



Research Councils UK
our vision
for international
collaboration

Research Councils UK is the strategic partnership of the UK's seven Research Councils. We invest annually around £3 billion in research. Our focus is on excellence with impact. We nurture the highest quality research, as judged by international peer review providing the UK with a competitive advantage. Global research requires we sustain a diversity of funding approaches, fostering international collaborations, and providing access to the best facilities and infrastructure, and locating skilled researchers in stimulating environments. Our research achieves impact – the demonstrable contribution to society and the economy made by knowledge and skilled people. To deliver impact, researchers and businesses need to engage and collaborate with the public, business, government and the third sector.

The seven UK Research Councils are:

- Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Biotechnology & Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC)
- Economic & Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Engineering & Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC)
- Medical Research Council (MRC)
- Natural Environment Research Council (NERC)
- Science & Technology Facilities Council (STFC)

our vision

for international collaboration



“In a fast-changing world fresh opportunities and new research partners are emerging.”

PROFESSOR ALAN THORPE
CHAIR, RESEARCH COUNCILS UK

The UK is among the world's top research nations, but its research base can only thrive if it engages with the best minds, organisations and facilities wherever they are placed in the world. A thriving research base is essential to maintain competitiveness and to bring benefit to the society and economy of the UK.

UK researchers already have an excellent record of working across borders. Almost half of more than 90,000 research articles published by UK researchers in 2008 had a co-author from another country. Co-authorship with non-UK collaborators tends to produce significant impact gains: e.g. papers with USA, Germany and France have impact 50% higher than the UK research base average.¹

Over half (54%) of all postgraduate students² and around 16% of permanent academic staff³ in higher education institutions in the UK are non-UK nationals and this is an increasing trend, demonstrating the internationalisation of the UK research base.

This strategy sets out how RCUK can grasp new opportunities and build on the UK's already impressive international reach. The strategy aims to:

- increase RCUK influence in international research strategy and policy development
- provide opportunities for excellent UK researchers to flourish in global research collaborations
- enhance the value and impact of research through international collaboration
- show RCUK commitment to key global responsibilities in a world where challenges cross national boundaries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. J. Thorpe'.

¹International Comparative Performance of the UK Research Base. Evidence Ltd. September 2009

²Higher Education HECCE Statistics Agency 2007/08

³Staff employed at -funded HEIs. HECCE 2008

Through the RCUK International Strategy, we outline the ways in which RCUK helps the best researchers work together, wherever they are in the world.

International research

Research Councils UK (RCUK) published its first International Strategy in 2007. Against the backdrop of a fast-changing global research landscape it responded to the Warry¹ report encouraging us to “foster the development of partnerships between research groups in the UK and overseas centres of excellence”. Since then, exciting new research developments in countries around the world mean that we can be more dynamic in engagement with researchers overseas. To ensure that the UK can work in partnership with these countries, RCUK has opened three new offices in China, the US and India, in addition to their long-standing UK Research Office in Brussels (UKRO).

The importance of international collaboration in research was reinforced in the Sainsbury review² and research institutions in the UK have also been encouraged to open up to the world³. The ambition to take a holistic approach to internationalisation brings together UK research with higher education, and increases the profile of the UK as a partner of choice, and a location for study and inward investment. Now that the new RCUK Overseas Offices are open and active it is timely to publish this refreshed international strategy, setting out RCUK ambitions for international collaboration for the coming years.

This new strategy outlines the ways in which RCUK helps the best researchers work together, wherever they are in the world

This new strategy outlines the ways in which RCUK helps the best researchers work together, wherever they are in the world. We recognise that research is critical to solving grand challenges, and that increasingly the solutions will require work across boundaries, crossing disciplines and borders between nations. Balancing collaboration with competitiveness means we can increase our impact, bringing considerable benefit to the society and economy of the UK by working with partners overseas.

The majority of funding is allocated in response to researcher proposals, so RCUK aims to have a flexible and creative approach to international collaboration. A portfolio of different opportunities is available which fit a range of research communities and research challenges. Future approaches will continue to build on experience and, importantly, will be developed collaboratively with funding partners overseas. A strong evidence base will help to develop policies which will support collaboration with maximum efficiency and minimum bureaucracy.

