



80 years of MRS
Evidence matters
more than ever

Business of Evidence Report

March 2026



In Brief

1

The research and evidence market is a major contributor to the UK's economy and intelligence capital

2

In a decade marked by continual disruption, research and evidence has guided organisations forward with confidence

3

The market has seen significant growth over the last 10 years

4

Our people, skills, and standards are the lifeblood to our success

5

The market now faces an opportunity to define the next era

6

We must leverage our curiosity to push the bounds of AI in research

7

We must invest now for future talent later

8

Now is the time for the market to seize the opportunity and lead the way with confidence

9

We must move forward together to build on our success

Download the full report at mrs.org.uk/boe26



Introduction

Jane Frost CBE

The research and evidence market has seen many waves of new technology sweep in, and we have been very adept at integrating them into the arsenal of techniques we use. From early machine learning and geodemographics, to big data and now generative AI. Indeed, this market has for a long time been a quiet pioneer, adopting and developing many of these innovations.

With each tech wave someone has predicted that market research will start to fail. DIY research arrived, and the market grew. Big data became the go-to buzz word, and the research market grew again. Clients discovered that just doing a Google search instead of market research did not provide them with the differentiated insight they needed to help their businesses grow.

We are all about experimentation and innovation; smashing methodologies together to crack difficult consumer and social problems. We collaborate across the disciplines of social and market research, ux and cx, analytics and AI, and that is why the UK is still a world leading research market.

Value is created by the people in the research market - all 350,000 of them! Insight that is actionable comes from human genius with the aid of technology, not from technology alone.



Our creativity, resilience and professional skills are the bedrock which supports the research market's economic impact on the UK and the world. Why else would it continue to be second only to the US?

By the time MRS was formed in 1946, market research had already shown its importance during the war years in helping the government to understand issues like public response to rationing. In the last 10 years, despite global uncertainty and crises such as Covid, our market has shown continued growth to reach £18.7bn.

As well as being bigger - and arguably better - than sliced bread (see next page), the research market contributes directly not only to commercial and public decisions, but also is a significant contributor to the creative industries such as advertising and business consulting.

80 years ago, the founders of MRS thought there might be about 25 people who deserved to be considered research professionals

and join the nascent MRS. Today £18.7 bn is the result of the work of over one third of a million amazing, creative and innovative people.

We at MRS are delighted to have played a part in this professional journey, nurturing skills, setting standards and providing research and guidance. Now more than ever, we need to rely on the evidence and insight professionals to generate and counteract misinformation and fight for truth, because our world, our society and the products we all use are shaped by the evidence we as a market create.

I am proud of the record this report highlights and grateful to our accredited company partner, PA Consulting, for their hard work in making this report possible.

Here's to the next 80 years.



Jane Frost CBE,
CEO of MRS

Foreword

The power of human ingenuity

It has been a privilege for PA Consulting to partner with the MRS to deliver the 2026 Business of Evidence Report, especially as we celebrate its 80th anniversary.

As Jane Frost so aptly points out in her opening remarks, our sector has continually faced waves of technological disruption. Yet it has only grown stronger, now contributing a record £18.7 billion to the UK economy and employing over 350,000 dedicated professionals. At PA, our foundational belief is in “the power of ingenuity to build a positive human future”. Jane’s powerful assertion that actionable insight stems from “human genius with the aid of technology, not from technology alone” resonates deeply with our purpose at PA.

A decisive moment

We are living through a decade defined by seismic shifts – from global pandemics and economic upheaval to the rapid ascent of generative AI. Amid this constant complexity and disruption, the research and evidence market has been the steady hand guiding both the public and private sectors. As this report highlights, four in five research buyers now rely on our sector’s insights to make more confident, strategic decisions.

‘AI is not a replacement for our workforce; it is an enabler of things we have previously only dreamt about.’

**Gemma Proctor,
Head of Human Insights,
PA**



Today, our market stands at a major inflection point. As AI reshapes our capabilities, allowing for unprecedented speed and scale, we must move forward with confidence. As highlighted in our findings, AI is not a replacement for our workforce; it is an enabler of things we have previously only dreamt about. The true value of our sector will always lie in our people. Research and evidence practitioners are the crucial ‘directors’ of AI, applying the human elements of empathy, ethical judgement, and compelling storytelling that machines simply cannot replicate.

What comes next

To maintain the UK’s position as a global centre for evidence-based decision-making – where almost two-thirds of our businesses now export their expertise to international clients – we must invest in the diverse talent of

tomorrow. We must foster inclusive environments and ensure our next generation of practitioners is equipped to blend technical mastery with human-centric curiosity.

We are incredibly proud of the hard work our diverse PA team of economic modellers, human insight experts, strategists, and consultants have poured into examining the ‘Business of Evidence’. We stand proudly with Jane and the MRS in celebrating this remarkable £18.7 billion milestone.

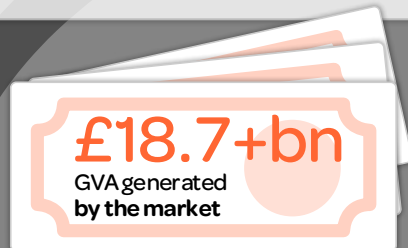
Here’s to the continued power of human ingenuity, and to the next 80 years of excellence.

**Gemma Proctor,
Head of Human Insights, PA**

Bigger than sliced bread



The 2026 Business of Evidence Report assesses the size and impact of the UK research and evidence market. Commissioned by the Market Research Society (MRS), and conducted by PA Consulting, **we determine how the market has changed in the 10 years since the last report.**



3.5x bigger than the UK bread market (GVA)

Our present

Driving real and measurable impact



Measurably elevating organisations
9/10 research buyers claim insights are referenced long after completion



Impact beyond the economy
89% agree research is a catalyst for change – up 18% since 2016



Global reach has doubled
64% conduct research with clients outside the UK – 2x higher vs 2012



Our talent is our lifeblood
Strategic thinking, skilled people, and high standards drive our success.

The last decade has brought a wave of disruption, and the UK research and evidence market has always been there supporting - playing a pivotal role in helping organisations carve their own way forward.

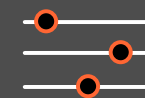
But now is the time for research and evidence to move beyond being a humble supporter, and instead lead the way forward with deserving confidence.

The future

Leading the way with confidence



Seize the AI opportunity: Apply our curiosity to enhance AI adoption, and embed the insight professional in the loop



The future researcher: Investing now in the talent pool is vital, focusing on diverse, AI-literate, storytellers



Collaboration is key: Mounting pressure from all angles means working better together, driving a shared purpose

“ *This is the golden time... Our comfort zone has often been finding out the story rather than telling it. **But in this AI world, we have to lead, we have to tell the story.*** ”

1.

The research and evidence market is a major contributor to the UK's economy and intelligence capital

With a value of £18.7+ billion , the UK research and evidence market has a significant economic impact, accounting for 0.7 to 0.8 percent of Gross Value Added (GVA).

The value rises to £24 .5+ billion when including the economic activity generated throughout the supply chain (e.g., IT / software suppliers, cloud infrastructure)

By size, the market surpasses several consumer goods industries, standing more than 3.5 x the size of the UK bread industry (GVA). There are more than 350,000 people working across research, insight, and analytics activities, making the market a major employer of talent that brings together a diverse range of skills and a wealth of expertise to support the UK's position as a global centre for evidence-based decision making.

The influence of research and evidence activities can be seen across a host of measurable business outcomes. Research has helped organisations deepen their understanding of customer needs, behaviours, and pain points, which has enabled them to develop and launch more effective products and services. This has led to higher adoption rates, improved conversion, and reduced support costs.

Research and evidence have also enabled leaders to sharpen strategy, prioritise investment, refine propositions, and focus marketing efforts where they

matter most. In marketing for instance, research and evidence have consistently driven improvements in campaign effectiveness and return on investment, helping organisations reach the right audiences, with the right messages, at the right time.

The market provides the essential intellectual infrastructure for the UK's most dynamic industries. Built on curious minds and creative innovators, research and evidence acts as an unsung hero within the UK's creative industries, generating insights that shape world-leading cultural exports, and empower creative teams to pursue bold ideas with confidence. Within business consulting / professional services, research and evidence serve as a vital engine of trust guiding high-level strategy, strengthening risk management and ensuring business decisions are built on a robust understanding of the global market.

The influence of research and evidence extends beyond commercial outcomes. The market has increasingly acted as an important catalyst for change across society, amplifying voices and perspectives that have often been overlooked, and contributing to the UK's 'Intelligence Capital™'. This has led to better public services, improved inclusivity and more human-centred decision making.

4/5

research buyers believe more confident decision-making is the top business benefit of research and evidence activities to their organisation

"We did a customer journey piece for an application form. After implementing the changes, one market saw a 47% increase in conversion. This will be worth millions over the next 2-3 years."

