

Different strokes for different folks - analysis of QR GCRF strategies of English HEIs

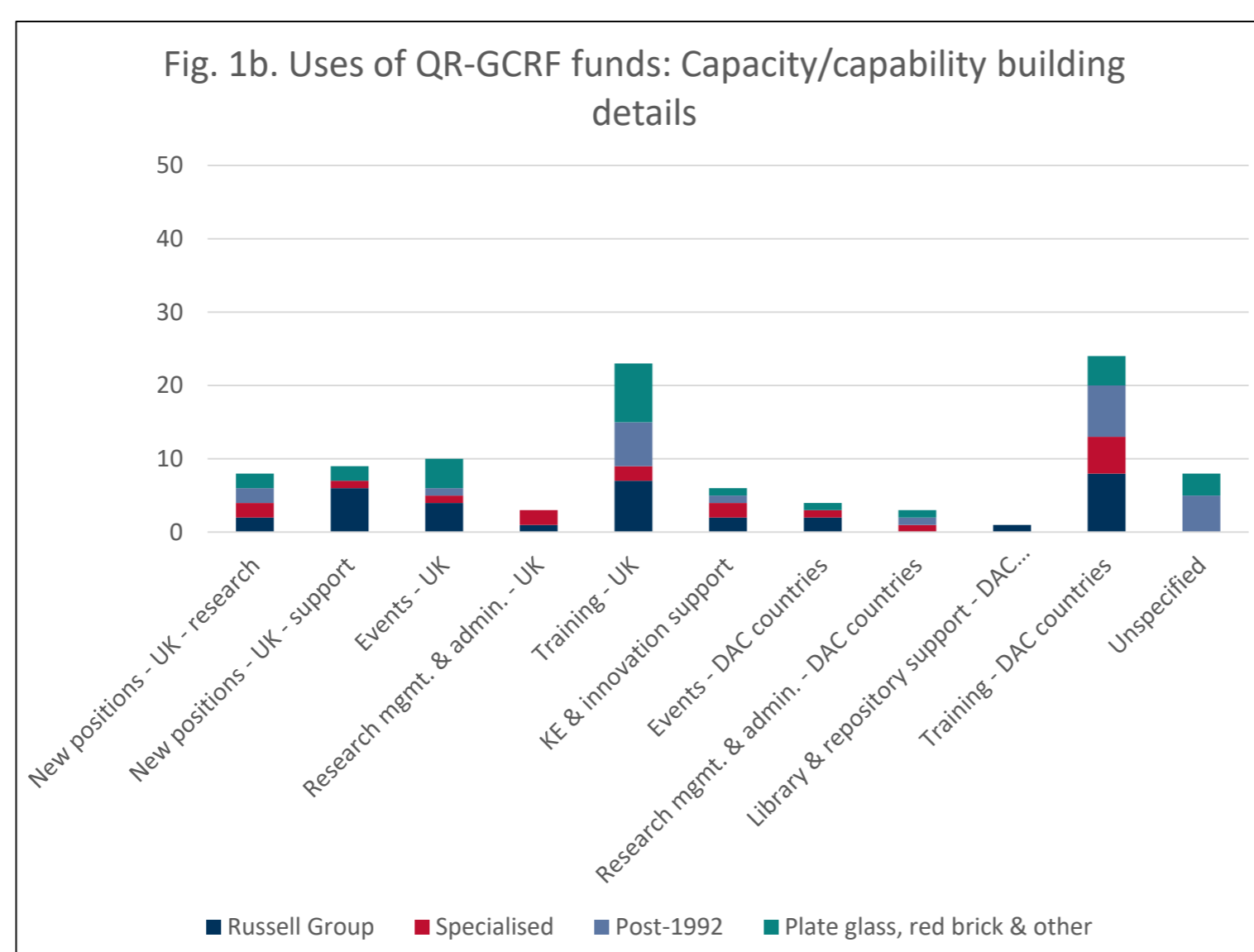