Research partnerships contribute to a larger UK agenda for international collaboration and RCUK will actively generate greater dialogue and integration between various stakeholders in the UK and internationally.

¹Increasing the Economic Impact of the Research Councils. Warry 2006

²The Race to the Top: A Review of Government's Science and Innovation Policies, Sainsbury 2007

³Internationalisation of Higher Education, a Ten Year View, Drummond Bone 2008

Increase RCUK influence in international research strategy and policy development

The first steps to developing the productive partnerships that lead to international collaborative research are taken by ensuring that the vision for collaboration is clear to potential partners. RCUK will work effectively with those partners to understand and shape shared ambitions, influencing agendas for the benefit of the UK research community.

RCUK will:

- work with others to ensure coherence at the UK level

RCUK influences and is influenced by a wide range of stakeholders; it aims to work effectively with them to ensure a coherent and considered UK position on issues relating to international collaboration.

- increase influence and impact overseas

It is becoming more important to work with overseas partners to ensure alignment of research priorities. Where we share priorities or have complementary strengths, RCUK works to leverage investment to mutual advantage. We value bilateral interaction with individual funding partners, and multilateral engagement via international organisations and programmes.

- influence the political debate on policies that affect, for example, researcher mobility, regulatory affairs, and access to data

RCUK seeks to influence the environment in which global research is conducted by shaping an appropriate regulatory environment and promoting best practice in areas such as peer review, open access to publications, and access to data.

By successfully following this strategy, RCUK will be well placed to lead and respond to changes in national and global research environments with a long term vision to provide flexible and creative solutions.

RCUK seeks to influence the environment within which global research is conducted

Building partnerships

Collaboration at the national level allows RCUK to present a coherent message to international partners. RCUK works closely with other UK stakeholders such as the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), the Science and Innovation Network, the British Council, the Technology Strategy Board, the Department for International Development and the National Academies. We also contribute to co-ordination bodies relevant to international research, including the Global Science and Innovation Forum and the UK Collaborative on Development Sciences.

The opening of three new Overseas Offices has heralded a change in the way that the RCUK is working overseas. Recognising the importance of partnerships in developing approaches to challenges that cross national boundaries, these Offices have the ambition to better understand the drivers and context of research funding organisations in China, India and the US, both now and in the future. The Research Councils' UK Research Office (UKRO) in Brussels, established in 1984, continues to be the UK's leading information and advice service on EU funding for research and higher education, and provides important policy advice on European issues to RCUK.

UK agrees deal with Canada to share polar facilities

RCUK works bilaterally and multilaterally with organisations in Europe and around the world in research closely focused to their particular remits. For example, a new agreement between the UK and Canadian governments to share ships, aircraft and research stations in the Arctic and Antarctic to increase science cooperation paves the way for a greater understanding of the rapidly changing polar regions. Results from International Polar Year highlight the need for more research on the regional and global consequences of disappearing ice and melting permafrost and illustrate how international cooperation is necessary to address these major challenges. Canada and the UK are well matched – both are signatories to the Antarctic Treaty and the partnership allows Canada to take advantage of the British Antarctic Survey facilities, while the UK can increase the capacity of its Arctic research base through access to extensive Canadian arctic infrastructure.



Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases

RCUK represented by MRC is a member of the Global Alliance for Chronic Diseases, along with seven of the world's foremost health agencies including the Chinese Academy of Medical Sciences, the US National Institutes of Health, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Australian National Medical and Health Research Council. The Alliance seeks to coordinate research activities that will address on a global scale the prevention and treatment of chronic non-communicable diseases (CNCDs).

Their first three research funding priorities are to lower hypertension (high blood pressure), reduce tobacco use, and the indoor pollution caused by crude cooking stoves in developing countries, which together factor into roughly 1 in 5 deaths each year. The Alliance's multi-country, multi-disciplinary research in these topics will focus in particular on the needs of low and middle income countries, and on low income populations of more developed countries.

European engagement

The UK academic community is currently the most successful in winning support from the European Union's Framework Programme for research, and is also a key partner for non-European countries wishing to participate in the Programme. Working through the RCUK Europe Group, and together with BIS we will ensure that RCUK is a strong voice in Europe and we aim to ensure that future Framework Programmes and other major initiatives align with UK priorities.

