Evaluation of the Research Grants Programme

Final Report

February 2011

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At Ecorys we aim to deliver real benefit to society through the work we do. We offer research, consultancy and project management, specialising in economic, social and spatial development. Focusing on complex market, policy and management issues we provide our clients in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors worldwide with a unique perspective and high-value solutions. Ecorys' remarkable history spans more than 80 years. Our expertise covers economy and competitiveness; regions, cities and real estate; energy and water; transport and mobility; social policy, education, health and governance. We value our independence, integrity and partnerships. Our staff are dedicated experts from academia and consultancy, who share best practices both within our company and with our partners internationally.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Big Lottery Fund's Research Grants Programme have been supporting voluntary and community sector (VCS) led research for over ten years, aiming to influence local and national policy and practice by producing and disseminating evidence-based knowledge about issues identified by the VCS. Two separate research programmes have run since 2001, providing over £80 million to 203 research projects, spread across 188 different VCS organisations. The two Research Grants programmes were both demand-led and funded a diverse range of predominantly social, but also medical and socio-medical research. Grant sizes ranged from around £30K to over half a million with the average grant size standing at just over £270K.

Background to evaluation

Ecorys (formerly ECOTEC Research and Consulting) was commissioned in September 2010 to evaluate the Research Grants Programme. Specifically the evaluation sought to assess the impact of the Research Grants Programme on capacity building, to examine what changed as a result of the research findings and to explore how BIG could optimise its research funding in the future. The evaluation involved quantitative and qualitative research methods: analysis of programme management data from BIG; a telephone survey of grant holders to which 85 organisations responded; a series of 15 project case studies which allowed more in-depth investigation of the research process and outcomes; and a series of in-depth consultations with wider VCS stakeholders and representatives from the research community.

Partnership working

Partnership working was at the core of the Research Grants programme; recognising that VCS organisations may not be equipped to carry out research themselves but that by working with other research organisations there would be a positive impact on research capacity for the future. Predominantly this led to linkages between VCS organisations and academic institutions (in 94% of cases). While VCS organisations were heavily involved in project design and management, only around half were involved in the data collection phases; this aspect was generally covered by the research partners. Partnership working enabled some VCS staff to gain skills around particular research methods and links with academic partners ensured rigor in the research. Partnerships experienced tensions between the academic and social nature of projects, and there was sometimes a lack of experience on the part of VCS organisations in steering the project. Lessons learnt were similar to those identified in the previous evaluation,[1] relating to the need to establish clear roles, responsibilities and shared ownership of the project, set out in a written statement.

User involvement

User involvement was strongly embedded in the programme, with users being involved not only as research participants but as active influencers of the research through steering groups or in some cases being trained as researchers. Projects largely agreed this aspect of their project had been effective and had had positive impacts not only for beneficiaries in terms of boosts to confidence and self esteem but also to the validity and accuracy of the research itself. Ensuring appropriate support and training for beneficiaries involved in the research and allowing adequate resourcing to support this were key lessons learned.

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[1] See SHM and Big Lottery Fund (2008) Good Practice Guides at www.bigresearchprogramme.org.uk

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Dissemination

Projects used a range of dissemination methods and it was fair to say that dissemination was relatively well embedded into the programme, compared with other commissioned research. However projects' approaches to dissemination were largely traditional, involving a research report, academic paper, or conference presentations. There was also some concern from wider stakeholders that the programme as a whole – and therefore its findings – was not widely known and more could be done to raise its profile. Leaving the planning for dissemination until too late was the most common challenge, and embedding it from the beginning was widely seen as being most productive.

Impacts on organisations and practice

The majority of projects aimed to impact on improving service delivery, contributing to their evidence base, informing stakeholders or changing organisational policy or practice (each targeted by more than four in five projects). However, smaller proportions felt they had actually achieved those intended organisational impacts, with impacts more likely to emerge around informing stakeholders (75% achieved) and less so around influencing practice in the wider sector (61% achieved). The programme particularly impacted on building organisations' experience of partnership working and raising organisations' profile. Having a Big Lottery Fund grant coupled with working with academic partners lent prestige and credibility to the work. Research Grant funding also helped voluntary organisations to expand the range or volume of services (38 projects) and improve the quality of services provided (53 projects); the research helped VCS organisations to better understand and support the needs of more diverse target groups, or helped them to make services more person-centred or involving of beneficiaries. Some projects went on to influence practice in the wider sector, for example via training of fellow professionals or disseminating toolkits or guidance. However concrete examples of this sort of influence were harder to identify because many projects had not measured the take up of the tools they have developed or had not tracked the impact of them over the longer term.

The programme also built capacity in VCS organisations around research skills, for example knowledge of new methodologies or analysis techniques. Staff also became more knowledgeable about planning, managing and resourcing research. In isolated cases the new skills were shared more widely in the organisation (for example via staff meetings or training) but inevitably skills were lost from the organisation as people moved on. Some projects built up the research skills of beneficiaries themselves which provided a pool of trained volunteers in some organisations who could then be called on in future.

Impacts on policy

The majority of projects aimed to raise awareness of a cause via their project (84%), yet rather fewer projects set out to specifically influence policy at the local, regional or national levels (only 58 projects or 68%), lower than any other area of intended impact (at the strategic or organisational level). The majority of projects felt they were successful in raising awareness of their cause (91% agreed) yet rather smaller proportions agreed that their project had influenced local or national policy (50% and 46% respectively). This may be because projects only expected to be able to influence at the local level or because some projects did not work as well as expected or did not achieve the outcomes they anticipated.

At the national level, some projects successfully disseminated their project, for example to politicians, government departments or in national media. Some projects inputted findings to All Party Parliamentary Groups or to parliamentary debates. For instance Research Grants funding was one of a number of sponsors of a medical research project led by Sense with University College London which *"discovered genetic elements that were previously unknown"* and helped to

raise awareness of the genetic condition they were researching. Another project led by the Royal Mencap Society developed and disseminated national guidance on prescribing for practitioners working with adults with learning difficulties. Two thirds of projects felt this awareness raising would not have happened without BIG funding.

At the local level, half of projects felt they had influenced policy; however relatively few were able to give concrete examples. Again influence tended to be interpreted as awareness raising; making local policy or decision makers more aware of the needs of particular target groups. In a handful of cases projects influenced the development or planning of local policy or strategy through inputting evidence they had gathered. For example, Age Concern Gwynedd in partnership with the University of Wales explored the needs of older people living in the remotest areas in Wales. Evidence they collected was presented to the consultation on the Wales older people's strategy and the organisation influenced the direction of the strategy.

The wider VCS research sector

Consultation with research sector stakeholders revealed that the Research Grants programme was not well known or widely recognised and this lack of wider dissemination may be undermining the ability of projects to have an influence. The programme is relatively unique for three main reasons. It is the only one of relatively few funding streams targeted at the VCS that is open and demand led and not subject to specific research themes or responses to invitations to tender. The programme is also set apart by its size and scale particularly in relation to social research. Other funders such as trusts or foundations[2] give away significantly smaller amounts of social research funding. However in relation to medical research the amount is minimal; for example in 2008/09 the Medical Research Council awarded over 400 new grants to UK-based researchers at a value of over £226 million. Finally, it is rare in the linkages it supports between VCS organisations and academia.

Future funding of VCS research

There was strong support from grant holders and stakeholders for continued funding of VCS research by the Big Lottery Fund which was unsurprising given the squeeze on alternate public sector funding; however views differed on the focus and structure of any potential future funding. Broadly speaking there was more support for continued funding into social or socio-medical research than medical research among projects and stakeholders; however there was recognition that BIG funding had supported research into less well known or rare conditions. Stakeholders strongly felt that 'pure' medical research did not have a good fit with BIG's ethos and themes and that BIG was not the best placed organisation to act on such research findings.

While current grantees supported the continuation of the open demand led approach of the Research Grants programme, there was wider recognition of the pressure such programmes place on administration and overhead costs and as such the approach may prove unsustainable going forward. The approach to partnership working adopted by the programme could also be revitalised to encourage VCS organisations to work with a much broader range of research bodies, institutes, think tanks and academic. This might bring benefits particularly around dissemination of research findings in new, less traditional ways and ultimately enable organisations to achieve greater policy level impacts. In the current climate of reduced budgets, stakeholders were also conscious that future funding would need to emphasise investment that represents a step change in investigating an issue or which synthesises existing knowledge in the sector and shares or disseminates it more strategically. Stakeholders also highlighted that future funding should support capacity within the

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[2] Such as Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund, EHRC, JRF and Nuffield.

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VCS sector for development work around issues such as skills development, management, volunteering and governance.

Given the current funding climate, and what is known about BIG's role going forwards, particularly the need to reduce overhead/administration costs, there is a clear case for any potential future funding to be more focused to BIG's mission and themes rather than continue as an wholly open, demand led programme, while performing a 'dual function' of supporting and building capacity in the VCS sector. Any potential programme will need to reflect the wider trend in the research sector for research to demonstrate impact, rather than merely add to the evidence base. Using peer review processes or advisory groups to select projects might prove beneficial. Stakeholders indicated BIG – and other funders – needed to 'step up a gear' in making better use of the findings and facilitating the exchange of best practice and knowledge generated from across this and other programmes.

Recommendations

Regarding any future potential research funding programme, it is recommended that:

- Any future potential funding is more closely linked to BIG's mission and key themes, specifically around social and socio-medical outcomes.

- The partnership model of a VCS lead working with academic partners should remain valid in any potential future programme, but the sector should be encouraged to work with diverse researchers from across the research community and wider VCS.

- Projects should be encouraged to develop more targeted and realistic intended outcomes that are in line with the scale and focus of their project. The Big Lottery Fund should encourage more specific and targeted dissemination plans that respond to the intended objectives of the project.

- There is clearly a need for BIG to manage any changes to its research funding carefully and sensitively given the wider economic outlook and perceptions around VCS sector funding cuts.

1 Introduction

Ecorys (formerly ECOTEC Research and Consulting) was commissioned in September 2010 to evaluate the Big Lottery Fund's Research Grants Programme. This report presents the study findings.

1.1 About the Research Grants Programme

The Big Lottery Fund (BIG) has been delivering the Research Grants Programme for over ten years (it was initially launched by the Community Fund, one of BIG's predecessor organisations). Two separate research programmes have been delivered since 2001, providing over £80 million to 203 research projects. All research projects were led by voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations who worked in partnership with research organisations including universities. The two Research Grants programmes were both demand-led and funded a diverse range of social, medical and socio-medical research.

The aim of both programmes has been to influence local and national policy and practice by producing and disseminating evidence-based knowledge about issues identified by the VCS which broadly fit into BIG's themes and outcomes . The intention was that findings from the research should be accessible and meaningful and ultimately lead to better services and interventions for beneficiaries. An underlying assumption of the Research Grants programmes was that they should also build capacity in VCS organisations through creating a better understanding of how to engage in and use research.

The Research Grants programmes occupied a unique position in the UK research funding landscape as they formed the only research funding stream exclusively open to the VCS. BIG has pledged to continue its commitment to the VCS through its Strategic Framework to 2015. Two key elements within this strategic framework are to continue to work predominantly with the VCS in delivering funded activity and to further develop the role of BIG as a learning organisation and intelligent funder. Against the context of the recession and public sector cuts, this role becomes increasingly important in terms of maximising impacts in response to changing social need.

A new Research and Learning Strategy (2009 – 2015) aims to take forward BIG's commitment to the role of research and evaluation in delivering its work. BIG is also currently developing the Innovation and Replication programme, and this evaluation of the Research Grants programme will provide key evidence to support the direction of research funding for the VCS within this programme.

1.2 Evaluation aims and objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to assess the impact of the Research Grants Programme on capacity building within VCS organisations, to examine what changed as a result of the research findings and to explore how BIG could optimise any potential research funding in the future.

Key research questions explored by the evaluation included:

- What is the range of research funded through the programme and how does it fit with BIG's mission, themes and outcomes?

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- What aspects of the Research Grants Programme appear to have been most effective in meeting the programme aims and how might these be taken forward?
- How has capacity been developed in VCS organisations to design, undertake and use their own and other organisations' research?
- What changed as a result of the research funded through the programme both in terms of the lead organisation's own work and wider policy and practice?
- What can we learn from the current research funding landscape to help BIG position any potential future investment in VCS-led research?
- How could BIG align research funding more closely to its strategic framework for 2009 – 2015
- How effective were the working relationships between the lead organisation and their research partners? What was the division of tasks between the different organisations?
- Did projects meet their original objectives for the research? How did they develop and evolve over time?
- How did organisations disseminate and implement their research findings and how effective were these approaches?
- How useful and crucial did organisations feel the research to have been in helping them improve their work? What did they learn from the process as well as from the results?

1.3   Methodology

The methodology for the evaluation involves the following quantitative and qualitative research methods:

- The **programme management data** collected from application data was analysed for all projects. The analysis sought to allow an assessment of the range of research funded through the programme as a whole.
- **Information about the Research Grants** programme as a whole was reviewed including the guidance issued to applicants, previous evaluation report and press releases.
- At total of 144 lead organisations who were funded in the first (legacy) Research Grants programme and those funded early in the second round programme were invited to participate in a **telephone survey.** The survey took place during October and November 2010 and in total 85 organisations participated, giving a response rate of 59%.
- To supplement the survey of lead organisations a sample of **15 case studies** were selected for more in-depth investigation of their experiences of the research process and outcomes. This involved a 360 degree style approach using in depth interviews with a range of stakeholders, including partners and where appropriate users, for each of the 15 sample projects to examine impact in more depth.
- A series of 11 in-depth consultations were conducted with wider VCS **stakeholders** and representatives from the research community to assess the impact of the Research Grants programme on building capacity in the VCS and to bring an external perspective to the impact of research funded by the Big Lottery Fund. This included leaders from research institutions, academic research centres, VCS representative bodies and research bodies within the VC sector. We also interviewed 2 internal stakeholders from BIG.

1.4   Presentation of data

This report combines qualitative and quantitative evidence collected by the research. All figures are rounded to the nearest whole %. Figures relating to survey data in some tables and charts may not sum to 100% due to multiple or non-response or rounding. An asterisk (*) represents a value of less than half a per cent. It should also be noted that the survey results replied on self-reporting by VCS

who managed the Research Grants project. As such the responses may be subject to a degree of positive bias. The full results from the survey are available in Annex One.

We also make use of qualitative feedback from case studies. Where this is the case, it is important to note that qualitative research is designed to explore issues in detail and be illustrative. However it is not statistically representative, and views presented by participants are based on perceptions and opinions and may not always reflect the views of the whole group. Findings from the qualitative and quantitative evidence are presented alongside each other throughout this report, and sources are identified where appropriate.

1.5   Structure of the report

This remainder of this report contains four main sections which address the evaluation questions outlined above:

- **Section 2** provides an overview of the Research Grants programme in terms of the type, size and focus of research projects that have been supported.
- **Section 3** outlines the evaluation findings in relation to the project level research questions.
- **Section 4** looks at the impacts generated at programme level in terms of impacts on organisations and delivery and impacts on policy.
- **Section 5** provides conclusions and recommendations.

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2   Overview of the Research Grants programme

This section provides an overview of the Research Grants programme in terms of the type, size and focus of research projects that have been supported.

2.1   Number and type research projects

The Research Grants programme has supported 203 research projects in total since its start in 2001. Some 122 of these (60%) were delivered under the initial legacy programme and 81 (40%) under the second programme.   In total, 188 separate VCS organisations were recipients of a grant from the Research Grants programme. There were eight, typically larger VCS organisations that were funded to undertake two projects concurrently in the legacy programme. The assessment process for the second programme introduced additional checks which meant only one grant was awarded to each organisation. Seven organisations who received funding through the second programme had already delivered a project under the legacy programme.

