RAND EUROPE

Evaluation of the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund (UKRPIF)

INTERIM FINDINGS

What is the UKRPIF?

The UKRPIF aims to **address the need for support and investment at the mid-range scale for higher education capital projects**. It is designed to promote partnerships, support research collaboration and drive non-public investment in higher education research facilities.

£1bn has been awarded to 59 projects over seven funding rounds, and the double-match funding requirement means over £2.5bn has been committed in co-investments by industry, charities, philanthropy and more.

Research England administers UKRPIF on behalf of UKRI and in partnership with the devolved funding bodies: The Department of the Economy Northern Ireland, Medr and The Scottish Funding Council.

UKRPIF objectives:

- Enhance the research facilities of higher education providers (HEPs) undertaking world-leading research.
- Encourage strategic partnerships between HEPs and other organisations active in research.
- Stimulate additional investment in higher education research.
- Strengthen the research base's contribution to economic growth.

How have we evaluated the UKRPIF so far?

This is a multi-year theory-based evaluation concluding in 2028. We have examined the UKRPIF's processes and progress towards its intended impacts so far. Methods included:

Desk review of project documents and monitoring reports

Interviews with projects, partners and programme stakeholders and **project site visits**

Secondary data review of the portfolio and a **survey** with projects

Collecting examples and **case studies** to illustrate outcomes.

What did we find?

Our **interim** findings suggest that UKRPIF has significantly enhanced UK research infrastructure, which anchors and enables research that contributes to the wider system. This improved infrastructure boosts research capabilities and capacity, attracts talent and increases national and international recognition, aligning with UK research and growth ambitions.

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ENHANCED RESEARCH FACILITIES

Extensive facility enhancements: All HEPs that had completed building their UKRPIF projects felt that the funding had enhanced their research facilities.

Increased national and international recognition: Upgraded facilities have helped HEPs enhance their reputation and visibility in the global research community.

Adaptability and future-proofing: Many HEPs (59%) reported they are financially able to adapt their new facilities to meet growth and changing research demands.

Financial sustainability: The majority of HEPs (95%) reported they are able to maintain the facilities financially.

Environmental sustainability: Efforts to construct and manage facilities in an environmentally sustainable manner have been prioritised.

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CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY FOR WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH

Expansion of research facilities: HEPs have significantly expanded their physical research spaces, which has increased their research capacity.

Growth in research staff: HEPs reported a statistically significant increase in the number of staff associated with the facility, including PhD students enrolled (79%) and awarded (156%), as well as postdoctoral (53%) and senior researchers (68%).

Increase in research productivity: HEPs reported enhanced facilities and increased quantity and quality of staff has directly contributed to higher levels of research productivity for 84% of awarded projects.

Development of new research areas: 92% of awarded projects reported that UKRPIF funding has facilitated the development of new and emerging research fields such as clean energy.

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PARTNERSHIPS, CO-LOCATION AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Incentivising collaboration: 86% of HEPs reported an increased number of partnerships with other HEPs (4x more than baseline).

Building new relationships: HEPs reported a statistically significant increase in the numbers of partnerships with the private and third sectors (both 2.2x more than baseline).

Boosting co-location: UKRPIF has increased the number of co-located staff from 33 to 215, including 53 more in industry, cementing collaboration.

Promoting knowledge exchange: UKRPIF recipients report improved knowledge exchange through hosting events, working with new collaborators and sharing equipment.

LEVERAGED RESEARCH INCOME, INVESTMENT & SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

Direct increase in research income: Projects supported by UKRPIF have seen a marked increase in UK industry research income (£68m/1.9x more than baseline) and overall overseas research income (£139m/4.9x more than baseline).

Increased and diverse investment sources: HEPs reported a net increase of £92m in domestic investment compared to baseline and £33m from overseas (both mostly from industry).

Commercial outputs: UKRPIF enabled HEPs to commercialise 9.7x more research outputs (e.g. patents) compared to baseline.

Sustained investment beyond initial funding: The initial investments by UKRPIF have led to ongoing industry engagement and further investments.

Contributing to government growth strategies and priorities: 51% of HEPs report they are able to contribute to government strategies and national priorities.

The full interim report is available through Research England or can be accessed on the UKRI or RAND Europe website.

UKRPIF evaluation next steps

1. Research England will continue annual data collection with projects until 2027.
2. RAND Europe will continue to collect case studies, conduct further interviews and analyse annual data returns from UKRPIF projects, Frontier Economics will conduct an economic evaluation.
3. Research England with the UKRPIF Programme Board will consider the interim report recommendations and further develop them with RAND Europe over the course of the evaluation.

The figures presented in this infographic are based on our analysis of survey responses and data collected from HEPs. The data collection aimed to examine changes across various metrics since the baseline year, defined as the year the project was awarded.

This document is adapted from *Evaluation of the UK Research Partnership Investment Fund (UKRPIF) - Interim report* by Katie O'Brien, Emily Hutton, Tamara Strabel and Billy Bryan, RR-A2796-2, 2024 (available at www.rand.org/t/RRA2796-2). To view this infographic online, visit www.rand.org/t/IGA2796-1

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