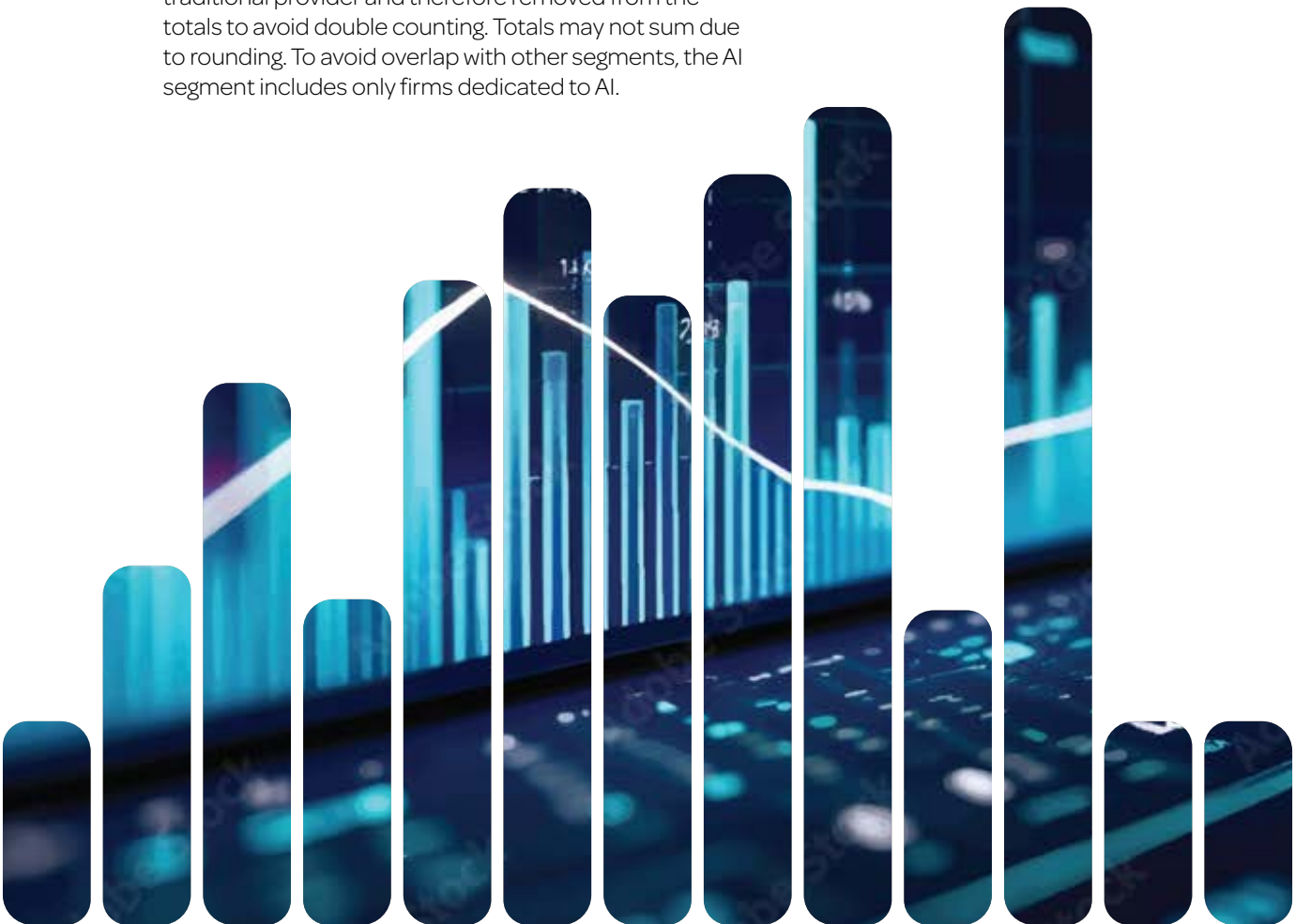
Research provider

"We have a deeper understanding of the needs of women experiencing homelessness and other forms of disadvantage. We better understand the scale of the problem and how services can be improved to help them."

Charity

Segments	Estimated FTE	Estimated GVA (current, 2024 prices)
Traditional providers	58,830	£4,340m
AI	5,590	£770m
Data analytics	7,500	£480m
Private sector	227,420	£10,760m
Higher education institutions	5,370 - 14,620	£360m-£1,270m
Central government	20,530	£1,050m-£1,650m
Local government	5,840	£290m
Think tanks	1,350 - 2,230	£90m-£140m
Charities	20,560	£700m
Total	351,640 - 360,890	£18,740m-£20,250m

Note: Think tanks are classified as a charity, HEI or traditional provider and therefore removed from the totals to avoid double counting. Totals may not sum due to rounding. To avoid overlap with other segments, the AI segment includes only firms dedicated to AI.



2.

In a decade marked by continual disruption, research and evidence has guided organisations forward with confidence

The past decade has been defined by a rapid succession of seismic shifts e.g., COVID-19, Brexit, global conflicts, political turmoil and the cost-of-living crisis, which have impacted organisations across sectors as they've navigated landscapes of uncertainty.

- ▲ In consumer services and FMCG, new challenger brands have gained ground, consumer behaviour has evolved rapidly, and regulations have pushed companies to adapt strategies and product offerings.
- ▲ In media and broadcasting, streaming and on-demand platforms have become the norm, fundamentally shifting how and what people watch.
- ▲ The public sector has experienced ongoing uncertainty, with changing leadership and increasing political polarisation.

This period of change has coincided with rapid technological advancement, most notably the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), which has reshaped market landscapes and intensified the pressure on organisations to adapt and stay ahead.

As organisations have navigated these choppy waters, research and evidence has become more important than ever. Organisations are asking more questions, making bigger decisions, and facing greater risks. Businesses, public bodies, and institutions increasingly turn to research and evidence not only to make confident choices and maintain competitiveness, but also to build stronger relationships with customers and users.

The influence of research extends throughout organisations. It helps to: support operational efficiency; guide strategy and annual planning; inform the evaluation of performance / marketing effectiveness; steer the development and optimisation of products and services; shape creative development, brand and communications; enhance the customer and user experience; and drive policy decisions

As a result, those leading research and evidence activities are increasingly getting a seat at the table, contributing to key business decisions from boardroom to factory floor.

9/10

agree research findings serve as an important, transformative strategic input, driving key business and policy decisions

“Every year has been a year of disruption. We’ve had such rapid change. There’s a lot of pressure in the public sector to simply survive the year.”

Public sector

“Our insight team does all sorts of work. We do the forecasting, develop our KPIs, all our marketing and creative research, all our brand tracking, all our product development. We do so much work for our programmes. We test new ideas for shows. There isn’t a show on our networks that hasn’t come through our team.”

Broadcaster

3.

The market has seen significant growth over the last 10 years

Over the past decade, rising demand for research and evidence services has fuelled significant growth across the market, with the UK research and evidence market recording a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 8%, between 2016 and 2024, based on the MRS league tables.

In central government, the emphasis on evidence-based policy has grown considerably. The UK Cabinet Office established the Evaluation Task Force in 2021 to ensure that major government spending decisions are grounded in robust research and evidence. HM Treasury's Green Book guidance similarly requires departments to use data and analysis to justify investments and interventions. This push for greater accountability and evidence-based governance has increased demand for market, social, and opinion research services across government.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required extensive behavioural research to inform strategy and communication, further underlined the role of research in shaping policy. Post-pandemic, there remains a high demand for insight to guide interventions on urgent issues like the cost-of-living crisis, energy transition, and digital inclusion.

Higher education institutions have also contributed to the Market's growth. In 2023, universities benefited from stable research funding through UK Research and Innovation, and Research England – enabling large-scale projects and cross-sector partnerships. The need for impact evaluation has become increasingly important, with frameworks such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) requiring universities to demonstrate the societal and economic value of their research.

This has led to heightened demand for evaluation studies, stakeholder engagement research, and impact measurement. As a result, higher education institutions have invested in these capabilities to meet compliance expectations and strengthen their reputations.

In the past 12 months, providers of research and evidence services have experienced the greatest increase in demand from sectors such as consumer goods / FMCG, technology / software, financial services, public sector and healthcare / life sciences. This growth has been driven by shifts in consumer trends and behaviour, changing competitive landscapes, greater investment in research by clients, and the rising influence of AI.

“We see our biggest demand from the CPG sector. There are a lot of early movers in the CPG sector, and they tend to be very pioneering.”

Research Provider



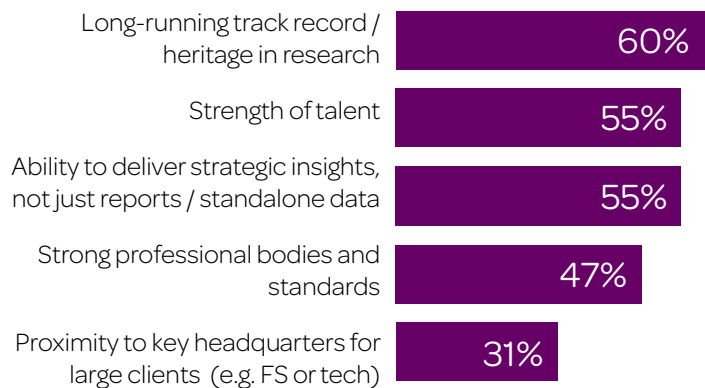
4.

