraged competitiveness and transparency, but the emphasis on global standards (e.g. English-language applications, joint UK-Turkey panels) inadvertently favoured institutions already equipped to meet these criteria. Similarly in India, bilateral platforms and career development opportunities were most accessible to leading research bodies, such as the Department of Biotechnology and the Indian Institutes of Technology. Brazil was an exception: decentralised leadership enabled institutions beyond traditional hubs to coordinate regionally relevant projects, increasing diversity and South–South engagement.

Box 8. Importance of pre-existing partnerships

An outcome reported in Malaysia built on an existing partnership between a UK university and a Malaysian university focused on food preservation. The research developed a sustainable packaging system, using what was otherwise agricultural waste. This is now nearing market readiness.

Partnerships were most effective in countries with well-developed research ecosystems, where opportunities for career progression and complementary initiatives existed (e.g. Brazil, China, India, South Africa). In weaker ecosystems, sustaining impact would have required more follow-on support or a critical mass of Newton researchers.

Examples illustrate the benefits of building on past collaborations. A UK–China partnership advanced research on rural heritage and identity by leveraging established links in ethnology and creative economy. In Brazil, ongoing collaborations building on pre-existing research relationships explored plant domestication in Amazonia. This UK–Brazil collaboration also demonstrated the value and impact of interdisciplinary research by integrating expertise from molecular genetics, archaeology, archaeobotany, palaeoecology and botany across UK and Brazilian institutions. Pre-existing collaborations and preparatory work facilitated the development of a robust research framework, enabling the use of advanced techniques to address complex questions about plant domestication in Amazonia. The project’s holistic approach produced novel methodologies, informed public policy on biodiversity and climate adaptation, and provided capacity-building opportunities for ECRs. High-profile outputs and public engagement activities further highlighted the innovation and societal relevance of interdisciplinary research.

In Malaysia a gamification project, through which the partners had previously developed a gaming approach to education, was expanded into teacher training with Ministry of Education support. In Turkey, Newton funding strengthened emergency planning partnerships, enhancing national awareness of volcanic risk. Building on past work on

volcanic hazards, Newton funding supported the development of volcanic hazard atlases that are now used as resources for risk assessment and emergency planning.

New partnerships also achieved success where enabling factors were present – shared interests, mobility and exchange support, and structured mechanisms such as staff exchanges, travel grants and joint research initiatives. These activities provided the foundation for trust and co-development. For instance, a UK–Brazil initiative on greenhouse gas emissions evolved into long-term institutional partnerships and follow-on collaboration on climate-related themes, supported by clear alignment with national priorities and complementary expertise.

There are trade-offs between, on the one hand, working with pre-existing partnerships which can focus immediately on high-quality research and, on the other, supporting new partnerships that necessarily focus on building relationships of trust as well as clarity on their common interests and defining ways of working. A portfolio approach could promote a balance between the two or give priority to high-quality research or the building of new partnerships and relationships between the UK and MICs. Both are valuable, and a fund strategy could be a useful device in defining the priorities of any given research fund to guide the choices made at the research funding agency level. Equally, the expectations and indicators of success of a grant to a new partnership should be different from those for a pre-existing partnership.

Sustainability varied across the portfolio. In 26 awards across eight countries,²⁸ partnerships extended beyond the life of awards through continued collaboration, joint funding applications and regional networks. Examples include Brazil's expansion of a national project into a multi-country network. In addition, a Newton Fund funded India–UK collaboration resulted in the development and market introduction of low-cost, high-precision paper-based microfluidic sensors capable of detecting AMR-related pollutants at parts-per-billion (PPB) levels. The sensor printing technique was patented and published in a high-impact journal, leading to significant academic recognition. A spinoff company was established to commercialise the sensor technology, demonstrating successful translation from research to market.

In Malaysia, a Newton-funded research partnership led to the development of bioactive, biodegradable packaging materials, made from palm oil residues and herbs sourced in both countries. These materials extended food shelf life and offered an environmentally friendly alternative to plastic packaging. The project reached the pilot production stage, with field trials completed and early uptake by regional manufacturers. Companies are now working with academic teams to refine the formulation for wider use, supported by further research into compostability and regulatory compliance. Although full commercialisation has not yet been achieved, the project has delivered a concrete innovation that addresses multiple UK-relevant concerns (including food waste, AMR and plastic pollution) and demonstrates potential for broader application.

²⁸ Brazil, China, Egypt, Kenya, India, South Africa, Turkey and Vietnam.