Overall, across both programmes, the greatest number of grants were issued to projects with a social theme – accounting for 104 projects and half of the total number of grants. Medical research projects represented 16% of the total grants made (32 projects) and 67 projects or 33% were 'mixed' or socio-medical projects.

Three quarters of the research grants were allocated to projects with a national focus, whilst one quarter of the grants were delivered to research projects addressing a local issue or theme.

2.2   Size and location of grants

The average grant size across the Research Grants programme as a whole was just over £270,231, and grant sizes ranged from £33,687 to £509,759. The smallest projects were generally social research projects focused on a defined local geographical area or target group and which were pursuing desk based methodologies. The larger projects typically included medical research and social research projects with a national focus or which involved more complex methodologies to be delivered over a longer timescale.

Grants under the second programme were of a greater value compared with the legacy programme. The average size of grant under the second programme was £350,982 whilst a smaller mean allocation of £216,617 was allocated under the legacy programme.

The majority of grants (91%) were distributed to VCS organisations based in England. In total, across both programmes, 9% or 19 grants were funded in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. This represented 8, 6 and 5 projects respectively across these countries.

2.3   Target groups

Projects under the Research Grants programme were targeting an incredibly diverse range of target groups through their research projects. The BIG programme data illustrated in Figure 1 below indicates that across both the legacy and second round programme disability and health target

groups, young people and socially excluded groups were commonly the focus of the research projects.

Figure 1 Target groups
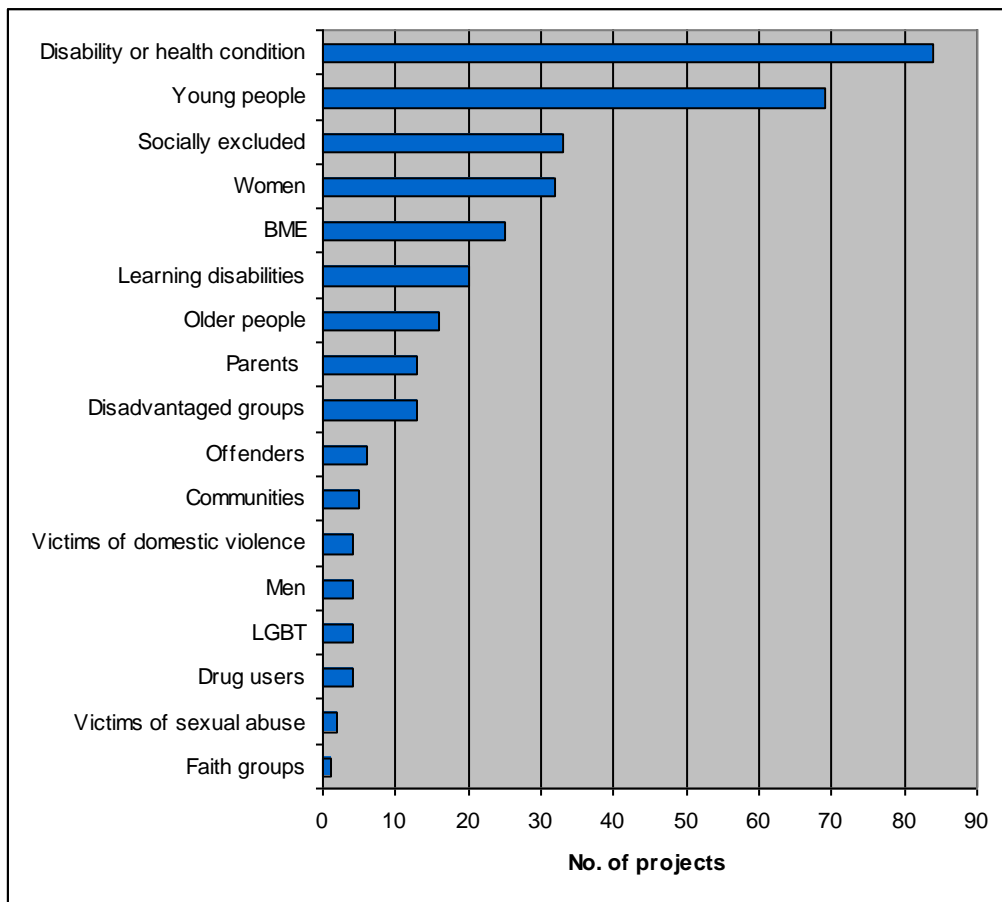
Source: Ecorys, based on programme data, base all projects

2.4 Research methodologies

As Figure 2 indicates, a range of research methods were pursued in the delivery of research projects. The research method most favoured by the funded projects was in depth interviews which featured in over three quarters of the funded projects. Other popular research methods included literature and document reviews (66%), consultations with experts and/or stakeholders (65%) and focus groups (62%).

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Figure 2 Research methods used
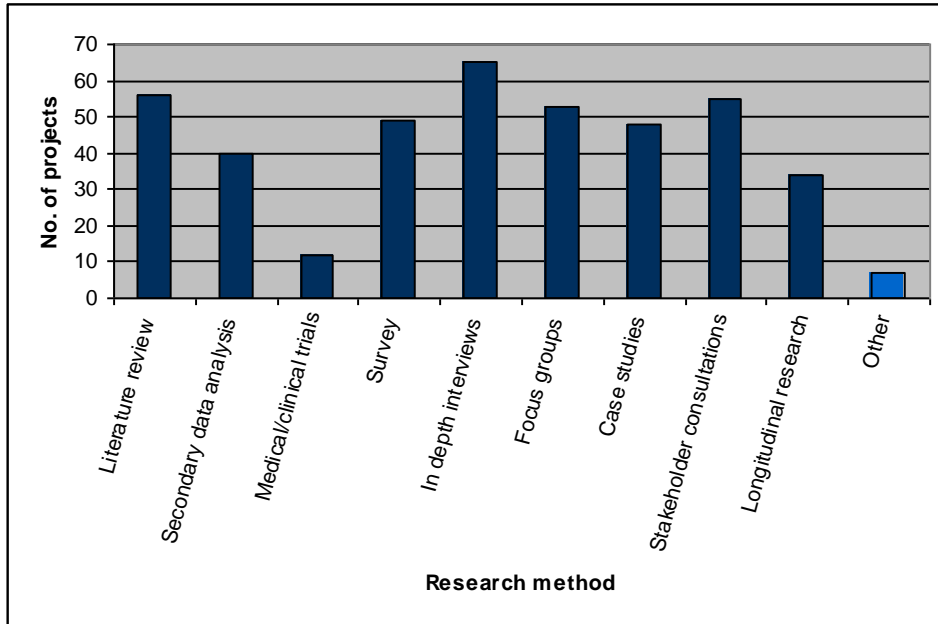
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base, 80

The survey indicated that most projects adopted a mixed method approach. Approaching three quarters (72%) of projects reported using more than three methods in delivering their project, therefore facilitating triangulation of findings. Medical projects made use of medical or clinical trials. Qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups and stakeholder consultations were most commonly reported to have been used social research projects.

3 Project level impacts of the programme

This section presents the evaluation findings in relation to the project level research questions. Specifically it looks at the process impacts generated by projects under the Research Grants programme in terms of partnership working, user involvement and dissemination. The evidence presented here is drawn from the survey of grant holders and case studies.

3.1 Partnership working

While only voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations could apply and be a grant holder for funding within the Research Grants programme, they were encouraged to form partnerships with research organisations or independent researchers to enhance the design and delivery of their research project. In the main, VCS organisations had embraced this, as the survey of lead organisations revealed only a minority of cases (5%) where they were the sole organisation involved in the project. Just under half of the VCS organisations worked with one other partner, a fifth (22%) worked with two or three other partner organisations and nearly a quarter of the lead organisations worked with five or more other partners.

In the majority of cases (94%), lead VCS organisations worked with an academic institution on the project whilst one third partnered with another voluntary sector partner. Just under one quarter of the VCS organisations were partners with statutory sector bodies such as health organisations or hospitals. In a smaller proportion of cases, the organisations worked with a private research and consultancy company or independent consultant in delivering the projects (in 6% and 5% of cases respectively). There were no statistically significant differences in the profile of partnerships between medical and social research projects.

The model of partnership working pursued by projects was often determined by the existence of established working relationships. One in ten project leads had already worked with their research partners on previous research. For example, Family Mediation Scotland had previously worked with the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships but the Research Grants programme presented a further opportunity to undertake research to understand how to support young people through family change. Crossroads Care Wales had also previously collaborated with Bangor University on a number of research projects. The Research Grants programme offered a further opportunity to undertake research together and to strengthen the relationship, this time to examine the issue of carers looking after people with mental health problems. For other projects, the partnership had been specifically created for the project. Solace Women's Aid partnered with the research team at Child and Woman Abuse Studies Unit at the London Metropolitan University specifically to do a piece of work on the long-term outcomes for women who leave a violent relationship.

3.1.1 Partner roles

At the core of the Research Grants programme was recognition that not all VCS organisations would be equipped to carry out the research themselves but that by working with research organisations there would be a positive impact on research capacity for the future. This was largely reflected in the survey results on the respective roles of the partners. A high proportion of VCS organisations, across all types of project, reported to be involved in project design both pre application and post the award of the grant through the design of research tools and project planning (73% and 84% respectively). Partners were actively involved here too (78%). For many

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research projects, the planning and design stage was a collaborative process involving partners equally. For example, one partnership, led by Thrive, established a Research Advisory Support Group, which brought together academics and researchers from Loughborough University with the aim of finalising a methodological approach for the project that was flexible and workable.

Positively, around half of all VCS organisations reported that they had a role in the data collection stage of the research project. Specifically, 54% were involved in primary research, 46% in secondary data collection and 51% in data analysis. This is somewhat lower than that of project partners (76%, 69% and 81% respectively) but nonetheless represented active involvement beyond management of the grant, providing an opportunity to impact on the development of research capacity. Understandably, the exception to this trend was in medical research projects, where only one VCS organisation was involved in primary data collection, given the specialist nature of the required methodologies.

VCS organisations and partners were equally reported to be involved in preparation of outputs (74% each), the impact of which was that VCS organisations retained ownership of the project and had the opportunity to influence the format and content of outputs to maximise the benefits and impact of dissemination for the organisation.

3.1.2 Effectiveness and impacts of partnership working

The impacts reported from the involvement of partners were largely in line with that intended; that partners would bring specialist skills and capacity to support the research. A large proportion of the VCS organisations strongly agreed in the survey that the partners they worked with had brought expertise and knowledge in particular research methods to the project (81%) and that working with partners helped them to ensure that the research was conducted rigorously (71%). Evidence from the case study research suggests that partners too recognised this was an important role. Given the relative inexperience of some VCS organisations in conducting research they were able to offer insight into the timescales for research, the most appropriate methods to use and what could be realistically achieved from the research within the timescales and funding available.

A slightly smaller proportion, 69%, strongly agreed that forming a partnership helped to raise the profile of the research when disseminating findings, whilst the role of partnerships in accessing expert advice and networks was recognised (with two thirds, or 63% strongly agreeing that they had experienced this positive impact). To a lesser extent (44%), recipient organisations also identified that working with partners helped them to access beneficiaries or target groups but this impact was attributed to a greater extent to the VCS organisations' involvement in the project as they typically had closer links with target groups.

Overall, a high proportion (81%) of VCS organisations reported that the partnership working on the project had been very effective. One in six organisations (16%) reported that it had been only fairly effective and for one project it had not been at all effective. In the main, where difficulties were reported in partnership working, this typically related to tensions between the priorities of partners. One VCS organisation, for example, was working with an academic institution as a partner and reported that this resulted in a tension in balancing the academic and social focus of the project:

"There were difficulties with the partnership as they [academic partner] concentrated on the academic research side as opposed to the social needs that we wanted to explore." (VCS organisation)

For other VCS organisations, their relative lack of research experience meant that they found it difficult to retain control of the direction of the project, although as this VCS organisation suggests this was overcome:

"We had some teething problems, they [research partner] were basically trying to take the lead but in the end we worked it out and worked well together." (VCS organisation)

For other partnerships, the different strengths, skills and interests of partners were key factors in successful partnership working as these VCS reported in the survey:

"I think that while they were a research organisation, they really appreciated that we had the direct community experience so they were willing and able to adapt to what we needed." (VCS organisation)

"This was a project that had both medical and social research elements that needed to be integrated. Our research partner's expertise was in the medical side and ours in the social side. The need to integrate these two aspects meant that our two organisations had to work in a very integrated fashion." (VCS organisation)

3.1.3 Lessons learnt

VCS organisations commonly attributed effective partnership working in delivering the Research Grants project to the existing working relationships with partners which had allowed preferred working styles to be identified and a degree of trust to develop between partners. Where a partnership did not already exist, VCS organisations and partners highlighted the need for effective communication and regular meetings to develop these relationships.

This evaluation confirmed the finding from the previous evaluation and subsequent good practice guidance[3] that projects worked best where the respective roles of partners were clearly understood. As a requirement of the Research Grant funding, VCS organisations had to take the lead in terms of accountability for the delivery of the project, whereas, as reported in section 3.1.1 above, partners were more usually responsible for the design and delivery of the methodology for the research. Partners suggested that identification of clear roles and responsibilities and a written statement or agreement detailing these supported the effective delivery of their research project. The requirement, as part of the Research Grants application, to produce a partnership agreement, while protracted for some partnerships, was a valuable process to determine the respective roles for partners. The evaluation findings supported the advice in the Big Lottery Fund good practice guidance on partnership working, which stated that the presence of strong governance arrangements, clear roles and responsibilities, and a formal written statement of understanding, all combine to establish the conditions for effective partnership working. This was certainly the case for projects delivering Research Grants projects, who highlighted a written agreement was particularly helpful in the unlikely event that something went wrong with the partnership. There were only isolated projects who reported more serious difficulties with their partnership. In these cases, projects reported that contacting their Grant Officers at the Big Lottery Fund was important and that BIG staff were open to agreeing changes to project plans or scope of the projects to get over any difficulties.

A practical lesson learnt by VCS organisations from the experience of working with academic partners was the need to build in time to the project plan to allow the project design to be approved

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[3] SHM (2008) Evaluation of the Legacy Research Grants Programme and The Big Lottery Fund (2008) Good Practice Guide: Partnership Working
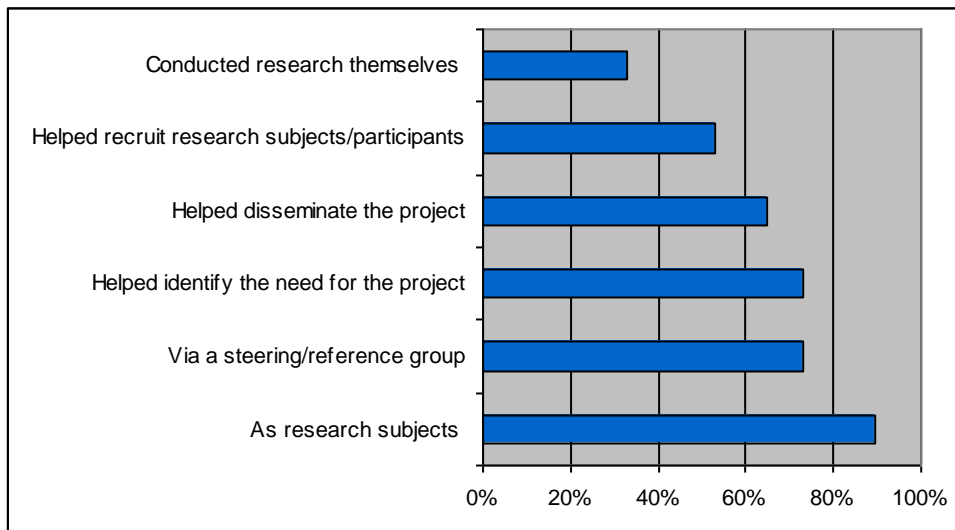
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by the ethical committees which oversee academic research. For some projects this led to delays in project delivery or required alteration of the intended project design.