Our people, skills, and standards are the lifeblood to our success

Our long-standing heritage, strength of talent, high-quality strategic thinking and professional standards have been key drivers of success for the UK research and evidence market.

These strengths have attracted demand from across the globe, with reach doubling over the past decade. In the 2012 Business of Evidence report, MRS reported that 33% of research activity was undertaken for clients outside of the UK. In 2026, only one-third of businesses conduct research with UK clients alone, with two-thirds working with global clients.

Top five drivers of the UK's market-leading position



MRS Business of Evidence Survey 2026: Thinking ahead, what are the key attributes you think researchers of the future will need to have to do their role? Base: n=309

Percentage of research conducted for clients based in each region

64%

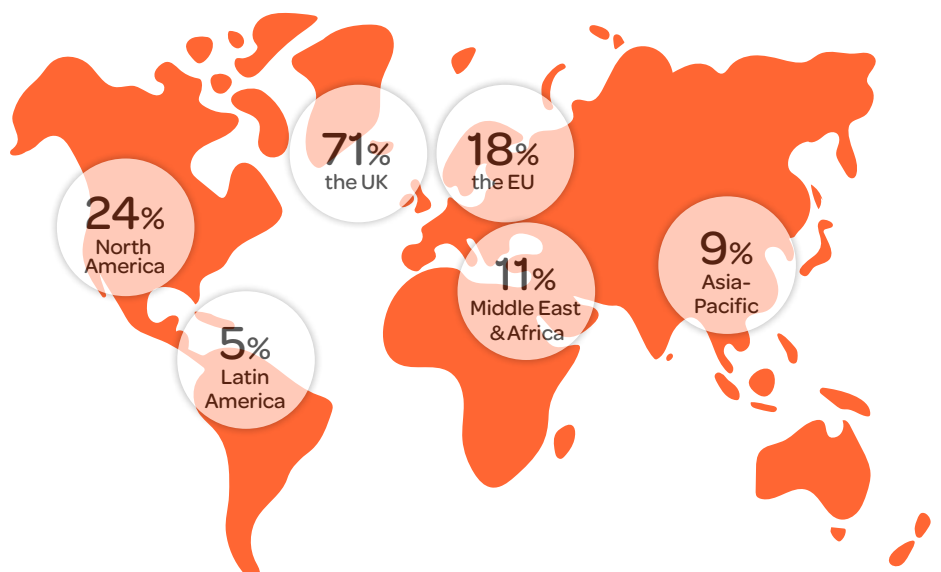
Conduct research with clients based outside the UK

2x

higher vs 2012 report

MRS Business of Evidence Survey 2026:

What percentage of research and evidence activities [does your organisation/do you] conduct for clients / stakeholders in the following markets? Base: n=309



North America and Europe remain the primary export destinations, with a growing presence in Asia-Pacific and Latin America. This global demand reflects the strong reputation and credibility the UK market has built over time.

International clients seek out the UK for trusted, high-quality research and evidence, recognising the market's expertise, methodological rigour, and strategic capabilities. At the same time, UK organisations are increasingly looking beyond their borders, drawn to new opportunities and growth in international markets.

Cementing its position as a global leader in the research and evidence market, the UK continues to play a fundamental role in the international research landscape. According to the International Comparison of the UK Research Base report, the UK accounted for 6.0 percent of global scholarly publications in 2022, ranking fourth worldwide. Collaboration remains a hallmark of the UK's research community, with more than 60 percent of UK research in 2022 co-authored¹ with non-UK researchers, the highest share among key comparator countries

“Most of our revenue is US based. It’s where the money is. Everyone wants great research and everyone wants it done well.”

Research Provider



5.

The industry now faces an opportunity to define the next era

The research and evidence market today stands at a major inflection point. The landscape of 2026 is vastly different from that of a decade ago. As the market looks ahead, it must define its path for future success, navigating an era that offers both opportunities and challenges.

A defining feature of this new era is rapid technological transformation, with AI at the forefront. The rise of AI has arrived at a critical time to meet the growing demand for faster, scalable insights. Organisations have increasingly required real-time insights to respond to rapidly changing markets.

AI-powered research and evidence tools automate tasks like data cleaning, sentiment analysis, and trend detection, reducing turnaround times from weeks to hours. This efficiency has made AI-driven research highly attractive compared to traditional methods. In addition to this, AI-driven research and evidence excel at natural language processing (NLP) and image recognition allowing organisations to analyse millions of data points for richer insights, and enabling them to understand customer behaviour across digital platforms. AI is transforming the research and evidence market, fundamentally reshaping how insights are generated and applied.

This inflection point coincides with a period of widespread economic challenge. Budgetary pressures have persisted across sectors. In

local government, spending has been focused on demand-led statutory services (e.g., adult and children's social care) leaving limited discretionary funding for research and evidence. Charities have also faced volatile income streams in recent years, with government grants declining and fundraising affected by economic shocks (Brexit, COVID-19, cost-of-living crisis). Smaller charities have been disproportionately impacted, reducing their ability to invest in external research.

Despite ever-tightening budgets, the need for research and evidence remains. Organisations have responded by turning to faster, lower-cost research solutions. However, there are growing concerns that this pursuit of speed and cost-savings threatens to undermine the market's hallmarks of high quality and methodological rigour. This includes concerns around declining data quality, a neglect of longitudinal research, and a fragmentation of research roles as the market prioritises efficiency, often at the expense of training and professional development.

Looking ahead to the future, there is an even greater need to cultivate high-quality, diverse, AI-literate professionals with strong strategic thinking. However, continued budgetary pressures and the increasing use of AI to automate junior-level tasks threatens the market's ability to build and develop the talent required for future success in this new era.

84%

believe technology adoption / usage will be more important in helping the UK remain a world-leading research market in the future

83%

believe that ever-tightening client budgets will be a significant challenge for the industry over the next 10 years

“There’s the challenge that fewer entry level roles will be recruited due to AI’s ability to automate tasks junior colleagues used to do. This may have a detrimental effect on the talent pipeline downstream”

Charity

6.

We must leverage our curiosity to push the bounds of AI in research

While the market has been making strong headway in adopting AI, there is scope to go further.

Organisations are actively investing effort and resources on AI implementation; 70% of those who have adopted AI have piloted or tested AI tools before rolling them out at scale, and 55% are training and upskilling employees on AI use and ethics. These efforts are already delivering tangible benefits; as AI is automating manual and administrative tasks and enabling researchers to spend more time on strategic thinking and creative problem-solving.

However, adoption has been slowed by a range of barriers. Concerns have persisted around data quality, maintaining human empathy, ensuring robust governance, and upskilling employees so they are equipped with the technical knowledge, ethical understanding and practical skills needed to use AI effectively and responsibly.

As the market looks ahead to the future, there is a need to shift the focus from AI adoption to AI innovation. Machine learning and large language models have already played a prominent role in the market for many years, meaning much of the groundwork was established well before AI reached its current prominence. As a result, the gains have not been as dramatic as in other markets, with the benefits of automation and faster delivery already largely realised.

The next step is to channel this experience into bolder innovation. The market must lead the AI agenda, adopting a forward-looking attitude that positions AI as an enabler rather than a threat.

Key market figures believe that the conversation should not be framed as a battle between traditional and AI-driven methodologies. Instead, AI should be recognised for the new possibilities it offers and its potential to propel the market forward.

61%

have adopted AI in their research and evidence activities (an additional 20% plan to in the next 12m)

“AI is not the threat. The person who knows how to use AI will take your job, not AI itself. AI enables things we’ve dreamt about...My hope is that the industry will continue to lead the way in this space”

Consumer goods / FMCG

“We had this period of big data vs research in the past which was complete nonsense. Now we’ve got synthetic data, digital twins, AI vs human research. These battles are beautifully framed by the press. But it shouldn’t be a battleground. We need both.”

Broadcaster



7. We must invest *now* for future talent *later*

The strength of the UK research and evidence market has always rested on the calibre of its people, skills and standards. The market's future success will depend on the talent that is cultivated and nurtured today.

While the UK remains a leading producer of skilled practitioners capable of delivering the strategic thinking organisations are looking for, there are concerns that junior roles will increasingly be fulfilled by AI, and there will be less time, effort and investment directed towards cultivating the next generation of practitioners.

This risks diminishing the market's future talent pool significantly, and negatively impacting the quality, integrity and standards that have been key to its global success. To avoid a talent vacuum, strong investment in training and development, will be essential.

At this inflection point, as we look ahead to the next decade, it is important for the market to reflect on the skills and capabilities that will define the practitioner of the future. Understanding these requirements is essential for shaping training and development programmes that will equip the workforce to excel in the next era.

The practitioners of the future will need a blend of skills to thrive. Storytelling and communication abilities will be as important as technical expertise. Mastery of AI tools must be paired with the ability to apply empathy when interpreting AI-generated insights. The capacity to engage and influence stakeholders, along with strong commercial awareness and business acumen, will continue to be key. Organisations have a responsibility to review and update their training programmes, making sure they are fit for purpose and equipping staff with the skills required for a changing landscape.

In addition to this, diversity and inclusivity will remain central, with continued efforts needed to attract and support diverse talent within the future talent pool.