Shaping European regulation with e-Science and UK expertise

RCUK e-Science expertise is being applied across Europe, defining how data may be accessed to provide an evidence-base for policies on environmental issues. In 2007, the European Parliament issued a directive creating INSPIRE (Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community). Set up to provide policymakers and the public with greater access to environmental data, the European Commission selected Dr Andrew Woolf, from CEDAR (Centre for Environmental Data Archival and Associated Research) at the Rutherford Appleton Laboratory, as one of the scientists to help develop these standards.

RCUK contributes to a variety of European Commission and other European groupings via standing committees and programme boards in specific disciplines. This participation strengthens lobbying power on behalf of UK researchers.

Provide opportunities for excellent UK researchers to flourish in global research collaborations

Once a shared vision has been developed, a shared approach to implementation is required to ensure efficient and effective ways to support excellent research.

RCUK works flexibly to ensure that funding mechanisms can fit the variety of interactions necessary to build partnerships, from first contact to large collaborative programmes.

RCUK will:

- facilitate international researcher partnerships

RCUK encourages UK researchers to gain experience overseas and provides them with the professional and personal skills that underpin successful international collaboration. The RCUK Research Careers and Diversity Strategy sets out our approach to skills training, enhancing the mobility of UK researchers.

RCUK supports international collaborations through visits, workshops and research grants.

- engage with international partners to develop robust processes for implementing, assessing and evaluating international research collaborations

Mechanisms for bilateral and multilateral research engagement can be complex and bureaucratic. RCUK will work with partners to align funding organisation processes, and develop efficient mechanisms for identifying and supporting excellent collaborative proposals.

- help UK researchers gain access to the best data and facilities for their research, wherever these may be in the world

Long term national planning through the biennial Large Facilities Roadmap supports agreement on priority funding for diverse facilities in the UK and overseas including research ships, high performance computing, subscription to large physical laboratories and access to social and economic data.

A successful outcome from this strategy will ensure that efficient mechanisms are in place to allow the best UK researchers to collaborate with their counterparts anywhere in the world, providing flexible opportunities for the UK research base.

RCUK aims to make it simpler for UK researchers to collaborate with their preferred research partners around the world, by supporting enabling activities and reducing barriers

Reducing barriers

In an increasingly globalised world competition is strong. Simple and open procedures will help to reduce barriers to collaboration and ensure that the UK remains a partner of choice. A barrier to collaborative international funding is the risk that a proposed joint project will be approved in one country but not in another. RCUK aims to simplify decision-making to ensure that projects are assessed under a single peer review system when they are funded by more than one organisation.

RCUK/FAPESP Memorandum of Understanding

In 2009 RCUK and FAPESP, the Research Council for the State of São Paulo signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the existing research links between the UK and Brazil to help encourage and support proposals that involve international collaborative teams.

Researchers from the UK and Brazil (a joint community of 75,000 academics) may apply for funds from both countries primarily through the RCUK 'responsive mode' schemes. RCUK will receive and assess collaborative proposals from eligible applicants in both countries on behalf of both organisations. FAPESP nominated experts will be involved with the peer review and decision making process throughout.

Joint peer review with China

In 2009 RCUK represented by EPSRC invested in the area of nanospintronics, in a ground-breaking partnership with the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC). Matched funding and a single peer review process ensured a truly collaborative activity which is a model for further joint calls between RCUK and NSFC. Nanospintronics has applications in areas such as data storage, microelectronics, sensors, quantum computing and bio-medicine.



“RCUK aims to simplify decision-making”

Left to right:
Professor Ian Diamond
(RCUK), Professor Carlos
Henrique de Brito Cruz
(FAPESP)

Access to facilities and data

UK researchers have access to a range of state-of-the-art national and overseas facilities through access arrangements agreed by RCUK. To ensure UK researchers will have such access in the future, RCUK will support the construction of major new facilities at home and, in some cases, abroad and will negotiate access arrangements to those new overseas facilities which complement RCUK's existing capacity. Not all the international facilities that receive support involve large pieces of equipment. RCUK is involved in the European Social Survey which provides consistent social and economic data from over 30 nations.