In Egypt, the biodegradable packaging project at Nile University aligned closely with Egypt's Vision 2030 and global priorities on plastic reduction, motivating the institution to invest in applied problem-solving research. By conducting early feasibility studies and engaging with industry and the Ministry of Industry, the project demonstrated how innovation could address national waste management challenges. This alignment catalysed institutional motivation, leading to the creation of the Smart Engineering Systems Centre, a permanent unit supporting applied research and development and entrepreneurship. The project's visibility at the 2022 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) further reinforced institutional commitment to commercialisation and societal impact.

In the remaining countries in our sample, partnerships often dissolved when funding ended, constrained by reliance on individual relationships, lack of continuation plans, and structural barriers such as misaligned funding cycles and shifting government priorities. These challenges were most acute for new partnerships, which lacked sufficient time to build trust and institutional resilience.

Finding 14	Strength of evidence
The Newton Fund expanded research networks within and beyond partner countries, creating unexpected opportunities for regional collaboration.	High

One of the Fund's notable outcomes was the expansion of research networks, both nationally and regionally. Although South–South collaboration was not an explicit goal, Newton Fund support enabled institutions in partner countries to bring additional national research bodies and government organisations into funded projects. Evidence from interviews with PIs and Co-Is across eight partner countries²⁹ and 14 awards shows that this broadened engagement beyond the most prominent research institutions and extended collaboration to actors outside the original Newton focus countries.

We found no evidence that the Newton Fund as a whole fostered the creation of new or expanded networks. Rather, these appear as researcher initiatives, building on existing connections and creating new connections in their areas of work.

These network effects were particularly significant for ECRs, who gained opportunities to work alongside established scientists across regions. By fostering these connections, the Fund helped strengthen national research ecosystems and laid the groundwork for future partnerships that could address shared development challenges at a regional scale.

²⁹ Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Kenya, Malaysia, South Africa and Thailand.

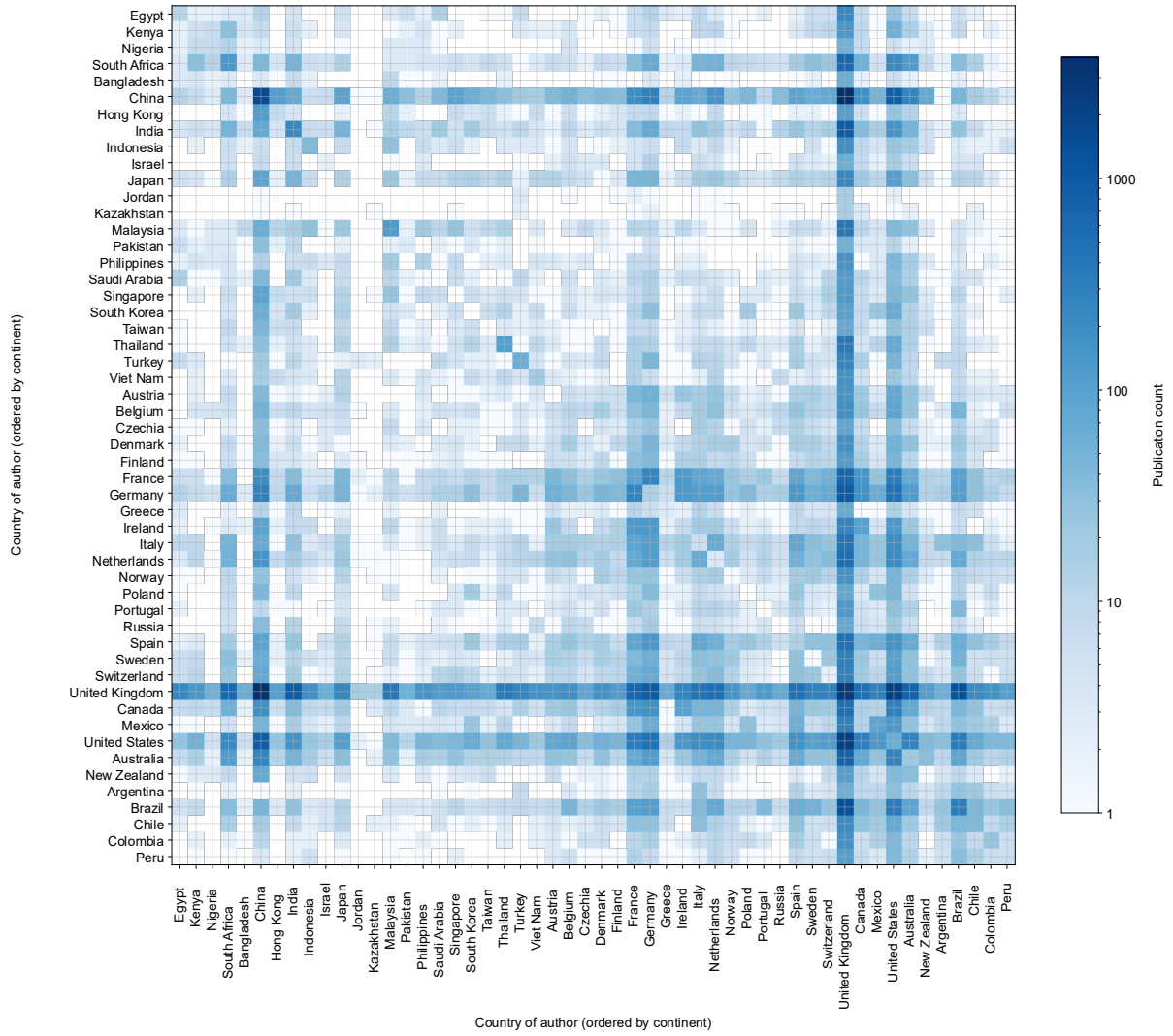
Box 9. Example of South–South cooperation across Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines

The Creative Culture Project built cooperation between the UK and three countries in Southeast Asia to develop gamification learning methodologies that are now in use in Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. In addition, the project demonstrated the value of interdisciplinary approaches, and follow-on funding from local and international sources resulted. The Creative Culture gamification approach (mentioned above), initially piloted in Malaysia, was subsequently adopted and adapted by the Malaysian Department for Education and integrated into primary schools, teacher training, and research seminars. The project has progressed from foundational partnerships to practical application, demonstrating clear continuity and expanding influence. Building on earlier initiatives, the artists-in-residence programme now engages disabled residents in Borneo, translating research into creative learning practice. Activities such as REMIX Play and international workshops, including a recent Malaysian artist’s visit to the UK, highlight the project’s ability to scale and adapt its approaches across contexts.

Finding 15	Strength of evidence
Co-publication reflects strong partnerships and the breadth of Newton Fund research networks.	Emerging

Co-publication between UK institutions and Newton partner countries emerged as a key indicator of partnership strength. Data science analysis (see Annex 4) shows that these collaborations were extensive and often extended beyond bilateral ties to include researchers from other middle-income and high-income countries. Alongside strong UK–partner country relationships, significant co-publication occurred with American, Australian, French, German and Japanese researchers, as well as contributors from a range of other countries. This pattern highlights the Newton Fund’s role in embedding funded research within global networks. See also Figure 11, which highlights first authorship by MIC researchers.

Figure 11. Publications with authors from collaborating countries



Data sources: RODA, Researchfish, WOS, OpenAlex, DSIT

Value for Money

The evaluation conducted a VfM assessment of the Newton Fund that followed the approach adopted by DSIT (in response to EQ5). The assessment builds on the methodology established earlier by the Fund.³⁰ The assessment is based on 50 case studies from the Outcomes and Impact modules, including documentary evidence and interview data from these cases. The VfM findings are included across this report, but a summary is included here. A more detailed VfM assessment can be found in Annex 3: Value for Money.

Finding 16	Strength of evidence
VfM was not embedded in early design, but the Fund improved significantly over time.	Limited

The Newton Fund’s approach to VfM evolved substantially during its lifetime. In its early years, the Fund lacked a clear strategy at both programme and country levels and operated without formal VfM or monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) frameworks. Resources were allocated based largely on the absorptive capacity of UK POs rather than partner country needs. Funding was disbursed quickly, with limited attention to equitable partnerships, and UK ODA remained largely tied to UK institutions. Weak guidance and oversight from BEIS (now DSIT) affected accountability and coordination. The 2019 ICAI review highlighted these design gaps, noting that despite them, the Fund still produced strong research outputs and enhanced UK soft power through science diplomacy.

By 2021, ICAI’s follow-up review found that the Fund had “operationally transformed”. BEIS introduced an Operational Framework³¹ in 2020, formalised governance structures and implemented a joint MEL strategy. These changes strengthened ODA compliance and improved strategic alignment with partner countries. Later phases also saw greater attention to gender equality, research capacity building and more intentional partnerships, collectively enhancing effectiveness and potential for long-term impact.

The final evaluation, in 2022, reaffirmed these improvements, noting progress toward intended outcomes such as multidisciplinary research, equitable partnerships and

³⁰ Peterson, H. (2023) Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) or the Highway? An Alternative Road to Investigating the Value for Money of International Development Research. *European Journal of Development Research*, 35: 260–280; King et al. (2023) *Assessing Value for Money: the Oxford Policy Management Approach*. Oxford: OPM.