63%

believe strength of talent will become more important in helping the UK remain a world-leading research market in the future

63%

believe diversity and inclusivity will become more important in helping the UK remain a world-leading research market in the future

“Skills shortages’ are a problem organisations have caused themselves by seeking the bottom dollar... The solution is as simple as investing in your people, which many refuse to do”

Consulting services

“There is still an issue with not enough ethnic minorities and people with working-class backgrounds in the industry. Those like me tend to work in data collection roles. Agencies are still something of a closed shop”

Research provider

8.

Now is the time for the market to seize the opportunity and lead the way with confidence

While the market faces a significant period of change, this is not the first the market has faced, and it is unlikely to be the last. At the time of writing, MRS marks its' 80th anniversary, a testament to the vitality of the profession.

Throughout this time, the research and evidence market has experienced several waves of change and upheaval. The rise of the internet reshaped data collection, moving research online and introducing mobile methodologies. The emergence of big data and advanced analytics marked another turning point, giving organisations access to larger and more complex datasets - enabling insight at a scale previously unimaginable.

Today, as the market enters a new era, leading members of the profession see strong parallels with prior periods of change. The concerns raised about the threat of AI to the market are reminiscent of earlier worries around big data and self-serve survey platforms. While these developments were initially seen as existential threats, they ultimately opened the door to new approaches and drove the market forward. Professional leaders

believe that this time will be no different, and the market will adapt and evolve as it has done before.

However, there are calls for the market to go beyond simply keeping pace, to be at the forefront of this period of change - taking a more proactive rather than reactive role. This is seen to be the 'golden time' for research and evidence. As organisations experiment with the possibilities of AI, the skills and capabilities of researchers are needed more than ever.

Research and evidence practitioners bring drive and curiosity that will be essential for exploring and testing the boundaries of AI. In an age dominated by 'machines', keeping humans at the centre remains vital - and practitioners provide a human-centric perspective. The opportunity lies for research and evidence professionals to help organisations connect and interpret data, applying human judgement and empathy where it matters most.

"When self-serve platforms were introduced, people thought everyone was going to be able to do research, and that would make the industry redundant, but it didn't. The industry had to change and evolve, and it did. It's the same now. The industry will change and evolve."

Consumer goods / FMCG

"This is the golden time in research. Insight professionals are good at connecting data. We get it. We are the people that can help companies pull the data together. Our comfort zone has often been finding out the story rather than telling it. But in this AI world, we have to lead. We have to tell the story."

Research provider

Research and evidence practitioners can act as ‘directors’ of AI, setting the benchmark for quality, professional standards, and rigour in this new era. Their expertise will ensure that insights derived from AI are grounded in sound methodology and ethics. By guiding how AI is deployed and interpreted, research and evidence practitioners will help organisations frame the right questions, critically analyse insights, and maintain trust in the evidence base used for decision making.

The research and evidence market is known for its humility but there is a strong belief among leading figures within the profession that this is the moment for the market to go beyond its comfort zone and embrace a bolder stance. The research and evidence market must own the conversation and assert its unique position and value, telling a confident story about the impact research and evidence deliver. By doing so, the market can ensure its contributions are recognised, and take a leading role in this new era.

“We need to be much more confident, much bolder about the amazing impact that we’re all having. Storytelling for me is everything. We need to stand up, be confident, and tell the story of how we make a difference.”

Energy and utilities



9.

We must move forward together to build on our success

Unity and collaboration will be essential for the market to build on the growth of the past decade and move confidently toward future success.

The UK research and evidence market has built a reputation for excellence: delivering real economic and social value; helping organisations navigate an ever-changing world, and fuelling the UK's most dynamic industries - from the creative arts to professional services. Its influence is felt in critical decisions across business, government, and society.

However, as the market looks to the future, there are challenges that must be addressed to maintain the UK's world-class position in research and evidence.

Research buyers and providers have come under mounting pressure. Budgets have become tighter, technology has evolved faster than ever, and the market landscape has changed at breakneck speed. This environment has fuelled demand for rapid, lower-cost research, and has raised concerns around quality and rigour as providers have tried to meet these expectations.

The challenges and opportunities ahead risk pulling the market in different directions. There are some who are moving quickly to embrace speed, agility and the new possibilities presented by technological advancements such as AI. There are others who

remain apprehensive and cautious, expressing concerns about the pace of change, and its impact on the quality, rigour and standards that have long set the UK research and evidence market apart.

The way forward requires bridging these perspectives and developing a shared vision for the future of the market that all can rally behind. This shared vision will be essential for charting the market's course, providing the direction needed to navigate both the challenges and opportunities ahead. This includes pushing the boundaries of AI, investing in training and developing the next generation of talent and telling the story of the research and evidence market with renewed confidence.

Developing this shared sense of purpose will demand a market-wide effort, bringing the market together to:

- ▲ Redefine the supplier-client relationship of the future, and foster a genuine spirit of partnership
- ▲ Protect and champion the standards that underpin the UK's world-class reputation in research and evidence
- ▲ Embrace innovation and technological advancements, while upholding quality and rigour

“Suppliers have been forced into a corner on costs yet the same players driving prices to the floor are demanding flawless quality.

This relentless price pressure cascades through the supply chain, impacting staffing levels at suppliers and agencies alike. Want to keep on attracting talent?

Let's provide them with an industry that complements each other, rather than fighting against each other.”

Research provider



Actionable human insight

Understanding what drives people is how organisations innovate and where new growth begins.

Get in touch:



Gemma Proctor

Head of Human Insight and Innovation
gemma.proctor@paconsulting.com

Research Methodology

A robust programme of quantitative research, in-depth interviews, and economic modelling was conducted to determine the intellectual impact of research, through examining the 'Business of Evidence'. This research was conducted by PA Consulting, in partnership with 3GEM Media Group, on behalf of MRS.

In-depth stakeholder interviews

A total of 10 x 45-minute in-depth interviews were completed with market stakeholders from a range of organisations.

This included both research providers and research buyers from sectors including consumer goods and FMCG, media and broadcasting, financial services, the public sector, energy and utilities, technology and software, as well as traditional research providers.

These interviews took place between November and December 2025.

Online quantitative survey

A 15-minute online survey was shared with MRS members to size and validate the research and evidence market. As well as considering research providers, the survey took a more holistic view. It included views from a range of other providers and users of market and social research, opinion polling, data analysis, and insight. A total of **309** responses were collected including 243 organisations and 62 sole traders.

The survey was conducted between November – December 2025.



Economic modelling

Segments	Difference in methodology from 2016
Traditional providers	We use the same methodology used in the 2012 report (based on MRS league tables and ONS data for relevant SIC codes). The 2016 report applied a growth rate to the 2012 report based on MRS assumptions.
AI	This sector was not included in the 2012 and 2016 reports.
Data analytics	The 2016 report used a Forbes 2015 article to assess Data analytics. To update these findings, we use DSIT's "DDC" taxonomy/tagging and subtract AI to avoid double counting.
Private sector	We use a similar methodology to the 2016 report, with updated survey results. The PA survey covers more sectors than the 2016 report, and so less extrapolation is required.
Higher education institutions	The 2012 and 2016 report use a 2011 Economic and Social Research Council report and applies an assumption on which categories are research positions. We instead use Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data as this gives more up-to-date and specific FTE and salary data for those in research roles.
Central government	The 2016 report uses headcounts from GORS, GSR, and GSS and applies a broad average salary to these. We believe that this is a small set of research professions and instead use current and detailed Cabinet Office profession data with research-proportion assumptions to produce a more comprehensive estimate.
Local government	The 2016 report relies on a Local Government Authority (LGA) report to determine the number of researchers per Local Authority. In order to update this, we use PA survey data. We additionally use more granular salary data, specific to local government research roles, rather than average salary in local government, previously used.
Think tanks	We use updated PA survey results to estimate the % of researchers.
Charities	We use updated PA survey results to estimate the % of researchers.

FTE and GVA values are rounded to the nearest 10 and therefore, do not always sum to totals.

Economic modelling

Traditional providers

Estimated FTE

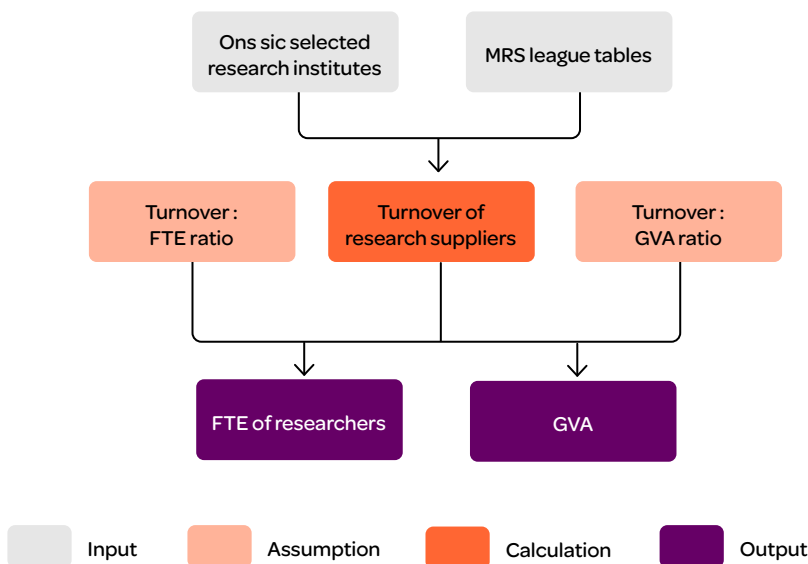
Following consultations with MRS, PA economists agreed to use MRS's Industry size and growth report² to estimate the traditional provider's segment.

