partners have all signed up to achieving by 2030, proposals with strong impact agendas focused on these specific targets are likely to be those we see come to fruition.

In terms of the GCRF opportunities we’ve seen, the Medical Research Council and Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council taking support from Arts and Humanities, Natural Environment, and Economic and Social Research Council were first off the blocks in May 2016, calling for applications for the “Foundation Awards”. This was an approach we saw spread across the funders, who all seemed to be dipping toes into the water through various forms of smaller awards such as the Foundation Awards.

We then proceeded to new significant opportunities, such as the Economic and Social Research Council GCRF Centres for Doctoral Training, which offered up to £5 million over five years. If we consider the 24 calls or so we’ve seen over the last 10 months, you can see the steady spread of topics and variety of funding models offered through the GCRF.

The most exciting opportunity stemming from the GCRF so far though is through the “Innovative” calls, which has morphed formally into the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Collective Call. So far only one call has so far been announced, for proposals of up to £8 million in any relevant area of GCRF, with a focus on growing research capability. What makes this so exciting is the sheer financial resource available through this route over the next few years, with applications growing from £38 million in 2017/18 to potentially £155 million in 2019/20.

Even with an institutional cap of two per organisation, demand was overwhelming with over 250 expressions of interest submitted for the first round. At this time, outcomes are yet unknown but, it’s incredibly exciting to consider what might have been supported through this and what future opportunities from this scheme may be offered. Suggestions being made are a huge increase in the scale of funding offered, moving up into the double digit of millions.

**CHALLENGE WITH CHALLENGER-FUNDED RESEARCH**

As exciting as this is, experienced colleagues working in development will tell us, aid budget allocations have its difficulties. Words that fare unimpressed in relation to this are “ODA Compliant”. While this relates to an actual funding, for GCRF this translates into a requirement that all research funded through this route must have a primary purpose of promoting the economic development and welfare of a developing country. We’ve seen this linked to Newton Fund funding, but that is something academic colleagues are struggling to address. To demonstrate this, most GCRF calls have required an “ODA Compliance Statement”, and without being able to meet those requirements we’ve seen applicants rejected at office stage from funders.

Aside from ODA compliance issues, we must not also forget the issues we face working in lower middle-income countries, not just as strict institutional infrastructure to process grants and payments, but risk assessment and travel guidance. Currently, from the list of eligible countries on the OECD DAC list, I would not be allowed to travel to South Sudan (for example), and there are several countries included on the list for which institutions will not sign off risk assessment. Alongside this, a huge impact of the GCRF is placed on working with country partners, with some calls stipulating this as an essential requirement, but even having the country register through UKaid can present difficulties.

Institutions, therefore, have to adapt and evolve with regards to working increasingly in this area. This is an opportunity for the community to work together more closely in terms of best practice and ensuring researchers and partners are safe and able to conduct their projects without difficulty.

**FORWARD THINKING**

As we write this piece, it is a relatively quiet time in terms of actual funding applications for the GCRF with only three recently sized calls open. We’re also just grandfathering the announcement of the new UK Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund, with benefits turned at the prospect of accessing new money for the research community. Which in stark contrast to GCRF looks to focus specifically on bringing together business and science to tackle identifiable challenges for the UK.

However, whilst the GCRF submission timeline may be slowing, the community is strategically preparing for the background of the upcoming calls. Whispers of the recent calls have come coming in the next few weeks, and with further whispers of another large pots of funding becoming available. Institutions are strategically preparing as much as possible to respond to such calls.

As we move further into the spending period, and we see the grants being finalised through the GCRF. I am happy to see that the initial momentum has certainly waxed. The community is clearly evolving, and despite the challenges that these large funding developments presents, I am looking forward to seeing how the UK research community reacts to these opportunities.

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