Most importantly, shared ownership of the project, facilitated by agreement on shared objectives and mutual understanding of the focus of the research, was identified as being key to successful and productive partnership working. Where partnerships were in receipt of larger grants, the application process for the Research Grants programme required the production of a business plan. Where this document had been produced jointly by the lead VCS organisation and partners, this was highlighted as an effective way to achieve the shared ownership and understanding which allowed the project to proceed with a strong partnership ethos.

3.2   User involvement

Across all Research Grants projects, the Big Lottery Fund was keen to see that the people who will benefit from the research to had the fullest possible involvement in it. Survey results suggested that Research Grant projects were generally effective in ensuring the involvement of their users. Some 64% of VCS organisations reported that they had involved users to a great extent, 22% to a small extent and only two projects reported that users were not at all involved. In practice, users were involved across various stages of project delivery as shown in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 How beneficiaries were involved in the research project

Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base all projects, 85

Predominantly, beneficiaries or users were involved in the research projects as research subjects (89%). Beneficiaries or users were involved in identifying the needs to be addressed in 73% of projects. These findings demonstrate a commitment to listening to users' needs and utilising direct experience and knowledge to determine the focus of the research project. Beyond the project design stage, there was evidence from the survey and case studies of more active involvement for users.

BIG particularly welcomed research projects that set up a steering group or advisory body to guide the project and nearly three quarters (73%) of projects reported to have involved users in an advisory capacity. The formality of this involvement varied between projects. Some users were involved in formal, structured advisory groups or steering committees, while for others their input or feedback was more ad hoc or informal, as these examples show.

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Figure 4 Case study examples of user involvement

Formal user involvement
- The research project led by Save the Children in Scotland, which looked at the impact of poverty on children's access to, perceptions of and use of services, established a young persons' advisory group.
- Crossroads Care Wales established a Project Reference Group including seven users.
- The Alkaptonuria Society involved a small number of patients in a steering group to guide a medical project looking to develop a treatment for the rare, genetic disease Alkaptonuria.

Informal involvement
- During the early stages of the project pursued by Thrive, small groups of users were spoken to in an informal setting, with the information derived being used to shape the themes, issues and questions to be considered through the primary research.
- The project led by Substance looking at the social and community benefits of angling created a young people's section of the project website where they can leave feedback and comments.

In just over half of projects, users helped to recruit fellow beneficiaries to take part in the research and in one third of, almost exclusively, social research projects (28 projects) beneficiaries were engaged in research activity as peer or community researchers. The research lead by the Single Parent Action Network, for example, was designed as a specific participatory research project, with single parents recruited and trained to conduct interviews with their peers to gather new evidence on the opportunities and training open to single parents. Age Concern Gwynedd a Mon trained group of older people as researchers who then worked on research projects for the charity afterwards.

In over three quarters of the research grant projects, beneficiaries or target groups were engaged in disseminating the findings of the research, and two in five projects (40%) reported that users had been involved in this to a 'great extent'. For example, a number of research projects invited their beneficiaries to speak at dissemination seminars and conferences. This had the impact of offering a more personal perspective on the research and was perceived to add credibility to the findings.

3.2.1   *Effectiveness and impact of user involvement*

In over three quarters of cases, the involvement of beneficiaries in the projects was deemed to be very effective and the case studies highlighted that user involvement provided positive outcomes both for projects and those being involved.

The key positive impacts of user involvement for projects were perceived to be that the research methodologies and tools were checked for relevance before being used, and the resulting findings were aligned to user needs. More widely, user involvement in the Research Grants programme provided a route for VCS organisations to pursue the best practice guidelines or emphasise user involvement that was emerging from policy documents in the organisations' area of work.

For users themselves, involvement in the research project resulted in improved confidence and self esteem, reduced their feelings of isolation and provided knowledge that they could use in their own treatment or contact with service providers. Few research projects had done any formal evaluation of the impact of user involvement so there was limited evidence of the longer term impacts for users. In isolated cases, however, user involvement had directly led to their subsequent involvement in further research or volunteer activities. For example, eight older volunteers were supported by Age Concern Gwynedd a Mon with the University of Wales, Bangor's Centre for Social Policy Research & Development to conduct interviews with people aged over 75 living in some of the remotest communities in Gwynedd. The capacity and skills of these volunteers has

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been retained and further enhanced by their involvement in subsequent projects for the organisation.

3.2.2 *Lessons learnt*

The importance of establishing at the beginning what role users would play in the project and the specific time inputs required was a key lesson learnt by projects. This finding also emerged a previous evaluation of the Research Grants Programme[4]. Projects recognised that it was important at the outset to establish users' roles and responsibilities. In particular, it was important to be clear with users about they would be doing in the project and what time inputs and skills were required. This meant that users made informed decisions to get involved. While there were still circumstances which meant users had to withdraw from being involved, this clear understanding of the role sought to minimise drop out from users.

VCS organisations identified the importance of maintaining effective communication with beneficiaries from pre-implementation stage to dissemination stage to ensure their involvement was not tokenistic. Projects also learned practical lessons around the need to avoid jargon or specialist language in communications with users and to allow extra time for users to enable them to respond. Projects realised that maintaining the same level of involvement across a multi-annual project was not always possible so organisations learnt that involvement had to be timed where they could make a significant contribution. Similarly, what users were being asked to do needed to be in line with their interests.

Other lessons learned were around the resources and support that was necessary to ensure that users could participate fully and effectively. As in the previous evaluation and subsequently recognised in good practice guidance,[5] projects recognised that users participating in research sometimes need training and support to fulfill their role. For example, they may need training in generic research skills such as interviewing, administration or communication. Alternatively in some projects the absence of more scientific knowledge or skills were barriers to effective user participation, which needed to be overcome with training. Projects highlighted that training can incur costs which need to be budgeted for and time needs to be set aside by the research lead to deliver the training. As in the previous evaluation, projects also reported the need to consider any other forms of support that were necessary such as mentoring, coaching or supervision. Additionally projects highlighted the need for some specific adaptations or provisions to ensure accessibility for users which may also incur costs which projects need to account for, and covering out of pocket expenses was also an issue.

Some projects had difficulties recruiting enough users. Financial incentives were required in some cases to attract beneficiaries. There was also requirement to introduce additional flexibility and a higher level of support into approaches in order to engage and involve young people or disabled groups effectively.

3.3 Dissemination

All Research Grants projects were required to supply a dissemination plan with their application and allocate a proportion of the funding for dissemination activities. Projects disseminated research findings using a range of mechanisms, as shown in Figure 5 below.

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4   SHM (2008) Evaluation of the Legacy Research Grants Programme
5   Big Lottery Fund (2008) Good Practice Guide: User Involvement

Figure 5 Dissemination approaches used
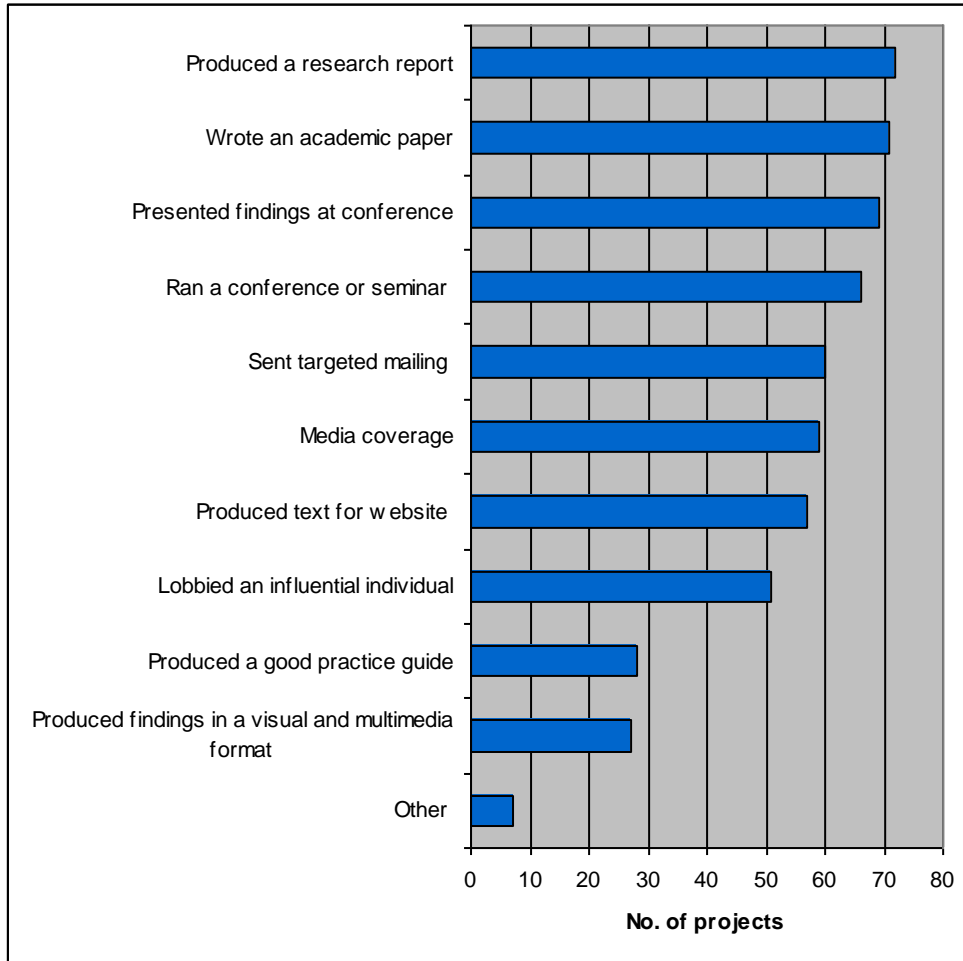
The favoured mechanism for communicating research findings was through the production of a research report, which was the case in 85% of research projects. A similar proportion advised that that an academic paper or journal article had been produced (84%) and over three quarters of the funded projects elected to run a conference, seminar or workshop, or presented at another organisation's conference (81%). In the main, projects complied with the dissemination methods listed in the application documentation: publication in journals, production of research summaries or presentations at conferences. There were some exceptions amongst social research projects. Just over a third of projects disseminated their findings in a visual or multi-media format which included some examples of more innovative or unusual outputs.

Figure 6 Case study examples - innovative outputs

- *The Having a Say at School* (HASAS) project was a study of pupil councils in Scotland conducted by Children in Scotland and the University of Edinburgh's Centre for Research on Families and Relationships. The project identified ways to boost pupil council effectiveness and disseminated the findings through production of a comic book, *Councils of the Galaxy*, which was sent out to all schools in Scotland.

- Age UK Oxfordshire (formally Age Concern Oxford City and County) produced a more visual research report using the photographs produced by older people in their Rural Grass Roots research project in partnership with Oxford Brooks University.

In most cases, VCS organisations focussed their dissemination on their own staff or organisation as a target group (in 93% of projects). A similar proportion identified that voluntary sector organisations and beneficiary groups were the audience for the dissemination of research findings. This fits with findings reported in section 4.1 where impact was most readily intended and achieved to an extent in terms of changing service delivery at an organisational level.

In approximately half of projects, dissemination was aimed at sharing information with local, regional or national government officials and the medical profession and nearly three quarters of funded projects identified statutory sector bodies such as health organisations as a target for the dissemination of findings. However, there was limited evidence to suggest that projects had undertaken a different profile of dissemination activity where their intended impacts were focused at the more strategic level. The methods reported as being used were largely the same across all areas of intended impact.

3.3.1 Lessons learnt

A key lesson learnt by projects was the need to integrate dissemination into the project plan and not leave it until the end of the project. The previous evaluation of the programme and subsequent good practice guidance on dissemination highlighted similar issues.[6] Drafting a dissemination plan early on, to identify the audience, method and timing of dissemination was highlighted as good practice. In isolated examples projects reported missing an opportunity to present findings at a key conference as findings were not ready in time. Thus, a dissemination plan that included a timetable of important events for dissemination was found to be particularly useful.

Another lesson learnt was around the need to produce outputs in formats that are tailored to the audience. Several projects produced simplified versions of their research findings that were aimed at children and young people or people with learning disabilities. Tailoring articles or reports to cover just one theme or area of the research was also highlighted by several projects as effective in ensuring it caught the attention of practitioners working in a particular area. It was important for projects to keep up to date with policy developments in their sector to ensure that any outputs or dissemination reflected the latest thinking. Big Lottery Fund's good practice guidance highlights that this can be effectively achieved by engaging stakeholders, for example through a steering group.[7]

VCS representative bodies emphasised the importance of research findings being accessible. Dissemination outputs such as policy bulletins or presentations at existing events for the sector such as the NCVO and Voluntary Sector Study Network annual conference and the Wales Third Sector research conference were recommended. These were viewed as more effective means of knowledge sharing than lengthy academic reports, and may have greater potential to influence future policy and practice.

The need to adequately budget for dissemination activities was another key lesson that emerged from this and previous evaluations. Development of an early dissemination plan allowed projects to undertake monitoring of the financial and resource cost of dissemination alongside other areas of project delivery, and make adjustments as appropriate.[8]

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[6] SHM (2008) Evaluation of the legacy Research Grants Programme, The Big Lottery Fund (2008) Good Practice Guide: Dissemination

[7] The Big Lottery Fund (2008) Good Practice Guide: Dissemination

[8] SHM (2008) Evaluation of the legacy Research Grants Programme

4 Programme level impacts

This section looks at the evaluation findings in relation to the impacts generated at programme level in terms of impacts on organisations and service delivery and impacts on policy. The chapter draws on the survey of grant holders and evidence from case studies.

4.1 Impacts on organisations and delivery

The Big Lottery Fund expected VCS organisations to use their research findings to build on and improve their own services as well as encouraging others to integrate the findings into wider policy and practice. The evaluation explored the Research Grants programme's intended and actual impacts in terms of changing organisational policy and practice; capacity building, specifically around improving the research skills and impacts in the wider sector around contributing to evidence base or changing practice. This section explores these in greater detail.