MRS's methodology utilises the standard industrial classification (SIC) code classification system to identify traditional providers of research (see estimated GVA methodology on the right for further details). The two codes that are specific to the research industry are 732 (market research and opinion polling), and 722 (research and experimental development on social sciences and humanities).

The report utilises ONS BRES data, which shows there are 34,000 full-time and 14,000 part-time employees within these SIC codes.

MRS pro-rate up this figure to cover non-SIC 732/722 businesses which implies that at least 70,000 people are employed in the research, insight and analytics sector, c. 49,000 full-time and c. 21,000 part-time.

Based on ONS ASHE data on hours worked between full-time and part time workers for SIC codes 732 and 722, part time workers amount to just under 0.5 FTE, and therefore the total research FTE in the traditional providers' segment is 58,830.³



Key metrics: traditional providers

Estimated FTE	58,830
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£4,340m

Estimated GVA

MRS uses the Annual Business Survey (ABS) conducted by the Office for National Statistics. To estimate the sterling value generated by firms identifying with SIC code 732 as £5,000m and for firms identifying with SIC code 722, as £300m. This amounts to a total turnover of £5300m across these research SIC codes. However, there are several firms contributing to the research sector that have not self selected into the 732 and 722 SIC Codes.

MRS annual league tables show that of the top 100 research firms, £2,273m was generated by 66 firms with an SIC code of 732 or 722; and a further £2,179m was generated by 34 businesses that

are active in the research sector but who are classified under SIC code(s) other than 732 or 722.

If nearly half (£2.3 billion) of the approximate £5.3 billion ABS turnover for SIC 732/722 companies is attributed to businesses in the top 100, it is reasonable to infer that the additional £2.2 billion generated by these top 100 firms suggests a total of at least £4 billion for non-SIC 732/722 businesses within the sector.

Therefore, the total estimated turnover for traditional providers amounts to £9,000m. Using ONS data, a conversion rate of turnover to GVA is then applied to obtain a total GVA value of £4,340m.

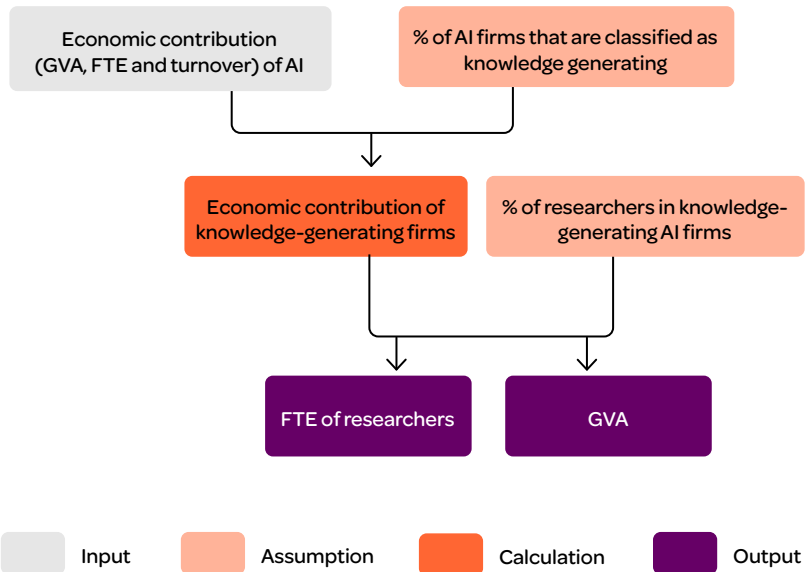
Economic modelling

Artificial intelligence

Estimated FTE

The Department of Science, Innovation and Technology's Technology's (DSIT's) AI sector study outlines key metrics within AI. This report states that the FTE in AI is 86,139.⁴

Given that SIC codes do not yet include a specific 'artificial intelligence' classification, the AI sector is better defined using a business-focused taxonomy. The AI business model can be broken into the following: AI services; AI products; AI infrastructure. DSIT delineate further using eight domains: natural language applications; perpetual systems; AI development and training;



Key metrics: AI

Estimated FTE	5,590
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£770m

autonomous and agent systems; knowledge generation; AI implementation; AI security and assurance ; AI infrastructure.

PA Economists agree that the tag 'knowledge generation' falls within MRS research scope. The percentage of firms with the research tag is 53%. PA survey data finds that of the firms identifying with this tag, 25% of workers are in research related roles. In order to avoid double counting with other segments, we focused on firms dedicated to AI, which account for 49% of firms.

Therefore, the final research FTE in AI is 5,590.

Estimated GVA

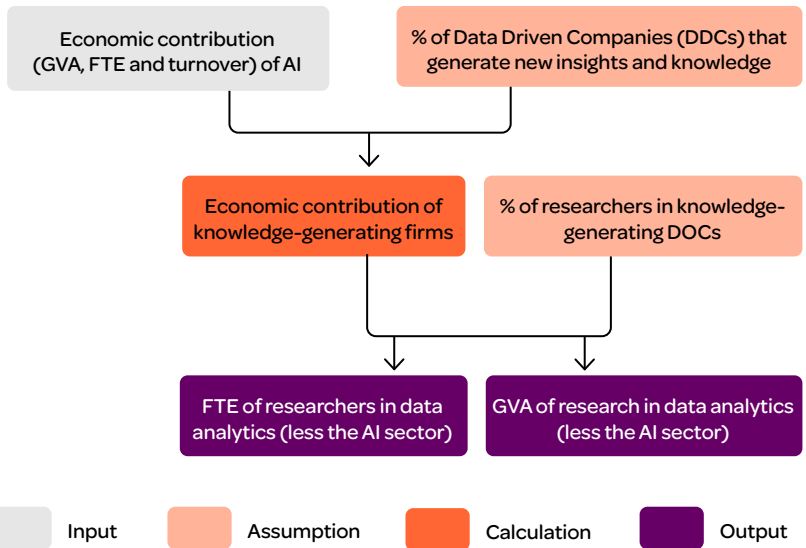
The DSIT report also outlines the AI GVA to be £11.8bn. Using the same methodology to calculate employment in AI in research related roles, the research GVA in the AI sector is £770m.

Economic modelling

Data analytics

Estimated FTE

The Department of Science, Innovation and Technology's (DSIT) report⁵ outlines key metrics within data analytics. Within this report, it is mentioned that data-driven companies (DDCs) do not have a formal SIC code. Identifying these companies is challenging, partly because data is intangible. For example, businesses often fail to record the value or scope of internal data analysis, meaning the true worth of data remains hidden. This creates a major limitation for market-based approaches to valuing data.



Key metrics: Data Analytics

Estimated FTE	7,500
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£480m

The report outlines that amongst specialised DDCs, the FTE is 443,000. PA economists agreed to use 'specialised' DDCs, as opposed to 'diverse' DDC's in order to avoid double counting with other segments.

This report states that 21% of specialised DDC's identify with the tag 'generates insights and knowledge'. After consultations with MRS, it was agreed that this tag constitutes research and evidence. Using PA survey data, 13% of specialised DDCs roles are research focused. Therefore, the research FTE is calculated as 11,690. DSIT notes that AI falls within the scope of data analytics, so the AI FTE is subtracted from this figure, to arrive at a final research FTE. For consistency with our other segment calculations,

we have used the AI FTE figure for 2023 (4,190), resulting in a final research FTE of 7,500.

Estimated GVA

The DSIT report also outlines the specialised DDCs GVA to be 31.8bn.

Using the same methodology to calculate employment in data analytic research related roles, we calculate the data analytic GVA as £873m, removing the AI contribution, this give a total GVA of £480m.