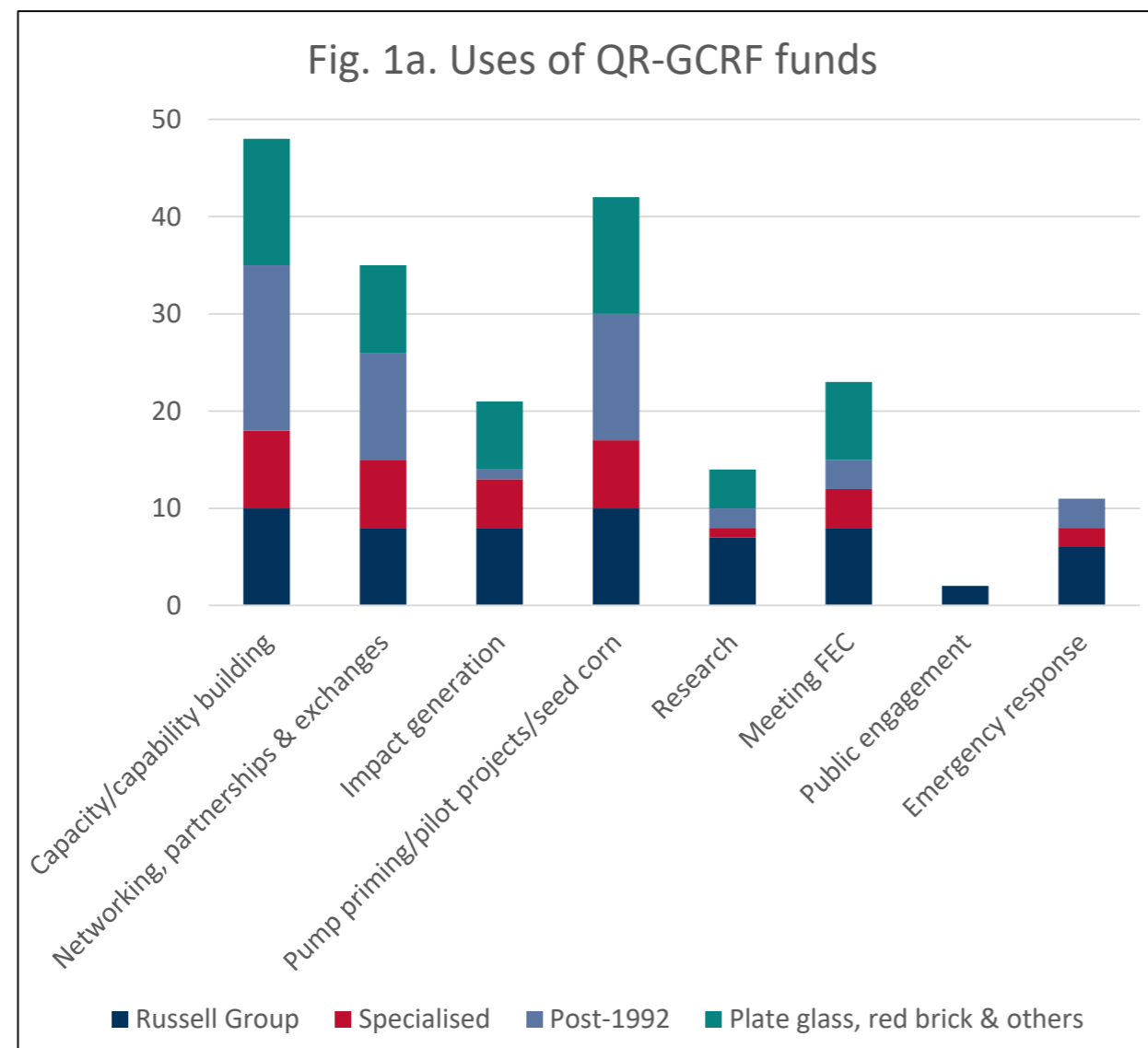
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Abstract

The Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) represents a major source of funding for UK Higher Education Institutions. In addition to competitive grants available through the delivery partners, some GCRF funds are now allocated to participating universities as part of their core quality-related (QR) funding. To avail of this QR-GCRF funding for 2018-21, English HEIs needed to submit 3-year strategies explaining how the funding would be used to promote international development research and impact. In this poster, we explore the different approaches taken by different institutions represented in the 107 published strategies, especially in terms of (i) what the funding is to be used for, e.g. pump-priming, capacity building, etc., (ii) the disciplines and development areas supported and (iii) the partner countries involved. In theory, core funding of GCRF-related research should offer greater opportunity for HEIs to experiment, to take risks, and to explore areas under-represented in the competitive GCRF calls.

Methodology

The survey used the (textual) narratives available at <https://re.ukri.org/research/global-challenges-research-fund/>. The detailed spending proposals (spreadsheets) were not available on the website – this probably resulted in some loss of information. The 50 strategies to be analysed were chosen at random from the 107 available. Development areas according to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1-16 were either mentioned explicitly in the strategies or were implied; SDG17 (Partnership for the Goals) was assumed to apply universally so was omitted. DAC countries only mentioned in the context of projects already completed, or in a purely aspirational sense, or in projects funded only from other sources, were not included. Only specific countries were counted: regions such as 'ASEAN' were ignored. Allocation of countries to different Asian regions was done according to the conventions of the UN Statistics Division. Only impact according to ODA/GCRF definitions is presented: where strategies mentioned e.g. joint publications or more GCRF grants as 'impacts', these were not included. In some cases, strategies were focussed on calls for proposals in areas not yet decided, and it was not always possible to identify specific disciplines/topics, SDGs, or DAC countries.



Results & conclusions

- Almost all of the sampled HEIs included capacity/capability building of some sort (Fig. 1a). This was followed in popularity by 'pump-priming' (or similar), then networking/partnerships/exchanges, then meeting FEC shortfalls and impact generation. Post-1992 universities were least likely to use their funds to generate impact or meet FEC shortfalls. Within capacity/capability building, the most popular activities were training of UK or DAC-country staff or students (Fig. 1b).
- HEIs reported a wide variety of disciplines and topic areas. Among the most popular (data not shown) were sustainable agriculture/agrifood security (17 of the 50 HEIs surveyed) education & wellbeing (14 HEIs), sustainable energy (13 HEIs) and infectious diseases including antimicrobial resistance (12 HEIs). Surprisingly given its importance, the topic of biodiversity & conservation was mentioned by only 3 HEIs. This may however be seen as a reflection of the fact that research is no substitute for political action. Categorised by the Sustainable Development Goal addressed (Fig. 2), SDG3 (Good health & wellbeing) was the most popular, followed by SDGs 2 (Zero hunger) and 4 (Quality education). The environmentally oriented SDGs such as 14 (Life below water) were relatively undersubscribed.
- Population size and language appeared to be major influences on HEIs' choices of DAC-list countries. Sub-Saharan Africa was the most popular region (Fig. 3a), closely followed by South Asia, with the Americas third. The most popular partner countries were India (38 HEIs), China (33 HEIs) and Brazil (32 HEIs). Russell-Group universities were less likely than others to work in the Middle East/North Africa. There were striking differences in the degree of engagement with individual sub-Saharan African countries (Fig. 3b), with around half of the HEIs working with each of Kenya, Ghana and Tanzania, while some countries such as Angola were absent.
- In many of the strategies, little or no ODA-compliant impact could be discerned in the narratives. The most popular types of impact were policy changes (13 HEIs), health-care interventions (10 HEIs), and improvements in research capacity (8 HEIs) or education (7 HEIs) (data not shown).