Overall, while two thirds of Research Grants projects met all of their intended objectives (57 projects, 67%) the remaining third met some (13 projects) or could not say because it was too early in the delivery of the project (12 projects) (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Meeting the objectives
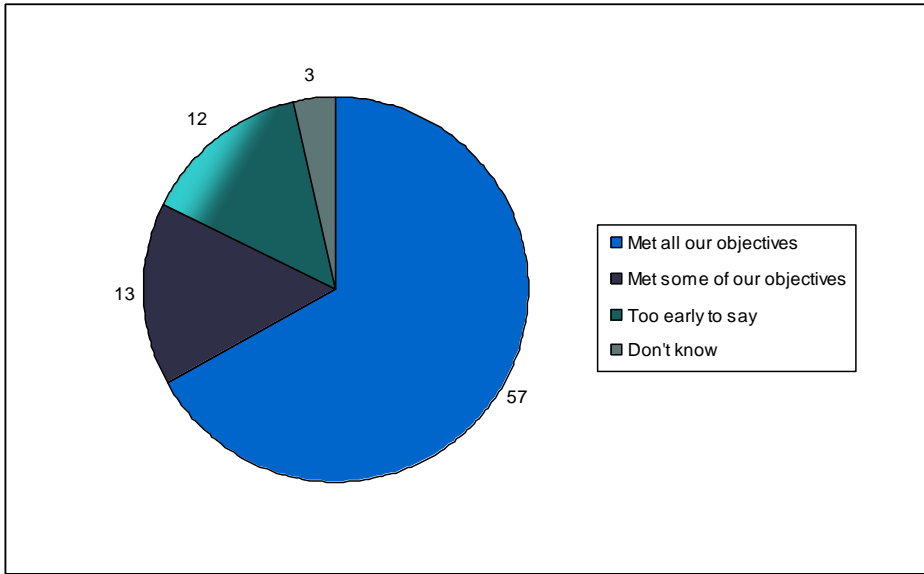
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

Projects did not meet all their objectives for a number of reasons. Some were over-ambitious in the scope of their research project and could not answer the questions they hoped to, or because they realised the subject area was far wider than the scope of their project and struggled to prioritise or had difficulty with the volume of detail their methods elicited. As reported earlier in section 3.1.2, a positive impact of the early involvement of research partners was that they could provide insights into the feasibility of research plans to avoid the problems experienced by this project:

"The project was more extensive in its nature than we at first anticipated and therefore although we received good quantitative information, not all of the strands of the objectives could be dealt with."
(VCS organisation)

Others had problems with their methodology, for example having to change their approach part way through their project, or wanting the approach to be more rigorous than it actually turned out. Some had difficulties engaging their target groups.

"One part of the project was to develop ways of imparting awareness messages to the Pakistani community; the project revealed more about what not to do than what is most effective." (VCS organisation)

Overall at the scale of organisation level impacts, projects achieved most but not all of their intended impacts (see Figure 8). More than four in five projects intended to achieve impacts around improving service delivery, contributing to an evidence base, informing stakeholders or changing wider practice (more than 81% each). Smaller proportions felt they had actually achieved those intended organisational impacts. Projects were more likely to achieve their intended impacts around informing stakeholders (75% or 64 projects achieved) compared with influencing practice in the wider sector (61% or 54 projects achieved). Eleven projects said it was too early to say.

Figure 8 Intended and actual impacts (organisational level)
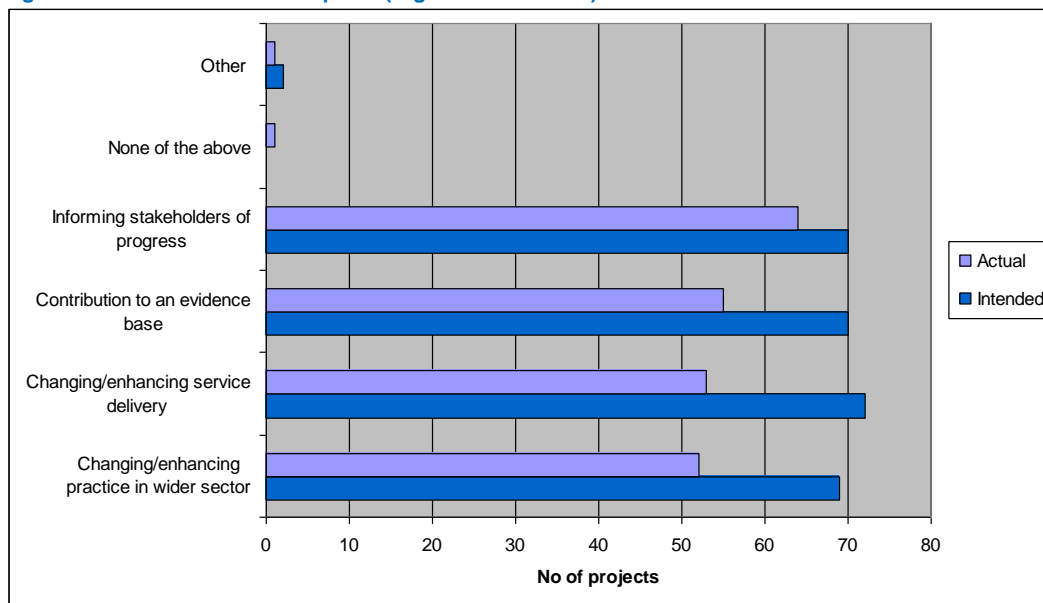
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

Looking at organisational level impacts in greater detail, the Research Grants programme had greatest impact around helping build relationships with partners (with 88% or 74 projects agreeing) and around raising the participant organisation's profile (with 86% or 73 projects agreeing) (see Figure 9). To a lesser extent the programme impacted on aspects of service delivery such as expanding the range or volume of services supplied by the lead organisation or others in the sector.

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Figure 9 Organisational level impacts
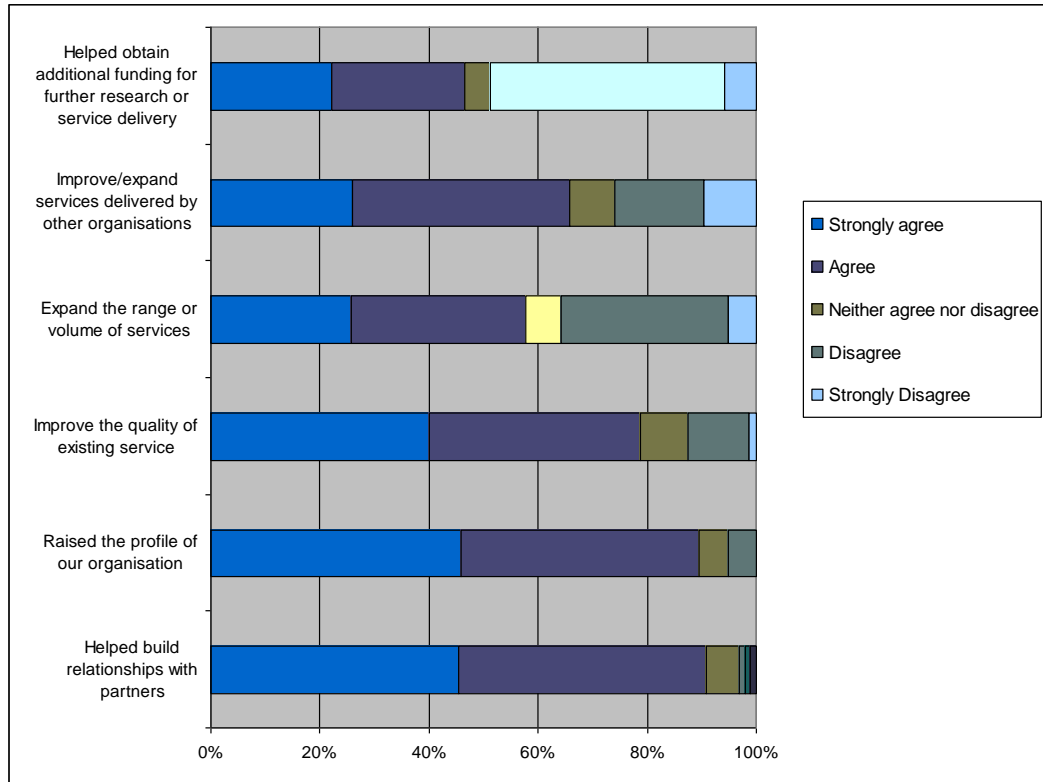
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

4.1.1 Impacts of partnership working

Projects responding to the survey identified the greatest impacts around working and helping build relationships with partners, with approaching nine in ten projects identifying this as an impact (88% or 74 projects). The significant emphasis in the programme design on VCS organisations working with research partners was commonly highlighted by VCS organisations as underlying this. Projects also reported that having access to such a sizeable grant enabled them to work with academics which helped build their reputation or enabled them to work with larger or higher profile organisations than they had done previously.

"It helped us to build a relationship with the foremost UK research team in this field at the university and led to three to four more research projects involving the same partner." (VCS organisation)

"It is giving us higher credibility, working with larger organisations." (VCS organisation)

While improving relations was clearly a by-product of the research, projects were ambivalent about whether this would have happened otherwise; with about the same numbers of projects agreeing or disagreeing that these improvements would have happened anyway (35 and 36 projects respectively). This may be because projects felt that other opportunities to work with their partners would have arisen, even if this particular grant application had not been successful.

4.1.2 Impacts on organisational profile

Linked to the above, the Research Grants programme also had a clear impact around raising the profile of VCS organisations. For some organisations, particularly those that were less well known, having a Big Lottery Fund grant added prestige and credibility to their work.

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"As a voluntary sector youth organisation I believe our role in delivering this project helped enhance the organisation's standing within the voluntary youth sector." (VCS organisation)

"We now have a level of credibility with partners as a result of the grant." (VCS organisation)

"Being supported by BIG carries a lot of weight and helps our profile." (VCS organisation)

For some organisations this increased profile has led to other benefits such as more invitations to speak at conferences and in one case the Research Grant project was felt to have been a factor in the organisation being more often invited to policy making events.

Case study: Effects of increased organisational profile

Thrive worked with Loughborough University to undertake research on how widely the practice of therapeutic horticulture is used in the UK and the role it can play in the promotion of social inclusion. The positive findings on the benefits of horticultural therapy were felt to have significantly raised the profile of organisations like Thrive and justified their existence. Other effects of this raised profile has been an increase in requests for visits from other organisations or groups wanting to do something similar, an increase in contacts from professionals wanting to refer their clients to the project and more interest from potential volunteers.

As reported earlier in section 3.3, many projects delivered presentations at conferences or generated press or media activity to raising awareness of their research and in turn the organisations' profile. For some, typically larger organisations, this type of promotional and marketing activity was fairly routine which may explain why many organisations considered this sort of awareness raising might have happened anyway (32 projects or 44% saying it would have happened anyway compared with 50%).

4.1.3   Improving service delivery

Research Grant funding helped many organisations to make changes to their service delivery, or influenced the service delivery of other organisations in the sector. The project had impacts on expanding the range or volume of services delivered in under half of the projects (45% or 38 projects) and in a slightly larger proportion the project helped improve the quality of services they offered (63% or 53 projects). However impacts on service delivery were evident to a lesser extent than the impacts on organisational profile and partnerships described previously (see Figure 9 above).

Case study: Changes to service delivery

A research study conducted by the Alzheimer's Society about the usage and affects of psychotropic drugs on dementia sufferers led directly to several changes to service delivery of external organisations. The primary aim of the research was to reduce the prescription rate in care homes by providing evidence of the effects of these drugs and developing training to lower level care staff. Through the offer of formal training and support to staff, the prescription rate within participating care homes dropped by 50%. More widely, the use of psychotropic drugs has become part of the formal assessment criteria of care homes by statutory authorities as a result of this study.

Those projects that reported an expansion in the range or volume of services included several organisations who used the research to apply for future funding or new projects (see section 4.1.5 on implementing the findings, below). Some projects made changes or expanded the services they were already offering. For example, improving the range of services available or making services available to wider groups of people or to new target groups.

"Because of the expertise we have developed we have gone on to develop products for other high risk groups." (VCS organisation)

"We have included other groups, especially the Muslim community." (VCS organisation)

On balance the majority of projects felt these changes would not have happened without the Research Grant funding (24 projects compared with 9).

Approaching two thirds of projects (63%) reported the research had impacted on the quality of the services they provide. However, projects were again more ambivalent about whether improvements in quality would have happened anyway (13 projects saying changes would have happened anyway compared with 32 projects saying they would not) (see Figure 10).

Figure 10 Impacts on improving service quality
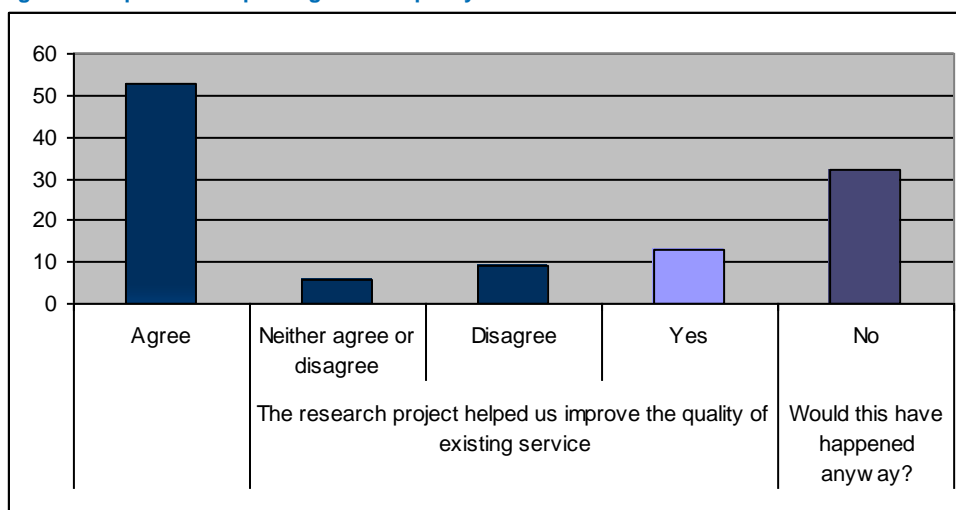
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

Improvements to service quality reported by projects included:
- Making services more person centred
- Users being more involved in services or projects feeding back to users more regularly
- Organisations or staff more aware/more understanding of the needs of their target groups

Case study: Impact on raising awareness and understanding amongst staff
Sign Health worked with The Centre for Suicide Prevention at the University of Manchester to undertake a literature review into suicide in the deaf community. Sign Health used the results of the Research Grants project to deliver training to their psychological therapy staff on the prevalence and risk factors associated with suicide. This raised awareness meant staff could provide more appropriate support or signposting to members of the deaf community.

Also at the level of service delivery, the programme appeared to have had some impact around improving/expanding the services delivered by other organisations in the sector, with more than half of projects (48% or 47 projects) agreeing. However concrete examples of these sorts of impacts were more difficult to identify. Some projects felt that through the research outputs they had produced, other organisations would have benefited, for example by using the good practice guidance, toolkits or training programmes that were produced as a result of the projects. Only five projects reported that they felt these impacts would have happened anyway without the Research Grants programme, showing the added value of these tools and resources. However, the downstream effects of such toolkits or guidance were difficult to establish, for example, there was

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limited evidence of improved services or take up and few projects appeared to have tracked take up and longer term impacts. These sorts of impacts can take time to occur and their measurement was beyond the scope of this evaluation.

4.1.4 *Capacity building within organisations*

The Research Grants programme had particularly significant impacts around helping to build capacity within the VCS organisations leading the projects around improving the research skills of staff. More projects reported impacts in this area than many of the other organisational impacts described above. Two thirds (66% or 56 projects) agreed the Research Grant project had helped develop staff research skills and a further eight in ten projects (78% or 66 projects) agreed the Research Grants programme had helped develop skills that were sustainable and could be used after the project ended. The case study research suggested that capacity had been developed in terms of specific research methodologies as well as the planning and management of research. Staff said they had acquired new knowledge of how to design a survey questionnaire or the practicalities of undertaking in-depth interviews. Other staff acknowledged now being more confident in developing a detailed work plan or budget for a research project as they were more aware of the timescales involved in different methodologies and some of the extra costs that need to be taken into account in research budgets.