Economic modelling

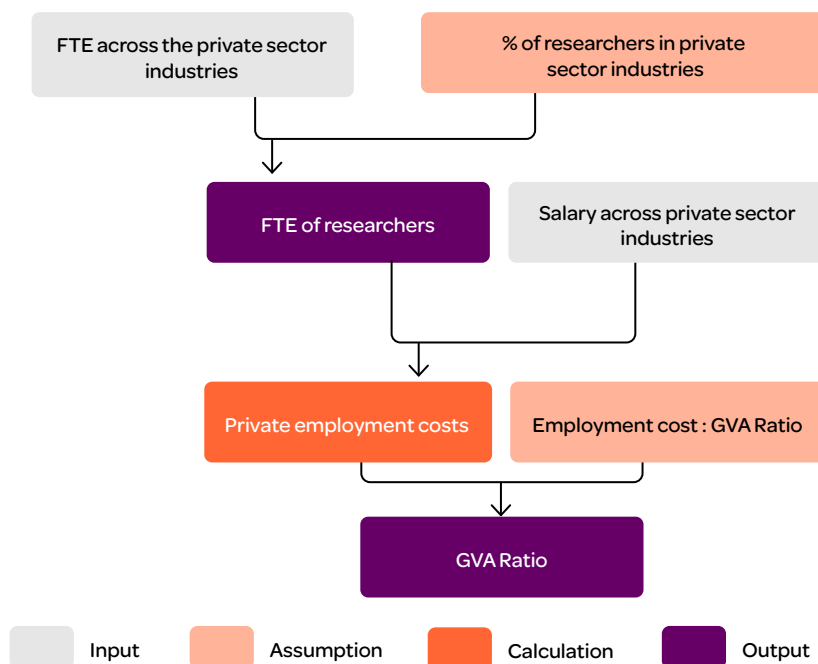
Private sector

Estimated FTE

Using PA survey data, we assessed the percentage of researchers across different sub-sectors (i.e. retail, media, utilities etc.). Survey responses did not provide accurate survey results across all subsectors. Where data was not available, results were extrapolated to include the whole private sector. Using ONS BRES data⁶, the FTE across these industries is estimated as 21.8m.

After consultations with MRS, we assume that only private sector firms that have greater than 250 employees will also have an FTE or proportion of FTE engaged in research and evidence. The Department of Business and Trade⁷ estimates the percentage of private sector firms that have more than 250 employees as 48%. PA survey data estimates the percentage of workers engaged in market research to give a weighted average of 2%. Combining these percentages yields a research FTE across the outlined industries as 218,700.

These industries contribute to 75% of spend within the research sector, with the rest of the private sector contributing to 3% of research spend and 22% contributed by public sector. Assuming research spend is proportionate to the number of research FTEs, we estimate the total research FTE in the private sector as 227,420.



Key metrics: Private sector

Estimated FTE	227,420
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£10,760m

Estimated GVA

Using ONS BRES data with ONS salary data,⁸ we estimate the employment costs for each industry previously outlined. Using the same methodology when estimating employment in research related roles, we estimate the total employment cost in research related roles across the entire private sector as £7,950m.

Applying the ONS employment cost to GVA conversion rate of 1.35 estimates a GVA of £10,760m

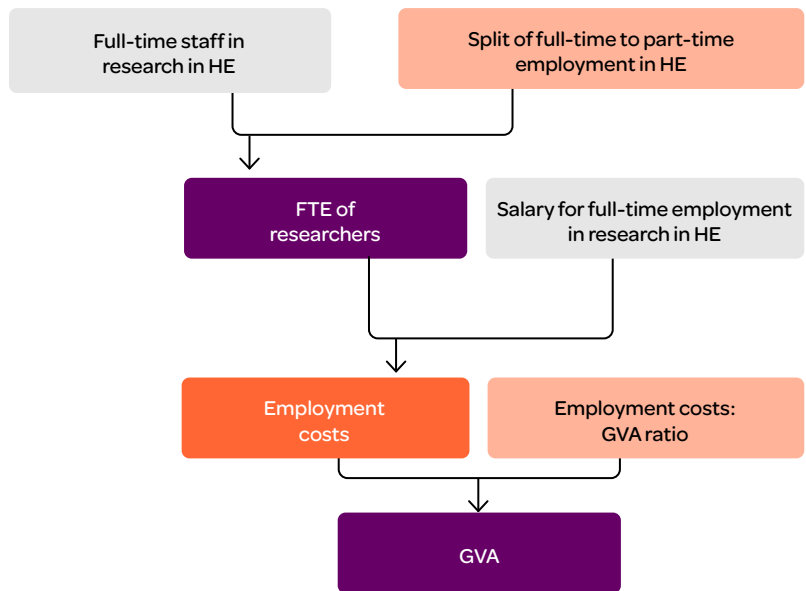
Economic modelling

Higher education institutions

Estimated FTE

Data from HESA⁹ outlines the total number of full-time academic staff by employment function ('research' and 'teaching and research' roles) and by subject area. We worked with MRS to select the subjects that are relevant to their research and evidence remit.¹⁰ The data does not include part-time employment by subject area, however the full-time to part-time employment split was available by employment function.¹¹ Using ONS data, we assume part time work in education accounts for c.0.5 FTE,¹² the value of any full-time worker is multiplied by 113% to attain FTE.

Based on HESA methodology notes, we further assume that 30-70% of activities within 'teaching and research' are research focused. The total number of research activities within MRS's remit is 5,370 to 14,620.



Input Assumption Calculation Output

Key metrics: Higher education institution

Estimated FTE	5,370 - 14,620
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£360m - £1,270m

Estimated GVA

HESA's contract and salary data contains salary ranges and the number of full-time workers within each range. This allows us to estimate the range on the average salary to be £47,700 to £61,630. Combining this with total FTE, we estimate the employment costs in the range of £256m to £901m. Applying the ONS Employment Cost to GVA conversion rate of 1.35 yields a GVA within the range of £345m to £1,220m. In 2024 values, this equates to £360m to £1,270m¹³.



Economic modelling

Central government

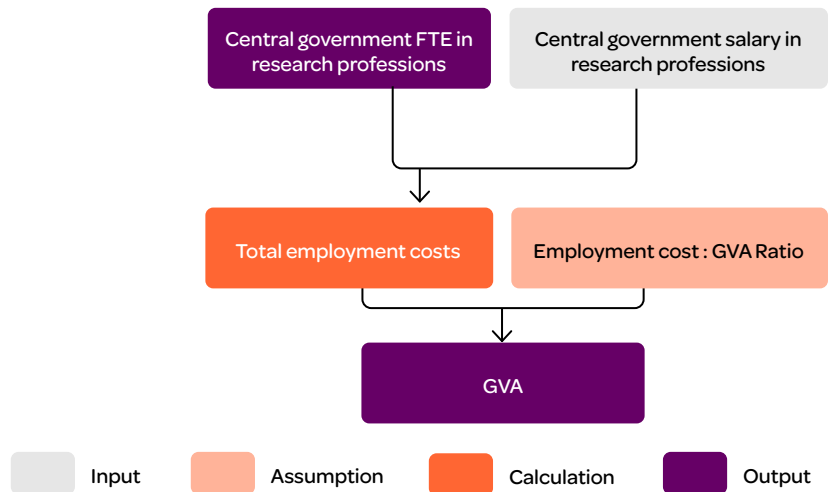
Estimated FTE

The cabinet office 2025 statistical bulletin¹⁴ outlines FTEs by civil service profession. After consultations with MRS, we chose civil service professions that were in line with the MRS definition of research and evidence.¹⁵

With MRS agreement, the proportion of research within each civil service function was estimated to allow us to compute the total research FTE in central government as 20,530.

Estimated GVA

The cabinet office report also outlines the salaries for each profession. Combining the lower to upper quartile salary with the FTE in each profession calculates the employment cost for each profession, and totalling these ranges leads to an employment cost of £775m to £1,216m. Applying the ONS Employment cost to GVA ratio of 1.35 yields a GVA of £1,050m to £1,650m



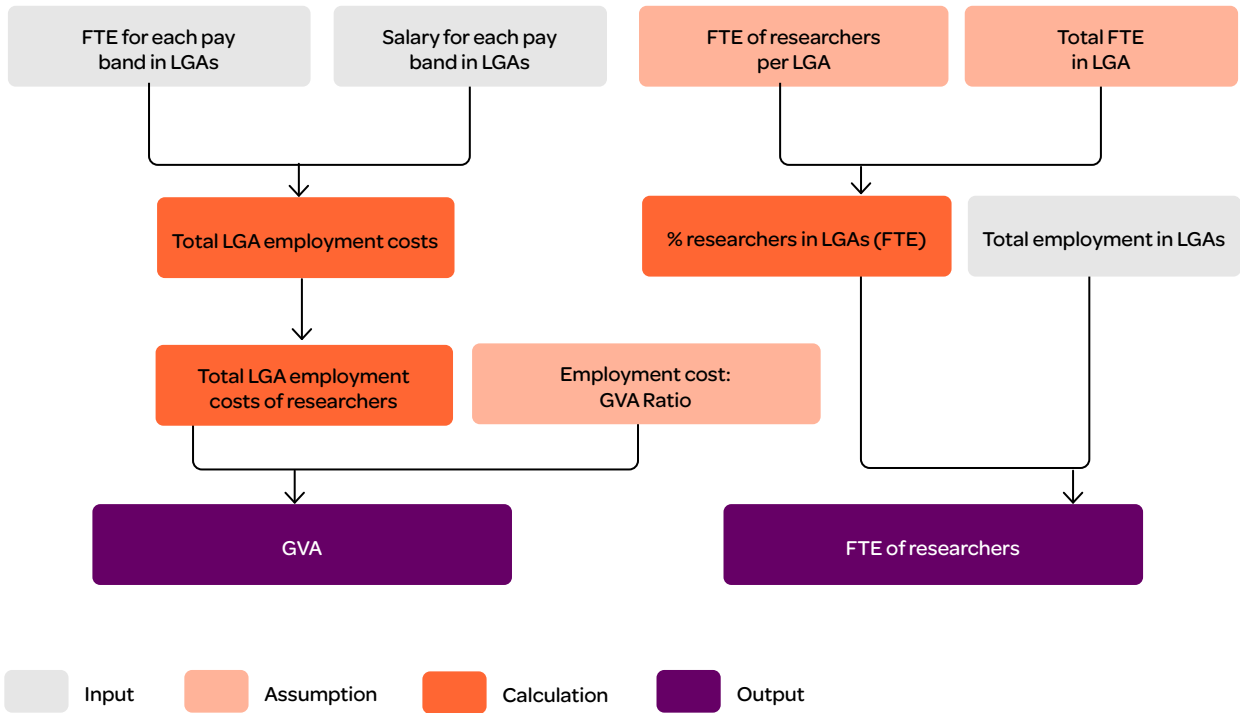
Key metrics: Central government

Estimated FTE	20,530
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£1,050m - £1,650m



Economic modelling

Local government



Key metrics: Local government

Estimated FTE	5,840
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£290m

Estimated GVA

The Local Government Association published a report outlining salaries and FTEs for different spinal column points¹⁷ (SCP's). NIVCA¹⁸ outlines the job function of workers and their pay grade. By matching pay grades to SCPs we are able to map job functions to spinal column points.