Support for overseas facilities

RCUK represented by STFC fund the UK's involvement with CERN, the international particle physics laboratory in Switzerland, and other bodies such as the European Space Agency, the European Southern Observatory and European Synchrotron Radiation Facility.

The UK is one of the biggest contributors to the Large Hadron Collider, supplying hardware, computing and scientific expertise to the project. RCUK invested more than £500m over the thirteen year construction period in funding the UK membership of CERN and supporting researchers from 20 UK institutions, who helped build the LHC's four detectors.

RCUK represented by NERC also fund the UK's subscription for the Integrated Ocean Drilling Programme (IODP) enabling UK researchers to participate in this international research programme exploring the Earth's history and structure recorded in the seafloor sediments and rocks. This provides important information about plate tectonics used for understanding hazards such as earthquakes and tsunamis, and about past climate change and environmental conditions.

Enabling activities

Many researchers benefit from working overseas, particularly in the early part of their careers. This experience provides them with different skills and ideas and lays the foundation for career-long collaborations. RCUK promotes the UK as a place to undertake research and encourages researchers to spend time overseas.

RCUK runs a number of schemes that foster international collaboration, from establishing first links, to developing long term relationships between researchers in the UK and another country. These include establishing partnership links between research institutions, building on existing links between research groups and extending networks, and encouraging researchers from overseas to undertake research in the UK as well as giving UK researchers the opportunity to spend time abroad.

Jointly funded partnerships

Co-funding by overseas agencies is an important feature of long standing international partnering schemes. The Japan Science and Technology agency joined together with BBSRC to focus on building links between the systems biology research bases in both countries. ESRC launched a new India-UK scholar exchange scheme in partnership with the India Council for Social Science Research. Ten awards were made in its first year helping Indian and UK researchers collaborate on a range of research topics including reproductive health, human rights, the evolution of financial systems and household income and employment.

Members of RCUK pay the UK subscription to the Human Frontier Science Program (HFSP), which was founded in 1989 to support international research and training at the frontiers of the life sciences. Partners in this initiative include the G7 nations and Switzerland, Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the European Union and India. In particular, HFSP aims to encourage research at the interface between the life sciences and physical sciences with special emphasis on creating opportunities for young scientists. The UK competes strongly for funding and routinely wins back more than twice its contribution to the common pot.



Library of Congress scholarship scheme

The prestigious Library of Congress Scholarship scheme, established in 2005, continues to attract growing numbers of excellent applicants. The scheme offers doctoral students and early career researchers the chance to spend up to six months carrying out their research in the vast and internationally renowned collections of the Library of Congress in Washington DC. For many of those taking up these scholarships, a large part of the benefit of the scheme lies in the opportunities presented by meeting and working alongside researchers from around the globe who share an interest in their particular field. Many develop valuable and lasting networks during their time in the United States.

Not only does this give access to the largest library and archive in the world, but also offers opportunity to network with Kluge Fellows and scholars, with the potential to create career-long relationships. A similar scheme operates with the National Institutes for the Humanities in Japan.

Enhance the value and impact of research through international collaboration

Collaboration with overseas partners increases the impact of research and enhances the reputation of the UK as a preferred location for research and business investment. RCUK works with stakeholders to ensure that the impact of international collaboration is understood and enhances the international reputation of the UK.

RCUK will:

- encourage UK researchers to consider the value of international collaboration when looking for partners

RCUK will promote awareness among researchers and research institutions of the value of working with overseas partners to increase productivity and innovation. We shall identify and tackle barriers to collaboration.

- promote the UK as a world centre for research and innovation

High quality research attracts inward R&D investment by business and brings wealth to the UK. Most major enterprises are multinational, and many are keen to work with UK academics to develop innovative solutions to their business challenges.

The UK continues to be an attractive location for overseas students and researchers. RCUK will work with others to attract the best minds to study and work in UK institutions, thereby increasing our capacity to work at the cutting edge.

By following this strategy, the UK will be recognised as a prime partner for collaborative R&D and investment from business, as well as a key destination for students and researchers from all over the world.