Figure 11 Capacity building: research skills
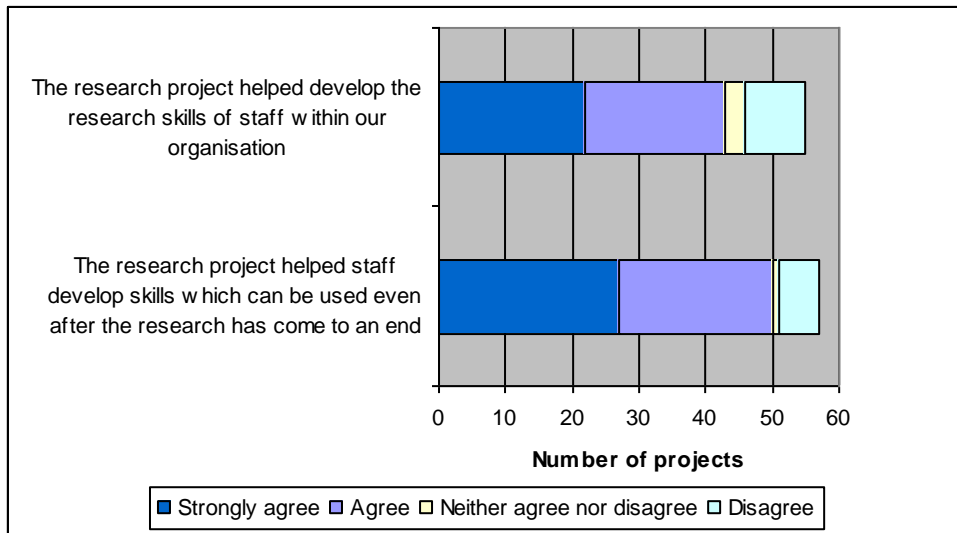
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

Furthermore, projects were inclined to report that the skills that had been developed were unlikely to have been obtained without the Research Grant funding – more than those who said it would have happened anyway (a difference of 35 projects or 53%).

Figure 12 Capacity building: research skills after the projects ends
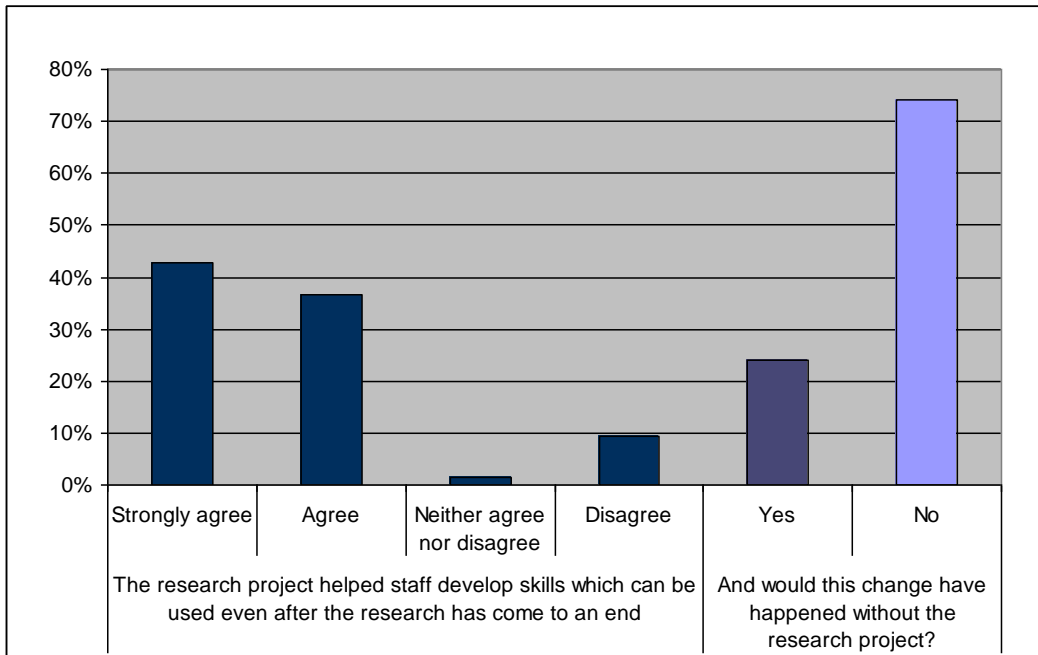
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

For many organisations, the skills being built up were among core or paid staff. For some this was as a result of working with a university which *"brought in better research skills and we were able to learn from their experience"* or where staff gained new experiences of designing research tools or trying out methodologies. For example: *"The research skills gained were analysing and qualitative interview techniques."* Many organisations reported that these skills would be useful in the future. Some organisations gained not only research skills but wider skills, such as IT skills. A few organisations ran internal workshops or held staff meetings to share learning more widely in their organisation, for example: "*the main researcher developed skills in participant observation and has run internal workshops for staff on this subject".* But overall there was only limited evidence that this research capacity was disseminated beyond the direct staff involved in the project. Unfortunately in some cases, staff members had subsequently moved out of the organisation to progress their career which undermined the impact of the project on the research capacity of VCS organisations and skills that had been built up, were lost.

For other organisations, the impact was on the capacity of their volunteers, who had been trained to undertake research tasks through the project and had used their skills in subsequent research. For example, a research project overseen by Age Concern Gwynedd a Mon, now part of Age UK, trained volunteer older people to interview their peers. Since the study, the original older volunteers have continued to use their new research skills on other Age Concern research projects.

4.1.5 *Implementing the findings within the organisation*

At the organisational (or operational) level, projects implemented the findings of their Research Grants project in a range of ways (Figure 13).

Figure 13 Implementing the findings

Most commonly, the research findings were used to secure additional funding. Specifically, more than half of projects used the research findings to help them demonstrate need to potential or future funders (56%). Conducting primary research built up an evidence base which was useful in helping organisations to better understand needs and helped future funders understand where to direct funding.

> **Case study: Research Grants findings used to demonstrate need for new service for older people**
> Age UK Oxfordshire (formally Age Concern Oxford City and County) used their project findings to help them to design a new service which successfully secured funding from the Big Lottery Fund under the Reaching Communities programme. The Rural Grass Roots research project, undertaken with Oxford Brookes University, identified that elderly people in rural areas have a need for services to help combat isolation and improve the physical and mental health of older people. The findings of the Research Grants project were used to demonstrate this need in the subsequent application to BIG and the organisation was successful in securing a four year grant.

Two in five organisations used the findings to implement a new project (45%). This included follow on research, for example advancing to a clinical trial or expanding or continuing the programme of research. For example, a medical research project lead by the Muscular Dystrophy Group of Great Britain produced specific scientific outcomes which helped secure a further grant to take the gene therapy research to a clinical trial stage. The Royal College of Psychiatrists which led research on the everyday lives of people with serious mental health problems has subsequently secured funding from Friends Provident for a further research project which looks at the practice of front line banking staff and how they deal with people who have mental health problems.

Other VCS organisations used the findings as an evidence base to help in fundraising activity as this project suggests: *"the project improved the knowledge base which gave us a stronger case when using research of this type as a reason why people should donate to the charity."*

Smaller proportions of projects implemented the findings of the project in their organisation in areas of *organisational* policy or practice (16 projects, see Figure 13). For instance, a third of projects (33% or 28 projects) changed the way they work with beneficiaries or partners, usually by

embedding learning from the project in how they involve users or around partnership working. For example, one VCS organisation reported that as a result of their project which demonstrated the benefits of involving users they *"employed a young people's involvement officer".* The project run by Mencap working with adults with learning difficulties impacted on Mencap's internal procedures, helping to safeguard users' interests and involvement in decision making in their wider work. All of those saying they changed the way they worked with users/beneficiaries were social or socio-medical research projects, probably due to the strict codes of conduct determining participation in clinical research.

4.2   Impacts on policy

More than 70 projects (84%) intended to raise overall awareness of a cause (for example of a specific disease or target group) yet, rather fewer projects set out to specifically influence policy at the local, regional or national levels - only 58 projects or 68% overall - lower than any other area of intended impact (at the strategic or organisational level). As with the impacts on the organisations described above, not all projects achieved their intended impacts at the policy level. Nine projects reported they did not achieve the intended impact on raising awareness of a cause (13% of all those intended to do so) and a larger proportion did not have the impact they intended at the policy level (17 projects or 29%) (see Figure 14).

Figure 14 Intended and actual impacts (policy/strategic level)
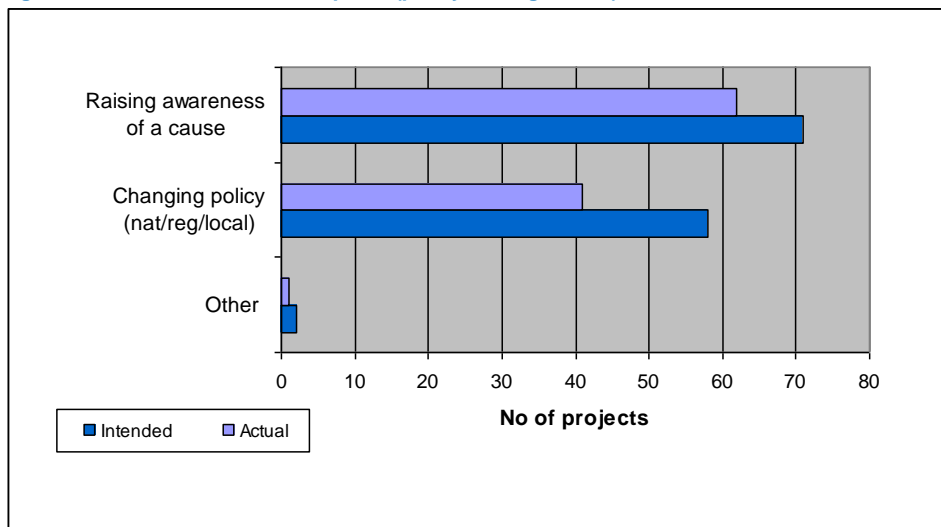
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

The clearest area of policy level impact from the Research Grants programme was around helping to raise awareness of the issue on which the projects focussed, with nine in ten projects agreeing or agreeing strongly this has happened as a result of their research (91%) and only one project disagreeing (see Figure 15). Smaller proportions of Research Grant projects agreed that their project had influenced local or national policy (50% and 46% respectively). Particularly at the national level where one in five projects disagreed or strongly disagreed (18%).

Figure 15 Policy level impacts
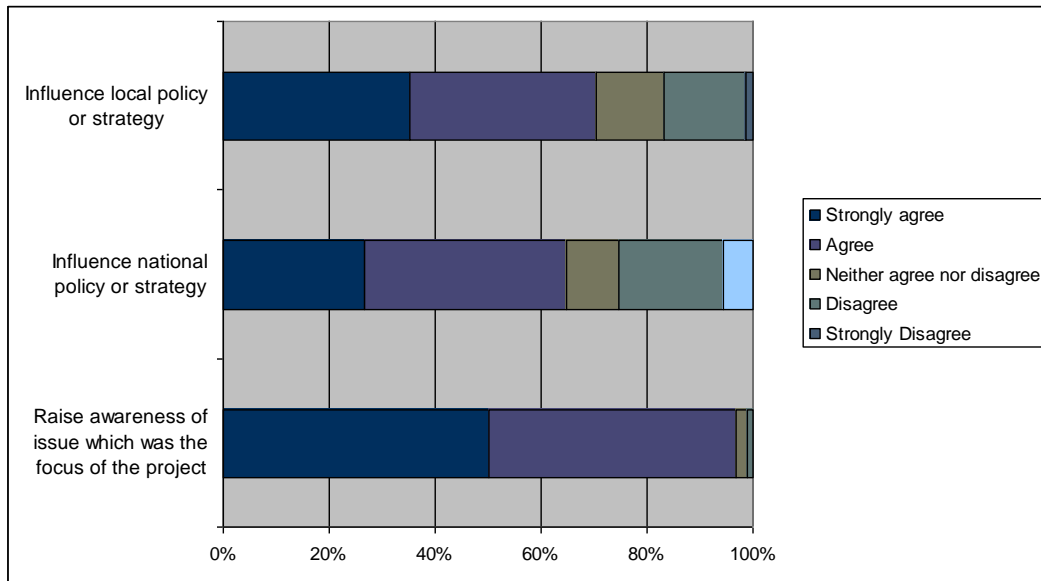
Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

Projects did not achieve their intended outcomes at the policy level for a variety of reasons. Survey evidence described in the previous chapter and above suggests some projects did not intend to have an impact at this level or had realistic expectations that their sphere of influence would be local rather than national. Other projects did not work as well as expected or did not achieve all their intended outcomes and therefore did not achieve the impact they wished to achieve. Some projects that had produced robust evidence and disseminated it, felt it would take further time for downstream policy impacts to occur.

4.2.1   Awareness raising of an issue

Embedding dissemination activity into the research projects meant that projects were required to plan for and undertake dissemination. Ultimately projects felt they had achieved a good level of impact around arising awareness of a cause or issues, for example in developing understanding of a rare disease or exploring the link between social policy areas that were under-researched, such as the link between mental health and debt.

Some projects had national level impacts around raising awareness. Research Grants funding was one of a number of sponsors of a medical research project led by Sense with University College London which *"discovered genetic elements that were previously unknown".* This discovery led to them setting up *"a dual sensory clinic, the first of its kind in the UK"* which helped to raise awareness of the genetic condition they were researching and will facilitate further investigation. Other projects used events in parliament and the House of Lords which they felt had helped raise awareness of the issue the issue they had researched. Others achieved national press coverage and references in publications produced by other organisations:

"The Guardian covered this research in depth and the research has been referred to by the Department of Health, local government, local NHS and numerous other organisations." (VCS organisation delivering socio-medical project)

Some projects had targeted their dissemination at the local level: to key stakeholder groups such as schools or GPs to raise awareness of an issue among local practitioners or commissioners.

Two thirds of projects (64%) felt this awareness raising of a cause or issue would not have happened without the Big Lottery Fund support for the research project; whereas one third felt it may have happened anyway, showing the added value of the programme in some areas. Particularly on the medical side, the programme appeared to be supporting the less well known, 'hidden disabilities', or more 'marginalised' conditions that struggle to attract the funding that better known charities and conditions can achieve from the traditional sources of medical funding.

4.2.2 Policy impacts - national and local

Overall, grantees perceived that the Research Grants programme influenced local policy more than national policy (42 projects or 50% influencing local policy compared with 39 projects at the national level). The majority of those projects who perceived a change to local policy felt that the change would not have happened without support for the research from BIG (33 projects compared with 5 projects saying the change would have happened anyway) (see Figure 16).