Following consultations with MRS, we selected job functions that constitute 'research and evidence' for the scope of our analysis.

Estimated FTE

Using PA survey data, the average number of researchers within Local government authorities (LGA's) is 14 researchers. Combining this with Northern Bridges¹⁶ estimate that there are 426 LGA's gives a total of 5,840 researchers in local government authorities.



Economic modelling

Think tanks

Estimated FTE

Using the State of the Sector report,¹⁹ we found the different ranges of number of workers that a think tank may have and the percentage of think tanks who fall in each range. Multiplying each range by the proportion of think tanks in that range estimates the average range of workers for a think tank to be 15 to 24.

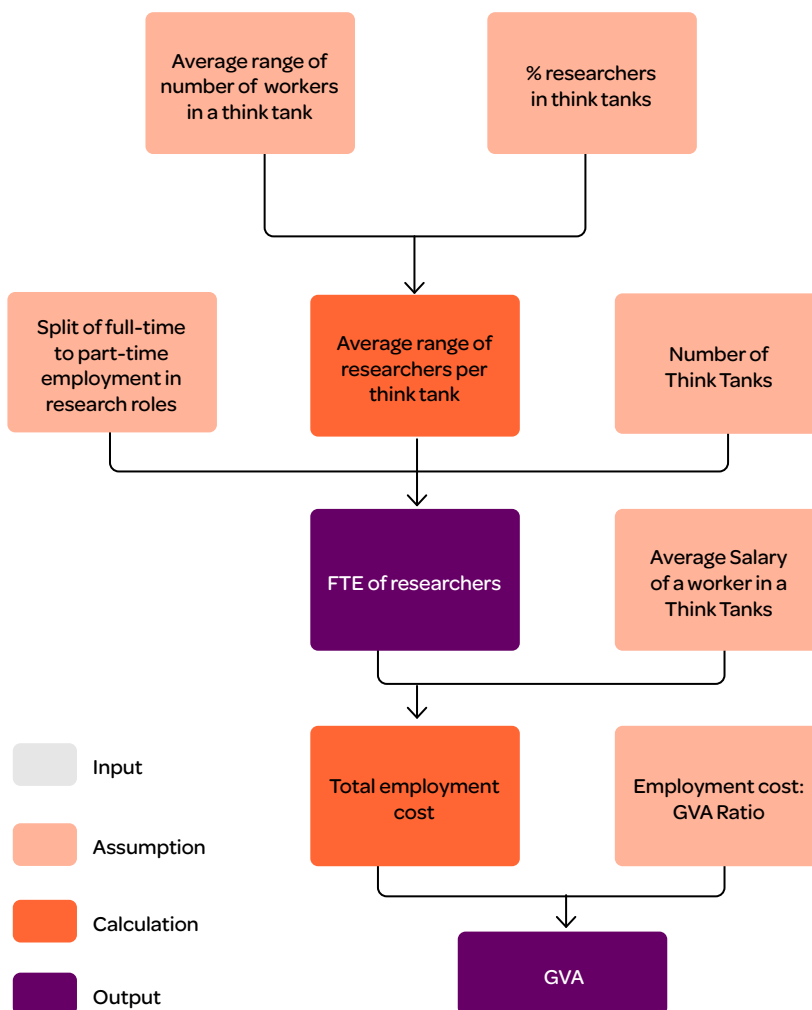
An important consideration is that the state of the sector report outlines the range of workers in think tanks globally, so we assume that UK think tanks mirror these figures.

We assume the proportion of researchers per think tank to be 60%.²⁰ Applying this figure to the average range of workers per think tank yields the FTE of researchers per think tank as 9 to 14. Using the spotlight on think tanks report,²¹ the number of think tanks in the UK is found to be 156. Therefore, the estimated FTE of researchers in the think tank sector is 1,350-2,230.

Estimated GVA

A report published by Smart Thinking²² outlines the average salary of think tank workers to be £42,000, with wage inflation, this is £47,025.

Combined with the range of FTE in the think tank sector, this estimates the employment cost as £64m to £105m. By applying the ONS employment cost to GVA conversion rate



Key Metrics: Think tanks

Estimated FTE	1,350-2,230
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£90m - £140m

of 1.35, we estimate the GVA impact of the think tank sector as £90m-£140m.

Economic modelling

Charities

Estimated FTE

Using PA survey data, we estimate the proportion of researchers per charity in the UK to be 2%. The charity commission published their charity sector overview which outlines the total employment in charities earning above £5m to be c.1m.²³

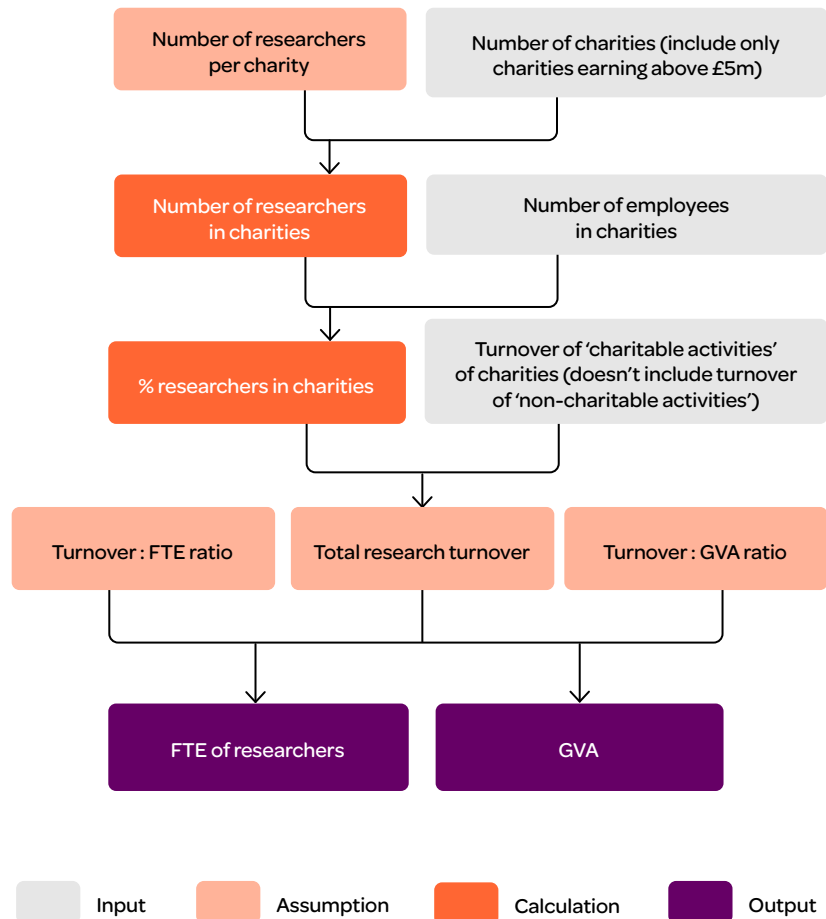
Based on interviews used in previous MRS market research reports,²⁴ charities have significant collaboration between smaller charities in relation to research activities and so we assume that charities with income of more than £5 million will have a research FTE or proportion of an FTE.

Therefore, the number of FTE researchers across all charities is calculated as 20,560.

Estimated GVA

The charity commission sector overview report outlines turnover from charities to be £78bn. Assuming the percentage of researchers is proportional to research turnover, we estimate the total research turnover as £1.6bn.

Applying an ONS Turnover to GVA conversion ratio of 0.46, we estimate the GVA impact for the charity sector to be £727m in 2025 values and £ 700m in 2024 values.