RCUK promotes the UK as an attractive location for overseas students and researchers

Attracting investment

The quality of the UK research base attracts companies from around the world. The UK has excellent researchers, world-renowned research centres, highly skilled graduates emerging from our universities and we are building strong relations between researchers and business. Companies such as Ford, Pfizer, Airbus, Nokia and Syngenta have chosen the UK for large scale R&D investment.

RCUK also works closely with the Technology Strategy Board in supporting national academic and industry partnerships. Internationally RCUK and the Technology Strategy Board support UK businesses in EU programmes, helping them to access EU funding and encouraging universities to drive innovation and the creation of small/medium enterprises.

Innovation in crops partnership

The John Innes Centre, Institute of Food Research and Rothamsted Research are part of the innovation in crops partnership, based at the University of East Anglia, that has attracted £2M from EEDA and the European Union to develop an enterprise hub to boost eco-businesses and create jobs. The focus is on maximising the use of crops for fibre, high value chemicals, proteins and starches and using renewables for low carbon products.



Left to right: Owen Mugune, Christine Aloit, Dr Charles Midega, Professor John Pickett and Dr Zeyaur Khan

Societal and cultural impacts

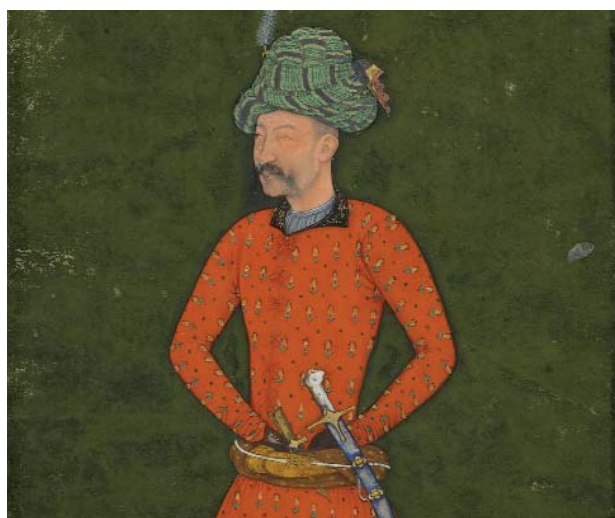
Enhancing quality of life

Trials of a screen-based malaria prevention programme in 500 homes in The Gambia, Africa, have led to a 50 per cent reduction in malaria transmission and anaemia in children. A child dies from malaria in Africa every 30 seconds and infection can lead to an increased risk of anaemia, which can also prove fatal. Yet to date, screens have often been ignored in favour of using drugs and insecticides.

The research, also funded by the Department for International Development, was carried out by scientists from Durham University, the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and MRC The Gambia.

The trial tested two types of screens to protect children against malaria. Both interventions were found to dramatically reduce malaria transmission.

Part of the Village E-Science for Life project (VESEL), a device to help some of the most impoverished farmers in Africa maximise crop yields, is being tested at London's Kew Gardens. Developed by the University of Leeds, the sensor device allows farmers to use available water more efficiently, minimising wastage and helping to optimise their harvests.



Developing cultural relationships

A UK research team undertook the research behind the major Shah 'Abbas exhibition at the British Museum and gained access to important Iranian cultural artefacts thanks to strong relationships with Iranian academic colleagues. The exhibition has been credited with helping to improve relations between the UK and Iran.

The Trustees of the British Museum

Show RCUK commitment to key global responsibilities in a world where challenges cross national boundaries

The importance of co-ordinated international effort in changing views and delivering solutions to grand environmental and societal challenges is gaining greater global recognition, and continues to be a part of RCUK activities.

RCUK will:

- address key global challenges using research as a driving force for change

RCUK supported research often has major consequences beyond national boundaries, bringing both direct and indirect national benefits, and influencing decision making at the highest levels.

As we implement current priority programmes and develop future priorities, we recognise the broader context of these programmes in shaping international agendas and addressing grand challenges.

- promote the use of research to provide underpinning evidence for sound policy development

The acceleration of globalisation and environmental change has significant impact on individuals, the economy and society. Governments and international organisations will need to make far-reaching decisions in the coming decades. To make the right informed decisions they need the best available evidence, based on excellent research.