Figure 16 Impacts on local policy or strategy
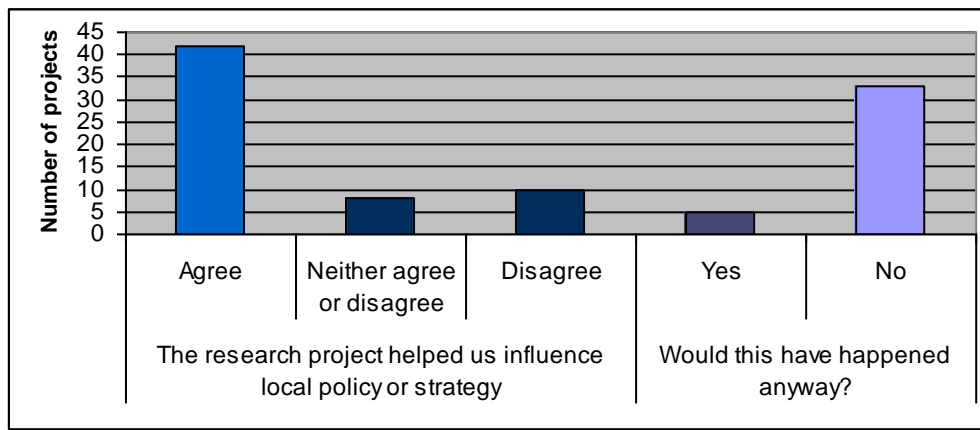
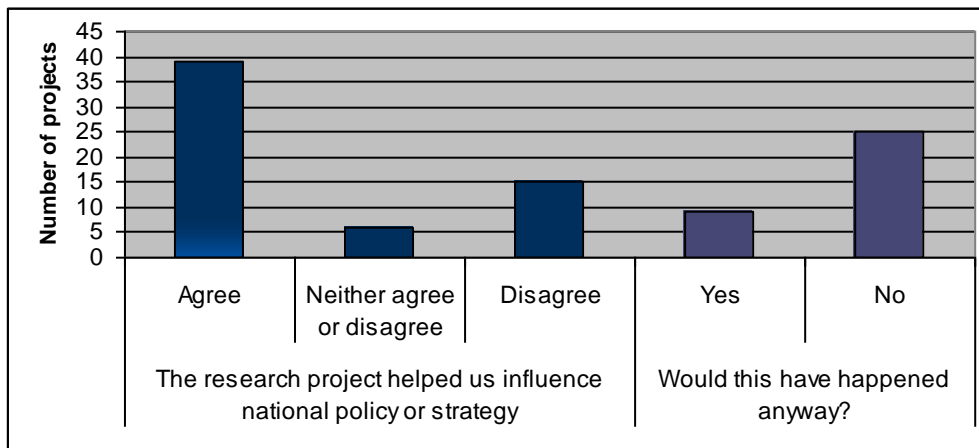

Source: Ecorys, based on survey data, base 85

However, projects could not always give concrete examples of where they had influenced local policy, suggesting some over-reporting in this area. Where evidence was available, local impacts included:

- Making local policy or decision makers more aware of the needs of particular target groups (e.g. South Asian communities, deaf people, older people) (which linked closely to awareness raising discussed in 4.2.1 above)
- Inputting evidence which aided in the development or planning of local policy and strategy

For example, a project by Age Concern Gwynedd in partnership with University of Wales, Bangor's Centre for Social Policy Research and Development, explored the needs of older people living in the remotest areas in Wales. The research coincided with the consultation on the Wales older people's strategy and the organisation was able to use the emerging findings from the research to respond to the consultation and to influence the direction of the strategy locally. Another research project led by Tommy's conducted a study examining how diet can be used to improve nutrition and pregnancy outcomes for teenage mothers. As a result of the research the organisations could clearly prove which factors affected pregnancy outcomes in teenagers. Local midwives now use the materials developed by the organisation to advise this target group.

Some 39 projects responding to the survey indicated their project had impacted on national policy, with 25 of those saying this change would not have happened without the influence of this project (see Figure 17).

Figure 17 Impacts on national policy or strategy

When this was explored in greater detail, not all projects were explicit about how they had influenced national policy and some felt their projects had the 'potential' to do so but could not give examples. While influence at the national level may take longer to drill down into policy change, given the length of national policy cycles and the change in government earlier in the year, some of this may be due to over-estimation by projects in their potential to achieve this. Those projects that could provide examples had had a range of impacts at the national policy level, including:

- Meeting politicians and the prime minister to convey the findings
- Findings being read in the House of Commons and House of Lords during a debate
- Being invited to sit on an All Party Parliamentary Group or government task force/working group
- Leading to a change in the law around handling of asylum seekers' cases

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Case study: Achieving policy impact

Research conducted by Kidney Research UK showed that there was a need to engage more effectively with potential organ donors from black and South Asian backgrounds. The project recruited and trained peer educators in North West London to explain the need for and processes involved with organ donation and how they can engage with their local communities and dispel any fears or taboos within their community. The organ donation team at the Department of Health were impressed with the project and went on to fund a follow on project that would train and deploy even more peer educators from further afield and across other 'at risk' communities.

4.2.3 Wider awareness of programme

It was beyond the scope of this evaluation to explore levels of awareness of the Research Grants programme amongst wider stakeholders and policy makers to explore the extent and effectiveness of the impact of programme on policy change. There was limited evidence from stakeholders, however, which suggested that some of the Research Grants projects were too specific to be of interest to or of relevance to regional or national policy makers' remit.

The findings from the interviews with external stakeholders, however, suggested that a key issue potentially undermining the policy and practice impacts achieved may be the profile of the programme amongst key stakeholders. External stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation overall had very limited knowledge of the Research Grants programme specifically, although a cross section were, or had historically, had links with the Big Lottery Fund research team more broadly, and several had participated in BIG panels and committees. Several external stakeholders

represented organisations in receipt of BIG funding through the Research Grants and, or other programmes.

"*The profile [of the programme] is quite low, both in terms of promoting the existence of the scheme and also, probably more importantly, promoting the results of the research.*" (Research body within the VCS sector)

The Research Grants programme did not therefore appear to have been effectively disseminated to key stakeholders representing the voluntary and community sector more broadly. Stakeholders indicated that there may be a role for BIG in developing the dissemination function beyond, to support individual projects to communicate their key findings to relevant bodies who are in a position to influence policy and/or to promote the outputs from across projects and the programme as a whole.

Some stakeholders expressed surprise that they had not been made aware of the programme, given their remit for social or socio-medical research and the potential linkages or overlap between their own work and that commissioned through the Research Grants programme. Stakeholders commonly said that the current culture was focussed on maintaining research teams through grant funding rather than effectively sharing research findings which may have been a key factor that underlying the more limited impact on policy change.

5 Future of research grant funding

This chapter presents the evaluation findings in relation to the future of the research grants programme. Specifically it presents grant holder and wider stakeholder views on the potential future direction of the programme and the key issues that need to be considered in the development of the Innovation and Replication Programme. By way of context it begins with a brief review of other funding available to support VCS research. The evidence presented here is drawn from consultations with stakeholders and the survey of grant holders.

5.1 Current funding for VCS research

Findings from the consultations with stakeholders overall revealed that the Big Lottery Fund's Research Grants programme appears to hold a fairly unique position in the context of other opportunities, as this stakeholder suggests:

"In terms of scope and breadth I don't think there is another source of funding in my opinion". (Research body within the VCS sector)

Stakeholders were able to explicitly identify only a handful of other funding streams which would potentially fund VCS research including:

- Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- Trusts and foundations such as the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF), Nuffield Foundation or Atlantic Philanthropy
- Royal Irish Academy
- Diana Princess of Wales Memorial Fund

It was perceived by stakeholders that there were likely to be other opportunities available through trusts and independent funders but that they are probably fairly unknown to VCS organisations. Stakeholders felt that the level of awareness amongst VCS organisations of the Big Lottery Fund as an organisation, increased the potential visibility of its research funding. Some stakeholders, however, perceived that the Research Grants programme specifically could do more to raise its profile, particularly in terms of its impact and achievements.

The size of grants available through the Research Grant programme was a key factor that stakeholders perceived sets the programme apart from others. The total funding allocated to date (£80 million) is higher compared to other schemes administered by the JRF or Nuffield Foundation which each spend around £6 million per year on externally commissioned research. The exception reported by some stakeholders was in terms of medical research, where the available funding was perceived as 'very substantial,' as this stakeholder suggested:

"The sums the Lottery has to spend, large though they are, are not particularly significant when you look at the medical arena. Medical research is a very sophisticated and well organised machine." (Research funder)

This is evidenced when looking at the funding available from the key funders of medical research. The 117 members of the Association of Medical Charities between them are reported to contribute over £935 million each year to medical research and in 2008/09 the Medical Research Council

awarded over 400 new grants to researchers in universities, medical schools and research organisations in the UK at a value of over £226 million.

Stakeholders reported that few of the other schemes were as open or demand led as the Research Grants programme. Several of the other funders (such as JRF or Nuffield Foundation) had key themes which guided their commissioning of research. While some of these were quite broad, at times these funders would also identified a more specific theme against which they would invite research projects. Stakeholders highlighted that other funding streams (e.g. ESRC) had a specific funding stream on the VCS but that its focus was on research about the VCS, rather than being open to VCS organisations to research issues which were of specific relevance to them.

Unlike the Research Grants programme, many of the other funding programmes are specifically academia led. The involvement of VCS organisations was sometimes recommended, or partnership bids encouraged, but it was not a specific requirement. Other funding schemes did not have this specific eligibility requirement but were made less accessible to VCS led research projects as a result of the funders' unwritten eligible requirements. For example, stakeholders reported that the ESRC does fund research involving VCS organisations but stakeholders suggested they would only fund 'recognised' institutions so it would be more likely only larger VCS organisations who would secure funding. The academic rigor sought by some funders further underlies the inaccessibility of grants for VCS organisations. Stakeholders highlighted that some funds were intended to be of the highest academic standards, so whilst they don't exclusively fund academic institutions, it can be difficult for smaller VCOs to access this funding due to their more limited research knowledge and capacity, an issue which is specifically recognised by the Research Grants programme.

5.2 The focus and structure of potential future VCS research funding

There was strong support from grant holders and stakeholders for continued funding of VCS research by the Big Lottery Fund but some differing views on the focus and structure of any potential future funding.

5.2.1 Focus of potential future funding

Some three quarters of survey respondents (63 projects or 74%) agreed that any potential future programme should continue to fund a mix of medical and social research. Respondents were less supportive of a programme focussing purely on medical research with only 12% (or 10 projects) agreeing. Of those ten projects, only two were medical projects, the rest were social research projects suggesting that there was support from the wider sector to continue BIG's role in funding medical research. Approaching a third of projects agreed the programme should only focus on social research in future (29% or 25 projects). Some bias towards support for social projects could be expected since the majority of projects funded within the programme could be categorised as 'social research' (72% or 61 projects).

Grant holders support for continued funding of medical projects stemmed from a perception that it was difficult to secure funding for medical research which covered less well known or rarer conditions. Grant holders reported that the assessment of research proposals by these medical funders is also often based on the relative importance and currency of the proposed research which can result in research on less well known conditions or those affecting smaller populations being viewed less favourably. The issue reported above of other funders seeking a perceived higher level of academic rigor in the projects they fund also applies to medical research, with traditional medical research funders perceived to favour academic led research, thus limiting opportunities for VCS led research on medical issues.

Feedback from the survey of projects stood in contrast to the views of external stakeholders, who overwhelmingly felt the programme would be best positioned by focusing on social and socio-medical research going forward. There was a perception that BIG's expertise lies in social and socio-medical research and that 'pure' medical research did not represent a good fit with BIG mission and themes.

"[BIG's funding of medical research] does seem like a very small drop in the ocean of a much larger field of medical research where the Lottery doesn't perhaps have the same level of expertise, or a particular interest in making use of the research findings." (VCS Research body)

As reported above, stakeholders perceived that there is significant funding available for medical research through other sources (such as the Medical Research Council, Association of Medical Research Charities or the Wellcome Trust). There was an isolated view from one stakeholder that this availability of medical research funding from other sources means there was a risk that the projects that approach the Big Lottery Fund may have been rejected elsewhere and may not be of sufficient robustness:

"The risk any non-mainstream medical research funder has is that they fund things which have been through the orthodox routes and not been funded. You run a very high risk of funding second rate stuff". (VCS representative body)

While the argument could be made that medical research leads to improved health and wellbeing (which is an area of interest for BIG) the timescales involved means this type of project wouldn't deliver immediate outcomes in this area.

Grant recipients and stakeholders agreed that potential future funding should address gaps and support research on under-represented themes and concerns. For example, several areas of socio-medical research were highlighted as in need of investigation, including early medical interventions and lifestyle changes, mental health, and health promotion. Where possible, respondents were keen for potential future research to link to community development projects and implementing the Big Society concept. Survey respondents also identified a range of key target groups for any potential future programme, including: vulnerable and marginalised groups (particularly older people, women and migrants), and those experiencing inequalities and/or deprivation.

5.2.2 *The structure of potential future VCS research funding*

Views on the structure for any potential future research funding programme were mixed. Current grant recipients were keen for future programmes to be demand led, with 71% of respondents indicating that the sector should decide what should be researched. However, contradicting this somewhat, more than half (54% or 46 projects) also agreed that the Big Lottery Fund should give more specific guidance about the areas it would like to see covered in any potential future programmes. Stakeholders recognised, however, that open demand led grant funding programmes are often oversubscribed and as such the administration costs can be very high. For example, the second round of the Research Grants programme received some 800 applications but only issued 100 grants which required significant inputs from BIG and applicants in terms of the production and assessment of bids. BIG has been asked by DCMS to reduce the administration costs associated with their function to 5%. The continued delivery of large scale grant funding programmes, following the model of the Research Grants programme, has significant potential to undermine this.

A key tension within the current programme is balancing academic and practical research. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of academic inputs to the research process, to safeguard the rigour of research methodologies and to ensure that the programme funds high quality

research. However, some stakeholders felt there was too much emphasis on the voluntary and community sector working in partnership with academics, and in future more creative partnerships should be sought between VCS organisations, research institutions, think tanks, representative bodies, and intermediary organisations, in addition to academic experts. Involving experts from the relevant fields should also include practitioners that are able to demonstrate how research findings can be utilised to help organisations adapt, thus leading to greater organisational impacts. It was hoped that this would produce research findings which were more accessible and could be taken forward both by policy makers and service providers. This would potentially increase the policy impacts of research which, as detailed in section 4, were fairly limited under the current programme.

5.3   Supporting research capacity

Stakeholders highlighted a potential tension between the aims of the current Research Grants programme to build research capacity within VCS organisations and to strengthen the wider evidence base, which potentially need to be resolved going forwards.

Previous findings (in Chapter 3) suggest, that many research projects were driven and delivered by academic research partners, which ensured robust research was conducted and useable evidence was produced. In isolated cases this led to a tension between VCS organisations and academics where it led to production of an output which was of limited use to VCS organisations and had limited wider impact.

The involvement of academic or research partners was also important in supporting the capacity building strand of the programme by supporting VCS organisations to be more involved in the research process, (as reported earlier, around half reported that they had a role in the data collection stage of the research project; 54% were involved in primary research; 46% in secondary data collection and 51% in data analysis). This provided an opportunity for these VCS organisations to build research capacity. However case study findings suggested there was limited transfer of research capacity and knowledge within VCS organisations beyond the direct staff involved in the research. In some cases, the direct staff members has also subsequently moved out of the organisation which further undermines the impact of the project on the research capacity of VCS organisations. There was no consensus amongst stakeholders about which of these potentially conflicting aims any future funding should be directed towards.

5.4   Facilitating knowledge sharing

There was recognition from stakeholders that a greater focus needed to be placed on sharing the knowledge generated from VCS led research, particularly where it had led to positive change. Issues of knowledge transfer, exchange and communication were reported to have emerged as significant concepts in recent years in the research community. In the current climate of reduced budgets, stakeholders were also conscious that there will need to be greater emphasis on investment that represents a step change in investigating an issue or which synthesises existing knowledge in the sector. Given the relatively limited local and national policy impacts identified as resulting from the individual projects (as reported in section 4.2.2, for example, 50% of projects self-reported a local policy impact but in several cases there was a lack of clarity about this was specifically achieved), the synthesis of evidence from across projects is ever more important to support the pursuit of policy or practice change.

5.5 Responding to the external research context

Stakeholders highlighted the importance of any potential future programme funding research to support the voluntary and community sector to adapt to the new research landscape and the challenges and opportunities presented by the recession and corresponding spending cuts. Whilst some stakeholders were keen for the programme to support the development of the Big Society concept, it was important to note that this was particular to the English context. Any potential future programme design should therefore consider the impact of devolution and encompass UK wide priorities emerging from policies that will create new demands on the VCS sector:

"The big thing that is going to change everything is the trend towards retrospective payment by results, the work programme… and social impact bonds…that will have as big an effect on how the sector is funded with the move from grants to contracts." (VCS representative body)

Most stakeholders felt it was important for the research programme to more explicitly support the infrastructure development of the VCS sector going forward, by ring fencing a proportion of funding for research and development work around issues such as skills development, management, volunteering and governance.