³¹ The Operational Framework improved the transparency of how BEIS outlined the primary and secondary objectives of the Fund.

improved translational capacities. However, persistent gaps in rigorous monitoring and data collection limit the ability to confidently assess overall VfM.

Finding 17	Strength of evidence
Overall, the VfM analysis of the Newton Fund shows that it has delivered good VfM.	Moderate

The Newton Fund delivered strongly against its core value proposition. It produced high-quality, multidisciplinary research positioned for use, and significantly strengthened individual and institutional research capacity in both the UK and partner countries. The Fund also fostered equitable and sustainable partnerships, including formalised government-to-government arrangements that, in some countries, helped institutionalise science and innovation collaboration. Although evidence of translation and leveraged funding was mixed, many awards contributed to early-stage innovation, policy-relevant outputs and stronger R&I ecosystems.

Value was most evident for researchers and institutions, as reflected in the capacity outcomes detailed earlier in this report. Governments also benefited through access to relevant research and enhanced strategic partnerships. However, translation into commercial and policy uptake was constrained by short funding cycles, mismatched timelines between UK and partner countries, and the absence of structured follow-on mechanisms. These same barriers limited sustainability and reduced the Fund's ability to maximise its return on investment.

Early phases of the Newton Fund lacked explicit equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) investments. EDI considerations were often addressed implicitly through researcher selection or social relevance rather than formal frameworks. Later phases introduced gender equality statements and more systematic inclusive practices, although adoption varied and disaggregated data remains limited.

Overall, the Newton Fund represents a good investment in foundational R&I collaboration, with strong direct value delivered and the potential for future impact if follow-on mechanisms are strengthened in successor funds.

Finding 18	Strength of evidence
The Fund made sound investments in the foundational elements of R&I partnerships (economy). ³²	High

Awards typically supported relevant and well-justified inputs – such as training, exchanges, research equipment, infrastructure, and dissemination platforms – leveraging existing institutional strengths and providing strong justifications for consortia with multidisciplinary/complementary expertise. Systematic evidence on procurement, pricing, or cost comparisons was largely absent across POs, limiting our ability to assess cost discipline.

Finding 19	Strength of evidence
Delivery of outputs and milestones was achieved in many cases, but performance was mixed, owing to systemic challenges (efficiency).	Moderate

The Newton Fund faced efficiency challenges at the award level, with delivery often constrained by structural and operational bottlenecks. Although many awards successfully met outputs and milestones, they did so against a backdrop of delays in funding disbursement, exchange rate fluctuations, and administrative hurdles such as procurement, licensing and due diligence. COVID-19 compounded these issues, disrupting timelines and causing no-cost extensions to be required for some projects.

Although risk and data management plans were commonly included in proposals, there was limited evidence of their systematic use during implementation. Data science analysis confirms that delays were widespread across portfolios, even though these were underreported in interviews. Award teams frequently adapted through strong relationships, proactive communication and flexible implementation – particularly where equitable delivery practices were in place. However, administrative frictions and coordination asymmetries between UK and partner institutions often slowed progress.

Overall, performance was rated as mixed, with an average score of 2.6 across 50 sampled awards (on a scale where 1 = poor, 2 = adequate, 3 = good and 4 = excellent). This

³² Foundational elements refer to the evidence, presented at the start of the Findings section, that Fund support set the stage through stronger capacities of researchers and institutions, demonstrated proof-of-concept in innovations, but did not actually achieve much in policy, practice or innovation input in the time frame.

reflects resilience in delivery despite systemic inefficiencies but also underscores the need for streamlined processes and better alignment between UK and partner country systems.

Finding 20	Strength of evidence
The Newton Fund demonstrated good cost-effectiveness, delivering strong value for most stakeholders while laying foundations for future impact.	High

Applying a fixed-budget approach, the evaluation finds that the Fund largely delivered on its value proposition. From a stakeholder perspective, value was rated as ‘good’ to ‘excellent’ for most groups. Researchers and institutions in both the UK and partner countries benefited most, gaining enhanced capacity, infrastructure, expanded networks and strengthened partnerships. Governments also realised value through access to relevant research and strategic cooperation. Benefits for the private sector and local communities were more modest, although downstream effects are likely to emerge over time.

The Fund’s contribution to longer-term value creation is evident in its strategic investments in research capacity, infrastructure and partnerships. Many awards produced high-quality, policy-relevant outputs aligned with the SDGs, and some have already been taken up by national governments or international agencies. Even where uptake or commercialisation has not yet occurred, awards delivered open access tools, proof-of-concept innovations and foundational research with clear future potential. Systems-level effects were also observed, including new governance processes, enhanced bilateral cooperation and strengthened R&I ecosystems, particularly where awards aligned with national priorities and were sustained through local ownership.