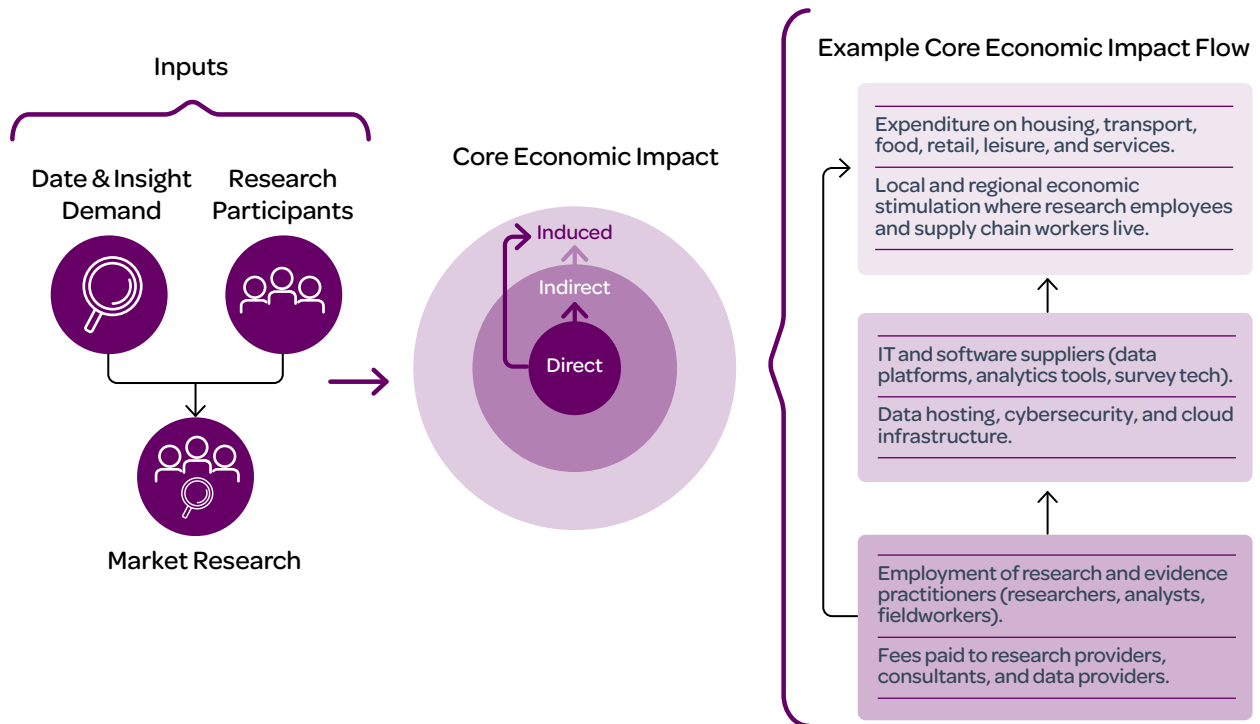
Legend: Input Assumption Calculation Output

Key Metrics: Charities

Estimated FTE	20,560
Estimated GVA (current 2024 prices)	£700m

Economic modelling

Indirect and induced effects



The economic impact of the research and evidence market can be split into two. The first impact is created by the direct, indirect, and induced economic activity generated through the operation of research and evidence organisations, and their supply chains. Any professional services sector can generate this type of activity, and it is not limited to traditional market, social and opinion research organisations.

The second impact is where research and evidence activity differentiates itself from other professional services. Such

activity improves the quality of decision-making, reduces uncertainty, and enables organisations to design better products, services, and policies. By informing investment decisions, driving innovation, and improving resource allocation, research and evidence acts as a catalyst for productivity growth and wider economic development.

The core economic impact of research and evidence is supporting jobs, generating profits, paying its employees wages, and generating tax revenue. The core economic impact is split into three avenues:

- ▲ **Direct Impact:** key to the definition of research and evidence and refers to economic activity created by research and evidence itself
- ▲ **Indirect Impact:** the economic activity generated in the supply-chain associated with the operation of research and evidence.
- ▲ **Induced Impact:** the economic activity generated by the spending of those directly or indirectly employed by the research and evidence market.

The 'business of evidence' market increase to 1.1-1.2% of UK GVA when indirect and induced impacts are included.

Total FTE and GVA, including indirect effects

Note: Think tanks are classified as a charity, HEI or traditional provider and therefore removed from the totals to avoid double counting. Values are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore totals may not sum.

Segments	Estimated FTE	Estimated GVA (current, 2024 prices)
Traditional providers	88,600	£5,690m
AI	8,420	£1,010m
Data analytics	11,290	£630m
Private sector	342,500	£14,110m
Higher education institutions	8,090 - 22,020	£470m-£1,660m
Central government	30,910	£1,380m-£2,160m
Local government	8,790	£380m
Think tanks	2,040 - 3,360	£110m-£190m
Charities	30,970	£920m
Total	529,570 - 543,500	£24,590m -26,560m

Total FTE and GVA, including indirect and induced effects

Note: Think tanks are classified as a charity, HEI or traditional provider and therefore removed from the totals to avoid double counting. Values are rounded to the nearest 10, therefore totals may not sum.

Segments	Estimated FTE	Estimated GVA (current, 2024 prices)
Traditional providers	100,310	£6,390m
AI	9,540	£1,130m
Data analytics	12,780	£710m
Private sector	387,770	£15,860m
Higher education institutions	9,160 - 24,930	£530m-£1,870m
Central government	35,000	£1,550m-£2,430m
Local government	9,950	£420m
Think tanks	2,310 - 3,800	£130m-£210m
Charities	35,060	£1,040m
Total	599,570 - 615,340	£27,630m-£29,850m

Total FTE and GVA, including indirect and induced effects

An employment type 1 multiplier of 1.51 and a GVA type 1 multiplier of 1.31 were used in order to obtain the indirect effects. These are obtained using ONS input output tables for SIC code 73 (advertising and market research).^{25,26} This leads to the indirect impact of the market being 177,930-182,610 FTE and £5,850m-£6,310m leading to a total direct and indirect impact of 529,570 -543,500 FTE and £24,590-£26,560m

The ONS does not publish type 2 multipliers, which capture the induced effects, instead Scottish Government input output tables²⁷ were used, and an uplift was applied to the type 1 multipliers in order to estimate the induced effects. The employment type 2 multiplier equates to 1.71 and GVA type 2 multiplier is 1.47. This

leads to the induced impact of the market being 70,000 – 71,840 FTE and £3,040m-£3,290m leading to a total direct, indirect and induced impact of 599,570 - 615,340 FTE and £27,630-£29,850m



References

- 1 International comparison of the UK research base, 2025 - GOV. UK
- 2 Market Research Society (2025) Industry size and growth rates. London: MRS.
- 3 Office for National Statistics (2025) Earnings and hours worked, industry by four-digit SIC: ASHE Table 16. London: ONS.
- 4 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2024) Artificial Intelligence sector study 2024: Report on the UK AI Sector. GOV.UK.
- 5 Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (2024) The UK Data Driven Market. GOV.UK
- 6 Office for National Statistics (2023) Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES): Table 2 – Employees by industry (two, three and five-digit SIC).
- 7 Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2024: statistical release - GOV.UK
- 8 Office for National Statistics (2025) Earnings and hours worked, industry by four-digit SIC: ASHE Table 16. London: ONS.
- 9 Table 14 - HE full-time academic staff by cost centre and contract salary 2014/15 to 2023/24 | HESA
- 10 Where subject areas were not fully aligned, a ratio was taken based on Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021. Units of Assessment
- 11 HESA (2025) Chart 4 - Academic staff by academic employment function. Higher Education Statistics Agency.
- 12 Office for National Statistics (ONS). (2025). Earnings and hours worked, industry by four-digit SIC: ASHE Table 16.
- 13 HM Treasury (2025) GDP deflators at market prices, and money GDP: March 2025 (Spring Statement & Quarterly National Accounts).
- 14 Cabinet Office (2024) Statistical bulletin: Civil Service Statistics 2024.
- 15 Within Central government, MRS identifies the following as relevant research roles: [Commercial, Communications, Economics, Geography, Knowledge and Information Management, Operational Research, Policy, Project Delivery, Social Research, Statistics]. A percentage of each role was agreed with MRS that is in scope of a research role.
- 16 Northern Bridge (n.d.) Local government. Public Policy Engagement Toolkit.
- 17 Local Government Association (2025) Local government pay briefing: Harry Honnor, Senior Adviser Workforce and Negotiations. LGA.
- 18 NICVA (2024) 2024–2025 Payscales using NJC pay points 1–43. Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action.
- 19 González Hernando, M. (2024) State of the Sector 2024. On Think Tanks
- 20 Elsaid, H. (2025) Think Tanks in Saudi Arabia, GCC, and MENA– 2025 State of the Sector Report. On Think Tanks Note: UK value is assumed to equate to the global value
- 21 Overton (2024) Spotlight on think tanks: What is the picture in the UK?
- 22 Smart Thinking (2022) Think Tank Employee Survey 2022.
- 23 Charity Commission (2024) Charities by income band
- 24 Market Research Society (2012) The Business of Evidence: Understanding the UK research, insight and analytics industry. London: MRS.
- 25 ONS, UK input output analytical tables: industry by industry, 2025
- 26 Employment multipliers and effects in the UK, 2023
- 27 Scottish Government (2025) Supply, Use and Input-Output Tables: 1998–2022.