- work with others to recognise the value of international collaboration in building good relationships and improving understanding between nations

Relationships fostered in research partnerships contribute to enhanced mutual understanding, improving wider collaboration and security across international borders. RCUK optimises these benefits by working with others including the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government's Science and Innovation Network.

The RCUK International Strategy recognises the value of research findings, in addressing key global issues such as poverty, disease, hunger, environmental degradation and security, and helping to inform policy solutions.

Research has an important role in informing and underpinning international policy development

Addressing global challenges

A team led by the Sussex Energy Group at the University of Sussex has made significant contributions to the search for a new global deal on climate change. Research has focused on the role of low carbon innovation in developing countries. The group and research partner, The Energy and Resources Institute, India, have been working on a project initiated by the UK and Indian governments on low carbon technology transfer. As well as being discussed at side events at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference (2008) and at the Delhi Sustainable Development Summit (2009), these findings informed the UK's position at the UN climate talks in Copenhagen (2009).

Increasing understanding beyond national boundaries

West African nations are extremely vulnerable to climate change, through changes in the West African Monsoon which may have profound impacts on their health, water resources, food security and demography. The international African Monsoon Multidisciplinary Analysis programme (AMMA) will improve understanding of the West African Monsoon and its influence on the physical, chemical and biological environment, regionally and globally. RCUK represented by NERC is contributing £2m funding towards the AMMA programme which is one of the biggest experiments on climate and environment in Africa. AMMA involves over 1000 people from 60 research institutes and 28 countries.



Improving health care in Africa

Researchers and health care workers from Africa and the UK have collaborated closely to run the Development of Anti-Retroviral Therapy in Africa (DART) clinical trial. This was the largest clinical trial of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for people with HIV infection ever run in Africa.

The trial found that regular laboratory tests offer little additional clinical benefit to populations when compared to careful clinical monitoring. These results suggest that many more people with HIV in Africa could be treated for the same amount of money as is currently spent if lab tests are not routinely used to monitor the effects of ART. The evidence will be of value to low income or resource poor countries that are prioritising ART access over investment in expensive laboratory facilities.

DART was sponsored and funded by the UK Medical Research Council. Further funding was provided by the UK Department for International Development and the Rockefeller Foundation. Antiretroviral drugs given to trial participants were donated by GlaxoSmithKline, Gilead Sciences, Abbott Laboratories and Boehringer Ingelheim.



Christine Acan walked 60km to get to an HIV clinic a week after giving birth to her baby. Her story demonstrates the difficulties faced by those needing treatment for HIV in sub-Saharan Africa, where 65% of the population live in rural areas.

Digital technology for rural communities

A grant worth over £300,000 has enabled digital technology to embrace rural communities in India. The 'StoryBank' will be a store of images, audio and visual media that captures stories, folklore and experiences of rural communities that can be shared both locally and further afield. Information ranges from the very practical, health or agricultural advice, advertisements for local products, or exercises for a school lesson, to more personal information including invitations to forthcoming events, local news, or requesting help with a particular issue. By sharing this data and building a repository of information, communities will be better able to have their voice heard, share knowledge about common issues and benefit from having access to digital technology the modern world.

The strategy in action...

The RCUK International Strategy outlines a set of ambitions to nurture UK international engagement in science and innovation, to influence the international research agenda and to promote the UK globally. It will be delivered through a number of mechanisms including:

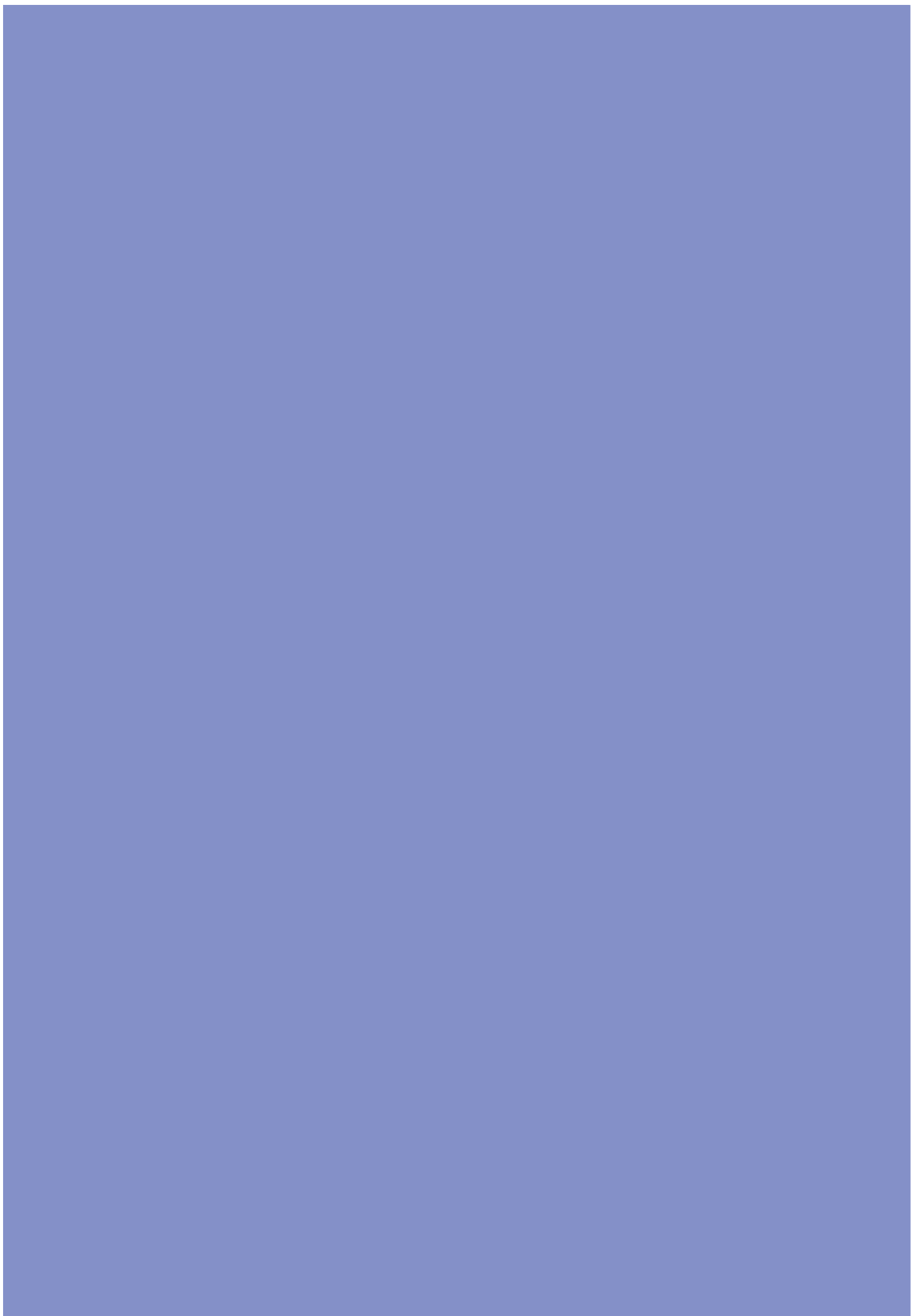
RCUK Cross-Council Groups

The Research Councils UK International Group and the Research Councils UK Europe Group, working with the four RCUK Overseas Offices and supported by the RCUK Strategy Unit, will oversee implementation of the strategy. This includes responding to emerging scientific opportunities in the UK and overseas, working collaboratively with partners in the UK and in target countries, maximising efficient delivery and ensuring effective evaluation. The groups will work closely with other areas of RCUK business including individual and cross-Council research programmes and cross-cutting activities in knowledge transfer, economic impact, careers and diversity and public engagement.

RCUK Overseas Offices

The Overseas Offices are an important tool in the delivery of our international strategy. The Offices aim to:

- gather intelligence on the strategic and research priorities of major overseas funding agencies and institutions across the RCUK remit
- build partnerships with overseas funding agencies to align strategic priorities, and set the scene for sustainable joint research programmes
- help to overcome institutional barriers and to form productive relationships with the research base (particularly in China and India)
- increase the RCUK presence and work with other UK stakeholders in-country to promote UK research and its impact.



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- Our research achieves **impact** – the demonstrable contribution to society and the economy made by knowledge and skilled people. To deliver impact, researchers and funders need to engage and collaborate with the public, business, government and the third sector.

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