Cost-effectiveness was strongest for direct investments such as training, infrastructure and dissemination, but broader or downstream benefits have yet to fully materialise. At the system level, the Fund helped formalise bilateral cooperation, establish co-funding mechanisms and joint peer review panels, and position institutions to engage in regional and global research frameworks such as EU Horizon. These impacts were most likely where awards were strategically aligned with national goals and built durable partnerships. Where follow-on funding or alumni engagement was lacking, pathways to sustained impact were less certain.

The Fund consistently delivered high-quality, innovative research outputs across disciplines. Bibliometric analysis confirms strong citation impact, with Newton publications outperforming the UK average. Most awards aligned closely with partner country priorities

and incorporated dissemination strategies, including conferences, workshops, websites and open access datasets, to position research for subsequent use.

Enabling and constraining factors in Newton Fund success

The findings outlined above condition the Newton Fund's ability to deliver long-term outcomes and impacts. Progress was shaped by a set of enabling and constraining factors. These factors operated at individual, institutional and national ecosystem levels, and their influence varied across contexts. This section synthesises the most salient drivers and barriers to impact, drawing on evidence from across the findings presented in this report.

Enabling conditions of the Newton model

Enabler 1	Strength of evidence
Capacity strengthening set the foundation for policy innovation and impact.	High

Many researchers and UK counterparts noted the importance of capacity strengthening in increasing the confidence of ECRs to gain experience, build the quality of their research, engage in the research-to-policy process, and advance in their careers. Promotions occurred, both within their own countries and in the UK and internationally. New funding was also secured based on Fund experience and exposure. The findings suggest increased engagement in policy discussions and with policymakers that is expected to lead to policy change over time. Institutional capacities were also increased through infrastructure support and research management support.

Enabler 2	Strength of evidence
Alignment with national priorities increased traction with government stakeholders.	High

The Fund's flexibility in implementation supported project alignment with national development strategies (such as Vision Egypt 2030 or India's Science & Technology Innovation Roadmap). This led to stronger government support. In China, links to ministerial priorities on AMR further reinforced relevance and uptake.

Enabler 3	Strength of evidence
Government-to-government collaboration unlocked systems access.	Limited

Joint planning between governments facilitated alignment with national priorities and improved access to partner country systems. China, India and Malaysia exemplified this approach, enabling smoother implementation and mutual accountability.

Enabler 4	Strength of evidence
Interdisciplinary approaches addressed complex challenges.	High

Development challenges often spanned multiple disciplines. Projects that embraced interdisciplinary methods were better positioned to generate relevant and actionable insights.

Enabler 5	Strength of evidence
Matched funding promoted ownership and equity in partner relationships and research implementation.	Moderate

In higher middle-income countries, matched funding enhanced partner engagement and fostered more balanced relationships. Matched effort did not appear to have as strong an effect. Conversely, where matched funds were absent or delayed, equity and participation suffered.

Enabler 6	Strength of evidence
Formalised partnerships helped foster collaboration.	Moderate

Where memoranda of understanding were in place, partnerships were more equitable and productive. Countries such as Brazil, China, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Turkey and Vietnam benefited from clearly defined roles, enabling joint leadership and shared decision making. This shifted perceptions of partner institutions from implementers to co-creators of research.

Enablers of partner context

Enabler 1	Strength of evidence
Institutional readiness and leadership commitment made impact more likely.	Emerging

Impact was more likely where MIC institutions demonstrated strategic intent to strengthen research systems. Active engagement from institutional leadership was a key success factor.

Enabler 2	Strength of evidence
Pre-existing partnerships accelerated progress.	Emerging

Established partnerships with shared research agendas were more effective within the Fund's time frame. These collaborations leveraged existing trust and infrastructure, enabling quicker mobilisation and delivery.

Enabler 3	Strength of evidence
Where new partnerships were successful, shared interests and opportunities for exchange (e.g. staff exchanges, travel grants, joint research) were important.	Moderate

Partnerships were most sustainable when both sides shared a clear commitment to addressing common challenges and brought complementary expertise. Alignment around national priorities and mutual benefit created the basis for equitable collaboration.

Constraining factors

All but the final constraining factor are factors that could be designed into a fund's requirements. The final constraining factor is also a known issue in partnership funding with some MICs and could also have been considered in the time frames permitted by the Fund.

Constraints the Fund could address

Constraint 1	Strength of evidence
Short project duration limited depth and sustainability.	Emerging

The 24–36-month time frame was insufficient for new partnerships to build trust, navigate regulatory processes, and deliver complex innovations. For example, in Egypt, projects on solar cooling and biodegradable packaging struggled to move beyond set-up and pilot stages.

