



## Business Boost 2020 Programme Survey

We invited participants to complete an online survey about their thoughts and experiences on business and industry engagement in the Social Sciences. The survey aimed to identify research themes and business-relevant social science expertise, establish levels of interest in training and professional development in regard to working with businesses, as well as identifying existing levels of business engagement. The survey was open until Saturday 11 July 2020.

The survey was targeted at all Social Science ECRs or PGRs at each of the 10 SeNSS universities and was communicated to them via Essex as the lead University. A total of 98 responses were received from ECRs or PGRs at 8 of the 10 SeNSS universities.

The University of Essex accounted for 43% of responses overall (42 responses). To put this into context, the next highest was from the University of East Anglia at 17% of respondents (17). Overall, the responses are biased towards PGRs, who comprised 74% of all respondents.

### Key Findings

- 59% of respondents have had some form of experience working with external organisations.
- ECRs are most likely to be motivated to work with businesses by opportunities to develop ideas for new research paths, access additional funding and improving their chances of advancing their academic career.
- PGRs are motivated by opportunities to advance their future careers in business. PGRs are keen to highlight the real-world impact of their research and see access to additional funding as key motivating factors.
- 60% of all ECRs and 44% of all PGRs felt that current networks, connections and events available are not sufficient to support collaborations with business.
- 68% of ECRs strongly agree that they have an ambition to engage business in their research, while 79.1% of PGRs believe that their research could benefit business.
- 26 respondents felt that their experiences of collaborating with business had allowed them to develop transferable skills. This is only 41% of those who have business experience, which could suggest there is a lack of awareness around what could count as a transferable skill from working externally.
- 70% of ECRs and PGRs have little or no confidence in understanding the process to convert business engagement ideas into live projects.
- For ECRs, the most relevant professional development activities to address current knowledge gaps would be: •Placements/secondments with an external organisation. •Shadowing a more senior colleague. •Informal networks and events.
- PGRs again followed a similar trend as ECRs in which professional development activities would be most useful to address current knowledge gaps, but favoured mentoring over placements.

## Recommendations Resulting from the Survey

- For both PGRs and ECRs: the survey suggests a lack of confidence and experience in engaging businesses, particularly in terms of presenting research in ways that are relevant to that organisation. To address these opportunities to meet and engage with business representatives through tailored events are suggested.
- For ECRs: Provide a platform where they can communicate with other ECRs in the different universities. This would be beneficial to i) open the door to ECRs with business experience advising those who are less experienced. ii) It could lead to collaboration with academic and business connections being shared iii) this platform could also act as a way to communicate with an 'already engaged' group of ECRs for group mentoring with an individual from business.
- For PGRs: Alignment of the Business Boost activity with career development objectives may have additional benefits in terms of participation and value to the PGRs. Most PGRs do not end up having a career in academia. Providing opportunities to explore working in business such as speaking with mentors who are successful social scientists within a company and helping PGRs to understand the transferability of skills they have acquired would be beneficial.
- For both PGRs and ECRs: a programme of how to engage with business. This could start with simple activities such as how to pitch research to businesses (knowing the right language to use to engage with business is key) which could culminate in a pitching session to business.
- For both PGRs and ECRs exploring "Management Consultancy" as a sector and career path, due to its popularity as a relevant sector for social science research has a number of potential points of value to Business Boost.
- For PGRs and ECRs: 63% of PGRs believed that their current research was relevant to the government and public sector. 68% of ECRs believed that their current research was relevant to the public sector and so there is an opportunity through Business Boost to support development of relationships in areas where business *and* local and regional government operate.