"[The programme] should be thematic…the third sector workforce is going to change dramatically, with this reconfiguration of delivery and changes of ownership models and different uses of volunteers... These changes are barely understood…we need research across the sector, a much broader picture of how the workforce, skills and roles are shifting, not at the individual or grant recipient level, but sub-sectoral studies in terms of scale." (Research body within the VCS sector)

5.6 A 'dual function' programme

Building on the issues highlighted above there is evidence to support any potential future Big Lottery Fund funding performing a dual function going forward. Essentially, ring fencing a proportion of funding to research and support the strategic development of the sector and facilitating knowledge sharing, whilst also continuing to fund a programme of research that targets gaps in the body of existing research evidence.

There is clear support from VCS organisations for the Big Lottery Fund to continue to fund research which is of relevance to the sector. As reported above, there are contradictory views amongst VCS organisations about how prescriptive any potential continued funding of research should be. Given the current funding climate, what is known about BIG's role going forwards and particularly the need to reduce administration costs of its programmes, there is a clear case for any potential funding to be more focused to BIG's mission and themes rather than continue as an wholly open, demand led programme. This would still provide opportunities for BIG to commission a relatively broad programme of research given its wide ranging interests. It would, however, undoubtedly produce tension and disappointment from some parts of the sector, particularly as it may result in a reduction in the funding of medical research given this represents less of a direct fit with BIG's remit.

An alternative option would be for a research function to be integrated into BIG's thematic delivery programmes, thus potentially providing an opportunity for any future research grant programme to be made available for more underrepresented themes. The risk for BIG here, however, is that research in a delivery context is most often 'evaluative' and narrowly focused on the operation of the specific project.

Going forward, stakeholders suggest there would be most merit in BIG reflecting on the areas where a lot of evidence already exists and the fields where not so much is known to ensure that future projects go beyond generating similar findings as research that preceded it. Regardless of the specific fields or themes which are pursued under any under any potential future funding, a key challenge for BIG going forward is that research increasingly needs to demonstrate impact rather than simply adding to the evidence base for a particular theme. One stakeholder suggests that as well as or rather than articulating a series of themes, BIG could set out a series of technical criteria against which to assess research bids:

"Its better to do the assessment based on a technical set of criteria, is it going to have a big impact, is it going to be well designed, is it filling a gap in the evidence base at the moment, rather than thinking is it based on young people, is it based on old people." (Representative of research commissioning organisation)

One stakeholder suggested that this altered assessment approach could effectively form part of an impact strategy for the programme which directs investment towards "i*nfluencing of policy and practice within and beyond the voluntary sector, particularly in those areas where information about best practice is less available."* (Research body within the VCS sector). The value of peer review approaches, were highlighted here. Peer review was commonly identified as the best quality control for research projects. Several stakeholders also commented on the value of external advisory groups providing support to projects at key stages to inform the development and direction of projects. This was recommended to ensure the currency and take-up of research findings by the wider research community and to increase their potential to inform policy.

The other side of the dual function programme recommended by stakeholders would be a focus on generic issues affecting the sector and on knowledge transfer and management to share information across the sector. Stakeholders reinforced a view that is developing in the wider sector, that the emphasis for BIG should be on facilitating the exchange of best practice and knowledge rather than just supporting new research, as this stakeholder suggests:

"We need to move up to another level now – how do, particularly grant funders make use of the evidence that is produced."

It is precisely these issues that BIG is seeking to address through its new Innovation and Replication programme and specifically the recently announced knowledge portal to be designed and implemented by the Third Sector Research Centre working with the British Library.

6 Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter provides a summary of the conclusions and recommendations emerging from the evaluation of the Research Grants programme.

6.1 Conclusions

As a whole, the Research Grants programme appeared to hold a fairly unique place in the current landscape of funding for VSC led research. Its openness, accessibility to VCS organisations both large and small and its recognition and action to address research capacity in particular set it apart from other funding streams.

Since its start in 2001, the Big Lottery Fund's Research Grants programme has provided over £80 million to support 188 VCS organisations to deliver 203 projects. On the surface this does not appear to be a particularly high number of projects to emerge from a funding stream of such size. Grant sizes ranged from just £33K to over £500K and a handful of organisations received multiple grants in the same round of funding and again in the subsequent round, amounting to upward of half a million pounds. This amounts to a significant investment in a small number of VCS organisations for which significant return might be expected. Given the open, demand led nature of the programme, however, a significant proportion of the total fund was allocated to administration which undermines its potential cost effectiveness. Going forward, any future funding programme will need to be mindful of its administration costs which may result in the design of a more focused programme.

The overall partnership working model, where projects were led by VCS organisations, who were encouraged to work with research organisations, produced positive benefits. For some VCS organisations the programme provided a good opportunity to link with new organisations and for other VCS organisations it provided an opportunity to work with larger or higher profile organisations than they had previously. For stakeholders representing the VCS sector, the VCS led partnership model was important because it altered the research partnerships traditionally supported by other funding streams where VCS organisations were typically a secondary partner. However, in isolated examples, the partnership working was less effective due to tensions between the priorities, and difficulties in balancing the skills and interests of the different partners. On balance, the reliance on academic partners to provide the research expertise undermined the impact of the research leading as it did, in many cases, to an output or dissemination activities which were too academically focused which was one factor in the limited policy impacts generated.

The Big Lottery Fund expected VCS organisations to use their research findings to build on and improve their own services as well as encouraging others to integrate the findings into wider policy and practice. Given the size of the programme it was somewhat disappointing that there wasn't greater evidence of organisational and policy impacts. The evaluation assessed the programmes' impacts through a survey of projects triangulated with qualitative evidence from case studies; many of the findings reported throughout this report are therefore self-reported by projects. As such there was potential for an overestimate of the achievements made. Nonetheless, at an organisational level, the programme did appear to have had greatest impact around helping build relationships with partners (with 88% agreeing) and around raising the participant organisations profile (86%). But there was a degree of ambivalence about whether these impacts would have happened

anyway. It appeared that the Research Grants project provided an opportunity which was pursued by VCS organisations but that they had other routes to achieve these impacts. The Research Grant funding helped many organisations to make changes to their own service delivery, in terms of expanding the range or volume of services delivered or improving the quality of services they offered. There were many examples of where the research had been used to demonstrate need which had helped the organisation secure funding for a new delivery project, or to pursue further research, for example moving onto a clinical trial.

Given the amount of funding available through the programme greater impacts and outcomes in terms of policy might have been expected. While there were some individual examples of projects that had positively influenced local policy or strategies, the impact on national policy was less tangible and in their self reporting, some projects had over-estimated their potential to achieve this. Overall, it appears that influencing practice was more likely for the Research Grants programme than influencing policy, given the faster timescales for policy making compared with the lengthy three to five year projects, and given the level at which the projects operated. Going forward, a greater emphasis in any potential future funding stream needs to be on the synthesis of evidence from across projects, which will be important to support the pursuit of policy or practice change.

Involvement in the Research Grant programme was reported by VCS organisations to have had positive impacts on their internal research skills and capacity, as intended. However, beyond a few organisations running internal workshops there was limited evidence that this research capacity was disseminated beyond the direct staff involved in the project and this was further undermined where staff had left the organisation. On balance, the programme had only limited impact on building research capacity more widely in the sector.

There was strong support from grant holders and stakeholders for continued funding of VCS research by the Big Lottery Fund. Going forward, however, BIG will be operating in more challenging times with a requirement to provide more evidence and justification of what it does with shrinking resources. Learning from the Research Grants programme suggests that a more focused programme, designed specifically to impact on policy and practice change or to address a recognised gap in evidence would provide better value for money. The commissioning of shorter, more targeted projects with a greater emphasis on achieving and monitoring impact would increase the potential impact of the programme as a whole. At the same time, there is clearly an increasingly important role for BIG to play in facilitating knowledge sharing and exchange within and between organisations.

6.2 Recommendations

In relation to the current Research Grants programme the following recommendations emerge:

- Given the diversity of the projects funded by the Research Grants programme, there would be merit in further work by Big Lottery Fund to synthesise the findings from across projects working in the same locality or thematic area to promote the findings from related projects, for example projects around older people. This might strengthen the potential for the current programme to impact on local and national policy.

- A networking event held in November 2010 for current grant holders was well attended and led to some positive knowledge exchange. There would be merit in BIG facilitating further opportunities for ongoing projects to exchange knowledge and ideas, in particular linking current and past grant holders to developments in the Innovation and Replication strand (particularly encouraging the use of cost effective online knowledge exchange mechanisms) and sharing

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findings with organisations running projects in other BIG programmes such as Reaching Communities.

- There is potential within the current programme to share good practice around for instance involving beneficiaries where some projects are 'going a step further' in involving them not only as steering group members, but actually as researchers training them to conduct analyse and write up research. Examples of this were less common in the programme and could be shared perhaps via case studies.

- The Big Lottery Fund should encourage projects to monitor the impact of their dissemination activity beyond the life of the research itself. Additional support should be provided to projects or the production of good practice guidelines on specific methods and approaches that projects can use to reach and influence at a local and national policy level and organisations should be encouraged as part of their grant to think about and plan for the sustainability of their findings.

Thinking about any potential future funding programme, we recommend that:

- Any future potential funding is more closely linked to BIG's mission and key themes, thus minimising administrative spend on an open programme and ensuring closer 'fit' to BIG's competence and interest areas. This might also mean considering a reduced focus on 'pure' medical research projects which could be better funded and supported by other funders.

- Partnership working with the VCS as lead organisation should remain at the core of any future programme to ensure continued benefits are reaped, particularly for VCS partners. The model of a VCS lead working with academic partners should remain valid in any potential future programme, but the VCS should be encouraged to work with researchers from across the wider research community to encourage innovation and diversity in the research outputs produced.

- Shorter and more focussed research grants managed via a programme of rolling deadlines could be considered, enabling VCS organisations to respond quickly to rapidly changing needs and link to local policy developments as opportunities arise and making the programme more proactive to change.

- Projects should be encouraged to develop more targeted and realistic intended outcomes that are in line with the scale and focus of their research. The Big Lottery Fund should encourage more specific and targeted dissemination plans that respond to the intended objectives of the project.

- BIG might consider mandating projects to disseminate learning around capacity building within their organisation (so that skills are not lost as staff leave) and with other interested parties so that skills and expertise are shared and embedded.

- There is clearly a need for BIG to manage and communicate any changes to its research funding carefully and sensitively given the wider economic outlook and perceptions around VCS sector funding cuts.

Annex one Grant holder's survey results

1. **Is your project now finished and complete?**

Base total = 85

	Number	%
Yes	68	80
No	17	20
Total	85	100

2. **How would you categorise your project according to the following list of options?**

Base total = 85, number of responses = 89

	Number	%
Medical research	11	13
Social research	61	72
Socio-medical research	16	19
Other (specify)	1	1
Total	85	100

3. **Which research methods did your project use from the following list of options?**

Base total = 85, number of responses = 421

	Number	%
Literature/document review	56	66
Secondary data analysis	40	47
Medical/clinical trials	12	14
Survey (postal/web/phone/in person)	49	58
In depth interviews	65	77
Focus groups	53	62
Case studies	48	57
Stakeholder/expert consultations	55	65
Longitudinal research	34	40
Other (specify)	7	8
Don't know	2	2
Total	85	100

Other	Number
Action research	1
Centre to research for families and relationships	1
Genetic analysis with auditory and visual exams	1
In depth interviews	1
Laboratory based medical research project on mice and rats	1
Mapping sessions group discussions	1
Participant observation	1

Partnership Working

4. **How many partners if any, did you work with on this project?**

Base total = 85

	Number	%
None	4	5
One	40	47
Two	12	14
Three	7	8
Four	1	1
Five or more	20	24
Don't know	1	1
Total	85	100

5. **What type of organisations were your partners?**

Base total = 80, number of responses = 140

	Number	%
Other voluntary sector	25	31
Statutory sector body (e.g. health organisation/hospital)	18	23
Academic institution	75	94
Private research or consultancy company	5	6
Independent consultant/sole trader	4	5
Other expert (e.g. a GP or scientist)	8	10
Other (specify)	5	6
Total	80	100

Other	Number
Local community groups	1
Local Government representation and the Welsh Strategic Migration Partnership	1
Older people	1
Oxford University	1
Publisher	1

6. **What roles or tasks within the project was your organisation involved in?**

Base total = 85, number of responses = 548

	Number	%
All roles/tasks	23	27
Project design (prior to application)	71	84
Project design/research tool design (post award of grant)	62	73
Primary research (e.g. fieldwork, surveys, trials)	46	54
Secondary research (e.g. desk based research)	39	46
Data analysis	43	51
Preparation of outputs/reports	63	74
Dissemination	74	87
Project management/client liaison	74	87
Adviser role	51	60
Other (specify)	2	2
Total	85	100

7. **And what roles and tasks within the project were your project partners involved in?**

Base total = 80, number of responses = 537

	Number	%
All roles/tasks	19	24
Project design (prior to application)	62	78
Project design/research tool design (post award of grant)	62	78
Primary research (e.g. fieldwork, surveys, trials)	61	76
Secondary research (e.g. desk based research)	55	69
Data analysis	65	81
Preparation of outputs/reports	59	74
Dissemination	58	73
Project management/client liaison	48	60
Adviser role	45	56
Other (specify)	2	3
None	1	1.3
Total	80	100

8. **Overall, how effective or not, was the partnership working on this project?**

Base total = 80

	Number	%
Very effective	65	81
Fairly effective	13	16
Not at all effective	1	1
Don't know	1	1
Total	80	100

9. Please explain why you think partnership working on this project was very effective.

Code	Frequency
Expertise	11
Positive relationships	15
Good communication	10
Effective team work	10
Previous experience of working together	9
Overall success of project delivery	9
Complementing strengths	6
Supervision and advice	2
Help with dissemination/outputs	3
Shared commitment	5
Help with other specific elements of the research process	9
Other	10

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about your partnership?

Base total = 80

	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither agree nor disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Don't know		Not applicable	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Our partners brought expertise/knowledge in particular research methods	65	81	11	14			2	3	1	1	1	1		
Our partners brought expertise/knowledge in a particular subject area	57	71	19	24	2	3					1	1	1	1
Working with partners helped us to ensure that the research was conducted rigorously	64	80	12	15	1	1			1	1	2	3		
Forming a partnership helped to raise the profile of the research when disseminating findings	55	69	18	23	2	3	1	1			3	4	1	1
Working with partners helped us access our beneficiaries or target groups	35	44	23	20	9	11	10	13	2	3	1	1		
Through the partnership we were able to access expert advice and networks	50	63	23	20	5	6			1	1	1	1		

Project Changes

11. Did your research project develop or change in any way during project delivery? If so how did it change?

Base total = 85, number of responses = 158

	Number	%
Did not change	25	29
Changed our research questions/objectives	9	11
Changed our target groups	10	12
Changed our methodology/approach	19	22
Changed the partners we worked with/added new partners	10	12
Changed dissemination plans/activities	22	26
Changed the timetable	32	38
Changed the budget/funding	23	27
Other (specify)	7	8
Don't know	1	1
Total	85	100

Other	Number
Amended target areas due to data we had from 4 to 2 areas	1
Changed location of case study	1
Distribution process changed	1
Expanded work	1
Look at volunteering and literature review	1
Nothing significant so far	1
Target group and methodology in response to piloting	1
Total	85

User Involvement

12. To what extent, if at all, were users involved in identifying the need for your research project?

Base total = 85

	Number	%
To a great extent	54	64
To a small extent	19	22
Not very much	5	6
Not at all	2	2
Don't know	5	6
Total	85	100

13. In what ways, if at all, were beneficiaries / target groups involved in your research project?

Base total = 85, number of responses = 330

	Number	%
As research subjects (e.g. via interviews, focus groups)	76	89
Helped recruit research subjects/participants	45	53
Helped identify the need for the project	62	73
Via a steering/reference group	62	73
Conducted research themselves (e.g. peer research)	28	33
Helped disseminate the project	55	65
Other (specify)	2	2
Total	85	100

14. To what extent, if at all, were beneficiaries / target groups involved in disseminating the findings of your research project?