Constraint 2	Strength of evidence
Asymmetries in administrative resource between UK POs and partner country institutions undermined equity.	Emerging

UK POs often had dedicated teams, whereas partner country institutions relied on single points of contact. This imbalance constrained responsiveness and reinforced UK dominance in decision making.

Constraint 3	Strength of evidence
Lack (or limited) account of contextual variation limited ability to tailor support and respond to local needs.	Emerging

The Fund's design did not account adequately for differing country contexts. This limited its ability to tailor support and respond to local needs. Although some projects adapted over time, the absence of a transparent strategy constrained responsiveness. Although the Fund did not take this into account in design, in some research awards, accommodations were made based on learning about the local context.

Constraint 4	Strength of evidence
Lack of strategic planning limited the potential for success.	Emerging

The Fund's early years lacked strategic direction, operating without VfM³³ or monitoring³⁴ frameworks. Initially, funding was disbursed with little intentionality around building equitable partnerships. Funding decisions were often driven by UK delivery capacity rather than partner country needs, and oversight from BEIS (now DSIT) was minimal.

³³ According to ICAI (2019): "the Fund is far from optimised to constitute the best use of ODA to achieve development outcomes (its primary purpose). Some of its projects do not seem to fall within the ODA definition. There is no Fund-level approach to capacity building and no coherent approach to VfM."

³⁴ The ICAI review (2019) found that the Fund did not have a Fund-level approach to capturing development outcomes over its first five years. It noted: "A lack of Fund-level system for capturing outcomes significantly hampers the ability of the Fund to learn and adapt, as there is no robust way to collect evidence on how the Fund achieves development impact." It also noted that individual POs used their own reporting tools to capture outputs and outcomes from grantees, but that these tools were not designed for the purpose of capturing development impact and that they were not coherent across POs. BEIS thus had no means to aggregate any meaningful data or compare performance across POs or countries to measure the collective impact of the Fund.

Constraint 5	Strength of evidence
Underinvestment in the translation pillar limited the potential for research to inform policy or commercialisation.	High

Only 15% of Fund spending was allocated to translation activities, limiting the potential for research to inform policy or commercialisation. This reflected a broader lack of institutional prioritisation of research uptake.

Constraint 6	Strength of evidence
Lack of follow-on funding stalled innovation.	Emerging

Without bridging finance, many promising policy and commercial innovations remained at proof-of-concept stage. The absence of mechanisms to support scale-up into policy or commercial systems curtailed long-term impact.

National constraints

Constraint 7	Strength of evidence
Political and regulatory barriers delayed delivery.	Limited

Visa issues, import restrictions and unfamiliarity with international collaboration created delays and eroded trust. These challenges were particularly acute in contexts with rigid financial and administrative systems.

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

As noted in the introduction to this evaluation:

“The primary objective of the Newton Fund is the economic, sustainable and social development of partner countries which is achieved through a bilateral partnership that centres research and innovation collaboration around that country’s development needs and aims to strengthen their research and innovation capacity. Alongside this, the programmes we fund through the Newton Fund contribute to the continued strength of the UK’s research and innovation system and support the UK’s wider prosperity and global influence.”³⁵

The Fund worked towards this objective through building partnerships with MICs, supporting multidisciplinary research on development challenges faced in those countries, and building R&I capacities.

Our mandate was twofold: to assess the progress towards impact at the 10-year mark in a Fund that anticipated impact being achieved at approximately the 15-year mark (EQs 1–5); and to comment on what can be learned to support future research funds in the ODA space (EQ6). The findings presented to this point in the report of the evaluation address the elements that were considered essential for the success of the Fund. Here we summarise our conclusions around the two key areas identified in the findings section, i.e. long-term outcomes and impacts, and strategy and operational considerations. This is followed by four recommendations that could improve delivery in future funds.

Conclusions

Long-term outcomes and impacts

Strengthening national research ecosystems requires engagement at the researcher, research institution and research ecosystem levels.

The findings demonstrate the value of working at all three levels of the research ecosystem, supporting not only high-quality research but also research management strengthening and the networking needed to build a national research ecosystem.

ECRs were found to be an important starting point, in terms of strengthening their capacities for high-quality research, building experience in publishing in peer-reviewed journals and promoting their findings, and developing leadership skills. Institutions benefited not only from

³⁵ BEIS (2020) The Newton Fund: Operational Framework. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165497/newton-fund-operational-framework.pdf, p.6.

stronger researchers who are building the reputations of those institutions but also from administrative and research management skill strengthening; and building and strengthening research networks of institutions and researchers in MICs supported the national research ecosystems of participating countries. Both stronger ecosystems and stronger research institutions are important to the ability – and opportunity – of researchers to deliver high-quality research. A focus on interdisciplinary research helped enhance capacities to address complex development challenges.

The Fund is on track to achieve its expected outcomes in contributing to stronger R&I systems through these efforts.

Limited progress has been made in contributing to policies and practices.

Inadequate support to build the connections and relationships with policy makers, the short duration of awards, limited resources devoted to building connections, and a lack of forward planning at the Fund level left many awardees with limited opportunities. Where successes were identified, these tended to be among the research teams that had pre-existing relationships and were building on existing research efforts.

It is unclear if the Fund is on track to achieve the intended policy and practice impacts. The potential exists, but it is most likely where the teams have built the necessary connections with relevant policy and practice communities, or where they are able to take advantage of new research funding opportunities to expand their work.

As with efforts to influence policy and practice, limited progress has been made in commercialisation.

The same limitations emerged as outlined above for policy and practice influence, but of course with different actors – those who are active in commercialising new technologies or are investors who are attracted to the opportunity.

It is unclear if the awards are on track to achieve impact in developing commercially viable products based on their innovations. Where innovation teams are able to attract the investment that they need to promote their innovations that have reached proof-of-concept stage, new commercialisation and trade opportunities may emerge.

Strategy and operational considerations

The evaluation elicited a number of strategic and operational considerations that might also be relevant to future research funds.

Matched funding was a useful requirement to build shared ownership of design and delivery of the R&I activities. **Matched effort provided some value add where matched funding could not be achieved.**

Government-to-government collaboration helped to ensure relevance, access to country systems for the researchers, and mutual accountability, each of which contributed to stronger, more useful research as well as enhancing country ownership of the research and its findings.

Partnership management did not always demonstrate equity in decision making in design, implementation and oversight of research and innovation awards. It was sometimes challenging, given different funding and reporting timelines and the pressures imposed by multiple reporting lines. Where funding was matched, equity appeared to be stronger, but this was not possible with all countries.

Partnership achievements were partly conditioned by the stage of development of research relationships. Partnerships were strongest where they built on pre-existing partnerships. Where research ecosystems were better developed, more progress was made towards impact. The expansion of the Fund’s bilateral awards led to some unexpected strengthening of South–South R&I partnerships and capacities for ECRs.

VfM is evidenced in sound investments in the foundational elements of R&I for development impact. However, systematic evidence on procurement, pricing, or cost comparisons was largely absent, and the VfM assessment would have benefited from stronger clarity and rigorous data on these.

Strategic planning did not take place at the launch of the Newton Fund. This lack of clear goals and outcomes from the start contributed to limited monitoring of key data points throughout implementation and an absence of sustainability or exit plans.

Enabling and Constraining Factors

Here we revisit the table of factors developed in the Findings section of the evaluation. It suggests important design principles that could support the design of future funds, in terms of both what worked well and what created challenges for the Newton Fund. It also summarises considerations in the partner environment that should be well understood in advance and taken into consideration in the design of a fund.

Table 6. Summary of enabling and constraining factors

Enabling factors	Constraining factors
Fund-level context	
Capacity strengthening set the foundation for policy and innovation impact	Short project duration limited depth and sustainability
Alignment with national priorities increased traction	Asymmetries in administrative resource between UK POs and partner country institutions undermined equity
Government-to-government collaboration unlocked systems access	Lack (or limited) account of contextual variation, limited ability to tailor support and respond to local needs
Interdisciplinary approaches addressed complex challenges	Lack of strategic planning limited the potential for success

Matched funding promoted ownership and equity in partner relationships and research implementation	Underinvestment in the translation pillar limited the potential to translate research into policy or commercial ventures
Formalised partnerships help foster collaboration	Lack of follow-on funding stalled innovation
Partner context	
Institutional readiness and leadership commitment made impact more likely	Political and regulatory barriers delayed delivery
Pre-existing partnerships accelerated progress	
Shared interests and opportunities for exchange were important for successful partnerships	

Recommendations

We focus on four key recommendations that emerged from the findings and conclusions of this evaluation. Because the Newton Fund is closed, these recommendations are targeted at future ODA R&I funds. We think they could strengthen a fund significantly. They are necessarily interrelated, but each could also be considered on its own merits. Each of them implies more than one action, but we suggest they serve as a guide to move towards; and they imply strong relationships between the UK and partner countries – at the government-to-government level, at the research agency level, at the university level and at the individual researcher level.

Support stronger research ecosystems

Strengthening research ecosystems means working at all three levels of a research system – individual, institutional and ecosystem.