Base total = 85

	Number	%
To a great extent	35	41
To a small extent	30	35
Not very much	7	8
Not at all	10	12
Don't know	3	4
Total	85	100

15. Overall, how effective or otherwise, was the involvement of beneficiaries in this project?

Base total = 85

	Number	%
Very effective	66	78
Fairly effective	15	18
Not very effective	3	4
Not at all effective	1	1
Total	85	100

16. Have there been any lessons learned about the involvement of beneficiaries in this project? If so please can you describe what you have learned?

Base total = 85

	Number	%
Yes	68	80
No	17	20
Total	85	100

Code	Frequency
Vital / invaluable / very important	16
Importance of effective communication	12
Useful	7
Issues relating to recruiting participants	7
Time consuming	5
Need to offer support	5
Led to specific findings	9
Need to be flexible	2
May need to consider payment	2
Beneficial to involve beneficiaries early on	2
Personal development opportunities for participants	2
Can be difficult	2
Other	10

Dissemination and Implementation

17. How did you disseminate your project and its research findings?

Base total = 85, number of responses = 576

Produced a research report	72	85
Wrote an academic paper/journal article	71	84
Ran a conference, seminar or workshop	66	78
Produced a good practice guide	28	33
Presented findings at someone else's conference, seminar or	69	81
Media coverage (e.g. general or specialist press)	59	69
Lobbied an influential individual	51	60
Sent targeted mailing containing relevant findings (e.g. new	60	71
Produced text for website (e.g. case study, blog article, ne	57	67
Produced findings in a visual and multimedia format (e.g. DV	27	32
Other (specify)	7	8
Too early to say	9	11
Total	85	100

Other	Number
Audio format	1
Emailing to a wide base group of people	1
Manuals	1
Meetings with participants	1
Ongoing basis	1
Took findings to MP's at Westminster and Welsh Government for Housing	1
Through peer educators	1

18. Overall, how effective were each of those methods you have just listed in disseminating your research findings?

	Very effective		Fairly effective		Not very effective		Not at all effective		Don't know		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Research Report	43	60	21	29					8	11	72
Academic paper / journal article	39	55	21	30	2	3	1	1	8	11	71
Ran a conference, seminar or workshop	50	76	11	17			1	2	4	6	66
Produced good practise guide	20	71	5	18					3	11	28
Presented at someone else's conference, seminar or workshop	48	70	14	20					7	10	69
Media coverage	25	42	25	42	4	7	1	2	4	7	59
Lobbied influential individual	27	53	18	35					6	12	51
Sent targeted mailing	28	47	22	37	4	7			6	10	60
Produced text for website	28	49	24	42	1	2			4	7	57
Produced findings in visual and multimedia format	21	78	3	11					3	11	27
Other	3	50	2	33					1	17	6

19. What types of audience, if any, did you disseminate your findings to?

Base total = 76, number of responses = 475

	Number	%
Our own staff/organisation	71	93
Voluntary sector organisations	70	92
Users/beneficiaries	72	95
Academic institutions	67	88
Private sector medical body (e.g. drug company, private heal	15	20
Statutory sector body (e.g. health organisation/hospital)	56	74
Medical professional (e.g. GP or scientist)	34	45
Local/regional Government officials	44	58
National Government officials	43	57
Other (specify)	3	4
Total	76	100

Other	Number
Financial sectors	1
National body for complementary therapy and presentations	1
Those who advise families	1

20. How, if at all, did you implement the findings of your research report?

Base total = 85 number of responses = 172

	Number	%
We changed the policies of our organisation	16	19
We changed how the organisation works with users/beneficiaries	28	33
We implemented a new project	38	45
We changed how we work with partners	16	19
We used them to demonstrate need to potential funders	48	57
We did not implement them	1	1
Other (specify)	5	6
Too early to say	17	20
Don't know	3	4
Total	85	100

Other	Number
Findings used in a beneficial way	1
Given participants more involvement	1
In policy advocacy work	1
Influenced national policy and started additional service	1
We influenced other organisations that were providing outreach services	1

Outcomes and Impacts

21. To what extent did your research project meet all of its intended objectives?

Base total = 85

	Number	%
Met all our objectives	57	67
Met some of our objectives	13	15
Too early to say	12	14
Don't know	3	4
Total	85	100

22. Why do you say that?

Reasons why the projects <u>met all</u> their objectives

Code	Frequency
Effective partnership working	4
Originality of project	2
Successful project management	3
Effective planning	3
Achieved planned impact	7
Went beyond planned objectives	4
Successful dissemination	4
Confirmed met objectives	34
Other	3

Reasons why the project <u>met some</u> of their objectives

Code	Frequency
Issues with methodology	3
Problems engaging research participants	3
Mixed success of outputs / dissemination	1
Unable to access impact on service delivery	1
Project scope to wide to achieve all objectives	1
Project not yet complete	2
Other	1

23. What factors, if any, affected the extent to which you met your objectives?

Base = 83, number of responses = 307

	Number	%
Good planning/project management	66	81
Enthusiastic staff	65	79
Lack of skills in our organisation	7	9
Lack of time	20	24
Lack of funding	8	10
Difficulties obtaining data/evidence	22	27
Difficulties with partners	7	9
Difficulties finding research participants	25	31
Support from partners	25	31
Difficulties in disseminating our findings	5	6

	Number	%
Successful dissemination	46	56
Other (specify)	9	11
Don't know	2	2
Total	82	100

Other	Number
Engaging beneficiaries was a problem as they were in and out of hospital	1
Personnel issue with one of the researchers	1
Recruitment of sample	1
Staffing issue	1
Too early to say	5

24. Which of the following, if any, were the intended impacts of your project?

Base total = 85, number of responses = 417

	Number	%
Changing national/regional/local policy	58	68
Changing/enhancing practice in the wider sector	69	81
Changing/enhancing service delivery to direct users/beneficiaries	72	85
Raising awareness of a cause	71	84
Contribution to an evidence base, i.e. transferring scientific	70	82
Informing stakeholders of progress	70	82
Other (specify)	2	2
Too early to say	5	6
Total	85	100

25. Which of the following impacts have been achieved by your project?

Base total = 85, number of responses = 340

	Count	%
Changing national/regional/local policy	41	48
Changing/enhancing practice in the wider sector	52	61
Changing/enhancing service delivery to direct users/beneficiaries	53	62
Raising awareness of a cause	62	73
Contribution to an evidence base, i.e. transferring scientific	55	65
Informing stakeholders of progress	64	75
Other (specify)	1	1
None of the above	1	1
Too early to say	11	13
Total	85	100

26. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about the impact of your research project?

Base total = 85

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Don't know		Not applicable		Too early to say		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
The research project helped us influence national policy or strategy	16	19	23	27	6	7	12	14	3	4	4	5	2	2	19	22	85
The research project helped us influence local policy or strategy	21	25	21	25	8	9	9	11	1	1	5	6	1	1	19	22	85
The research project helped us improve the quality of existing services we deliver	27	32	26	31	6	7	8	9	1	1			5	6	12	14	85
The research project has helped expand the range or volume of services we deliver	17	20	21	25	4	5	20	24	3	4			6	7	14	17	85
The research project has helped improve/expand services delivered by other organisations	16	19	25	29	5	6	10	12			8	10	5	6	16	19	85
The research project helped us obtain additional funding for further research or service delivery	16	19	18	21	3	4	31	37	4	5			3	4	10	12	85
The research project helped raise the profile of our organisation	37	44	36	42	4	5	4	5							4	5	85
The research project helped us build relationships with partners	37	44	37	44	5	6	1	1					1	1	4	5	85
The research project helped raise awareness of the particular issue which was the focus of the project	40	47	37	44	2	2	1	1							5	6	85
The research project helped staff develop skills which can be used even after the research has come to an end	32	38	34	40	2	2	9	11							8	10	85
The research project helped develop the research skills of staff within our organisation	25	29	31	37	4	5	15	18					3	5	7	8	85

27. Would this change have happened without the research project?

	Yes	%	No	%	Don't know	%	Total
The research project helped us influence national policy or strategy	9	23	25	64	5	13	**39**
The research project helped us influence local policy or strategy	5	12	33	79	4	10	**42**
The research project helped us improve the quality of existing services we deliver	13	25	32	60	8	15	**53**
The research project has helped expand the range or volume of services we deliver	9	24	24	63	5	13	**38**
The research project has helped improve/expand services delivered by other organisations	5	12	26	63	10	24	**41**
The research project helped us obtain additional funding for further research or service delivery	12	35	19	56	3	9	**34**
The research project helped raise the profile of our organisation	32	44	37	51	4	6	**73**
The research project helped us build relationships with partners	35	47	36	49	3	4	**74**
The research project helped raise awareness of the particular issue which was the focus of the project	25	33	49	64	3	4	**77**
The research project helped staff develop skills which can be used even after the research has come to an end	14	21	49	74	3	5	**66**
The research project helped develop the research skills of staff within our organisation	14	25	40	71	2	5	**56**

28. In what ways has the project achieved the following?

i. The research project helped us influence national policy or strategy

Code	Frequency
Used to inform or lobby government / national agencies	7
Government / national agencies have used the research	6
Joint working with government / national agencies	11
Successful dissemination	4
Raised profile of an issue	4
Pertinent timing	2
Influenced the organisations national policy	2
Influenced future research / data collection	2
Bo further explanation of impact	3
Other	5

28.ii The research project helped us influence local policy or strategy

Code	Frequency
Used to inform or lobby local agencies	8
Local agencies have used the research	13
Joint working with local agencies	2
Raised profile of an issue	3
Influenced the organisation's local policy	2
No further explanation of impact	5
Other	8

28.iii The research project helped us improve the quality of existing services we deliver

Code	Frequency
Useful outputs	3
Greater staff awareness	14
Policy change	4
Development of existing services	6
Development of new services	10
Access to funding	4
Led to new data collection	2
No further explanation of impact	4
Other	11

28. iv The research project has helped expand the range or volume of services we deliver

Code	Frequency
More specialised services	3
New project/ programme	3
More staff	2
Better info/advice	1
Better informed services	4
Increased services to particular client groups	3
Accessed additional funding	3
No change	1
No further explanation	8
Other	8

28.v The research project has helped improve / expand services delivered by other organisations

Code	Frequency
Guidance/ resources/ training	5
Increased staff awareness	7
Development of new projects	6
Partnership working	2
Policy change	2
Other	8
No further explanation	9

28. vi The research project helped us obtain additional funding for further research or service delivery

Code	Frequency
Funding for research	7
Funding for services	4
Funding from the Lottery	2
Funding from government	2
Awaiting outcome of further funding applications	3
Other	4
No further explanation	14
None	1

28.vii The research project helped raise the profile of our organisation

Code	Frequency
Increased recognition from audiences in relevant sector	6
Increased recognition from professionals	3
Increased recognition from a range of audiences	5
Through partnership with university	8
Through working nationally	1
Through partnership working	5
Because support from BIG carries weight	2
Through recruiting participants	3
Through dissemination work	18
Through media work	13
No further explanation	16
Other	4

28.viii The research project helped us build relationships with partners

Code	Frequency
Positive relationships	9
Effective team work	10
Relationship continued after project	8
Further joint research planned	3
Relationships with range of partners	13
Increased organisation's credibility	5
Help with dissemination/ steering groups	2
Brought expertise	2
No further explanation	9
Other	10

28. ix The research project helped raise awareness of the particular issue which was the focus of the project

Code	Frequency
Through dissemination/ events	22
Through publications/ resources	6
Through wider audiences	6
Through partners	13
Through professionals	3
Through the organisation	3
First time this issue addressed	4
Through media	5
Through providing evidence	5
No further explanation	15
Other	8

28.x The research project helped staff develop skills which can be used even after the research has come to an end

Code	Frequency
Skills for funding bids	2
Media skills	1
Project management skills	4
New skills	12
Understanding	1
Research skills	15
Communication/ engagement skills	5
Guidance produced to help skills development	1
No further explanation	16
Other	11

28. xi The research project helped develop the research skills of staff within our organisation

Code	Frequency
Methodologies	8
Passed on new skills	2
For future research	5
New research skills	12
Dissemination skills	1
Has helped	3
Experience	1
No further explanation	14
Training received	1
Other	7

29. Which of the following statements most closely reflects your views of how important the research project was in achieving the improved / changed service delivery you described?
Base total = 58

	Number	%
The research project was the most important aspect in the change	24	41
The research project contributed to the change, but other factors played a part	32	55
The research project played only a small part, other factors were more important	2	3
Total	58	100

30. How likely is it that the organisation will design, undertake and use future research as a result of your experience of this research project?
Base total = 85

	Number	%
Very likely	55	65
Somewhat likely	17	20
Neutral	3	4
Somewhat unlikely	6	7
Very unlikely	1	1
Too early to say	3	4
Total	85	100

31. What lessons if any, have you learnt about the process of conducting a research project?

Code	Frequency
Learnt about research/ dissemination process	14
Value of effective partnership working	16
Importance of clear research design/ planning ahead	10
Importance of using beneficiaries/ stakeholders	11
Value of the research findings/ impact	8
Difficulty/ complexity of research process	8
Need to be adaptable	7
Importance of effective project management	5
Time-consuming	7
Importance of clear expectation/ defined roles	4
Value of expert advice	4
Increased confidence for future research	4
Difficulty of working with academic partners	3
No particular learning about research	3
No further explanation	6
Other	4

Future Funding

32. What do you think the priorities should be for any Big Lottery Fund supported research grants in the future?

Code	Frequency
Voluntary/ community based organisations	10
Social research	7
Health and social	5
Medical research	3
Health and equalities	2
Research with useful outcomes/ for beneficiaries	6
Less popular issues	3
Research on specific marginalised groups/ issues	25
Research into preventative work	3
Help with the research/ application	4
No suggestions	9
Other	13

33. To what extent would you agree or disagree with the following statements about the future of any Big Lottery Fund research grants programme?

	Strongly agree		Agree		Neither agree or disagree		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Don't know		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Any future programme should support a mix of medical and social research	34	40	29	34	4	5	10	12	6	7	2	2	85
Any future programme should support only social research	13	15	12	14	8	10	42	49	8	9	2	2	85
Any future programme should support only medical research	5	6	5	6	6	7	55	65	13	15	1	1	85
Any future programme should be demand led so that the sector decides what should be researched	27	32	33	39	8	9	13	15			4	5	85
Big Lottery Fund should give more specific guidance about the areas it would like to see covered in any future research programmes	16	19	30	35	10	12	22	26	3	4	4	5	85

34. Are there any further comments you would like to make?

Code	Frequency
Positive feedback to Big Lottery	14
Reiterated funding priorities for vital research with specific groups	6
Need for further funding	3
Responses limited as individuals moved on	3
Survey would be more useful sooner after the project	3
Survey would be more useful with more open questions	2
Should be more input from applicants	2
Funding should be less restricted	4
Positive feedback for Big Lottery staff	4
Onerous application process	3
Other	8

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