Individual research capacity strengthening is foundational, but on its own it is insufficient. Strong research institutions and research ecosystems are necessary to retaining and making effective use of research talent.

Funder

Continue to explicitly include support for capacity strengthening at all three levels of a research ecosystem that especially values the contributions of ECRs and the strengthening of institutions and networks.

Consider different award time frames based on need.

Partner organisation

At the launch of a partnership, collaborate with MIC partners on an approach to institutional capacity strengthening that accommodates the needs of the country and is informed by an assessment of the institution's leadership, research systems, and ways of working. This should consider strengthening research capacity, supporting institutions with research management and delivery, and promoting networks and relationships that enhance research ecosystems. Where research is intended to support policy and practice change or commercialisation of

innovation, ensure clear alignment with national goals and priorities. Expectations and indicators of success should match the capacities and priorities of the country.

Prioritise knowledge translation

The absence of a deliberate strategy and resources applied to knowledge translation, whether of policy influence, practice influence or commercialisation, meant limited focus on an aspect of the Newton Fund that is central to its goals of contributing to economic and social development. A knowledge translation plan should identify the key resources beyond the research team that will be needed to achieve success, which usually includes policymakers and practice leaders. The commercialisation of innovations, investors, technical experts, incubators, IP management frameworks, and those with specialised skills, such as Innovate UK, will need to be identified.

Funder

Make knowledge translation an explicit requirement in the design of a fund. Provide support to POs for its development.

Ensure that an exit plan or sustainability strategy is in place before the end of an award, to enhance the potential for follow-up.

Partner organisation

In collaboration with the MIC partner, develop a clear and resourced knowledge translation plan, and monitor and adapt it as needed over the life of the award. Within that plan, identify an exit plan or sustainability strategy to enhance the likelihood of follow-up.

Consider multiple delivery modalities

The Newton Fund was developed largely as a one-size-fits-all fund (with some exceptions, such as the Newton Prize). Adaptations were made by POs and their MIC partners, but the overall design placed common structures and goals on all awards. Because partner countries are at different stages of the development of their research ecosystems and have different priorities, a more flexible approach merits consideration. A more flexible approach does not mean a less rigorous approach but rather one with more rigour, with careful monitoring and evaluation of progress.

One key point of differentiation is research partnership experience – where pre-existing partnerships are in place, more progress is made on high-quality research. The trade-off here is that a fund usually does not want to only support existing strong partnerships but to be part of building new research relationships with the UK. A strategy for a fund can help build a portfolio of awards that balances the potential for strong research outcomes from pre-existing partnerships with the potential for building new relationships with the UK and strengthening research systems.

If such an approach is adopted, a clear strategy for POs and country partners to guide their design of programmes is essential. Different indicators of success should be considered across the portfolio; for example, a focus on new R&I partnership building would not be well

evaluated by looking at its successes in creating impact within the time frame of the fund's ToC.

Funder

Consider a portfolio approach in a fund strategy that accommodates different priorities and partnership experience. Monitor progress to ensure the goals are being met.

Partner organisation

Together with country partners, assess the priorities that can be addressed in awards or award programmes.

Improve data and knowledge management

The findings note a number of gaps in data availability, including both data that should have been collected during the life of the fund (for example on matched funding and VfM) and any follow-up monitoring since completion of the awards – some being completed up to five years ago. These gaps have limited DSIT, POs³⁶ and partner countries in their management of the Fund resources, and they limit what we can say about the outcomes and impacts of the Fund. It is our understanding that some improvements have been undertaken in data systems over the life of the Fund and since its completion; but in terms of both management of public resources and ODA compliance, it is crucial to continue to improve data management and use.

Funder

Make the development of a clear strategy and a monitoring and evaluation plan from the start a priority. Anticipate new funding programmes with skeleton data frameworks and guidance that could be rapidly scaled up to ensure more complete data, both for managing the programme and for ensuring accountability. Ensure that ODA requirements are integrated into any strategy for an ODA-supported fund.

Explicitly aim to reduce the structural barriers and asymmetries of partnerships by supporting institutions with the processes, systems and resources to deliver the research partnership effectively. This could include common reporting requirements to reduce the reporting burden on country partners, balance in research partnership management, and planning for different budget cycles.

Make ongoing monitoring of progress a priority over the life of a fund.

Partner organisation

Research funded through ODA is focused on supporting development improvements. As such, it has different reporting requirements and expectations from research funding through programmes for foundational research. This should be taken into account in programme design and management, and it may require new data and knowledge management systems.

³⁶ Some POs had more data available than others, but the gaps remain at all levels.

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