



ACCESS

ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022: Event Evaluation Report (September 2022)

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* Report written by SEG on behalf of the ACCESS Guiding Principles Team

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Introduction

ACCESS (Advancing Capacity for Climate and Environmental Social Science) is a 5-year project, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, which seeks to champion and coordinate social science to help address key environmental challenges spanning biodiversity, sustainability and decarbonisation. ACCESS is co-led by Director, Professor Patrick Devine-Wright (University of Exeter) and Deputy Director, Professor Birgitta Gatersleben (University of Surrey), supported by a network of colleagues and partners across academia, public bodies, industry and civil society.

Across four main areas of work, ACCESS will 1) identify and champion existing points of influence for environmental social science in research, education, policy and practice, 2) build capacity for interdisciplinarity and leadership amongst social scientists working in different sectors and at different career stages, 3) develop agile responses to requests for social science insights and generate innovative approaches through administration of a £1m flexible fund, and 4) enable more effective use of data across environmental social science.

Underpinning all of ACCESS's activities are three, intertwining, Guiding Principles: Environmental Sustainability, Knowledge Co-Production, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). ACCESS will provide leadership in these areas by developing, promoting, and enacting ways of working (in the form of a Guiding Principles Charter) that will embed best practice in these areas across all work packages. This work is led by the ACCESS Guiding Principles Team.

During June 2022, ACCESS held its first Annual Assembly. The Assembly had several objectives, including bringing together a range of partners from different sectors, providing an opportunity for networking early in the project, and enabling discussions around the aims of ACCESS. The Assembly also provided an early opportunity for the Guiding Principles Team to 1) embed principles of Environmental Sustainability, Knowledge Co-Production, and EDI within the Assembly, and 2) use the event as a reflection and benchmarking moment early in the life of ACCESS to inform the ongoing development of the Guiding Principles Charter.

The event was held across 2 days (1.5 days in duration) with a mix of plenaries, panels and break-out sessions. Main sessions were hybrid in nature, with break-out sessions being separated into physical groups for those attending in-person and virtual groups for those attending online. Sessions were organised around 4 key themes: Interdisciplinarity and the social sciences; Working with data; Knowledge co-production with policy makers; Horizon scanning for environmental social science. During the event there were several opportunities for informal interactions amongst those attending in-person, including lunch and refreshment breaks during the programme and an evening dinner on the first evening.

Given the short timeline for planning this event, relative to the start of the ACCESS project, the Guiding Principles Team focused on “quick wins” – actions that we were already skilled in delivering and advising on. We acknowledge that there is further work to be done to ensure that ACCESS goes beyond these initial initiatives, something reflected in some of the comments from Assembly attendees!

Examples of how the Guiding Principles were enacted during the first ACCESS Annual Assembly include:

- **Environmental Sustainability** - meat-free menus to role model low-carbon catering; request to bring own water bottle to avoid use of disposable bottles; accommodation near primary venue to support active travel during event; collected plastic name badges from delegates to re-use for future events
- **Knowledge Co-Production** – designing the event, as well as delivering all sessions with the involvement of participants from more than one sector to embed co-production in programme priorities; inclusion of inter- and trans-disciplinary breakout sessions to facilitate cross-sector interaction and co-production of knowledge.
- **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion** – hosting as a hybrid event to widen opportunities for attendance; inclusion of Equal Opportunities Monitoring questions in the post-event evaluation survey to enable understanding of how, and in what ways, delegates and speakers at the event were diverse (or not).

Post-Event Evaluation – Survey Details

Although ACCESS is not primarily a research project, we still want to evaluate and reflect upon our work. Following the Annual Assembly, we conducted a post-event evaluation survey to assess:

1. Attendees' views about what elements of the event were successful and where ACCESS could make improvements for future Assemblies
2. Attendees' views about the event in relation to the Guiding Principles and suggestions for future actions.
3. Diversity of attendees across a range of professional and personal characteristics

The Assembly was attended by approximately 70 people each day (day 1: 42 in person, 31 online; day 2: 47 in person, 25 online); most people attended both days. The post-event evaluation survey was hosted online (using Qualtrics) and was sent to all those who had attended ($n = 87$); 25 people provided responses to at least some of the questions, a response rate of 28.7% (see Appendix¹ for all survey questions).

To gather attendees' feedback on the event itself and the Guiding Principles, we asked five open-ended questions about what people felt worked well at the Annual Assembly 2022 and where they felt there was room for improvement at future Assemblies – both in general terms and in relation to the Guiding Principles.

To enable us to assess the level of diversity at the first Annual Assembly and provide a benchmark that will inform whether we increase diversity at the Assemblies over the life of ACCESS, we need to collect information about who attends these events. We also need to consider different forms of diversity, in terms of both professional and personal characteristics. We therefore included a series of demographic questions, based on standard Equal Opportunities Monitoring questions, as well as asking attendees about questions about their professional roles.

¹ It should be noted that at the start of the ACCESS project, the Guiding Principles were initially referred to as the 'Cross-Cutting Themes'. As such, the terminology in the survey refers to Cross-Cutting themes rather than Guiding Principles.

Qualitative Feedback on Annual Assembly & Guiding Principles

Using Thematic Analysis², the open-ended comments provided by respondents were coded by SEG into four, pre-determined themes. The codes themselves were inductively generated from the data. These four themes are summarized here.

1. What worked well, what people valued

As well as enjoying the opportunity to meet other people from across the wider ACCESS network, comments from respondents suggest that attendees at the Annual Assembly particularly appreciated the inter/transdisciplinary nature of the event. Respondents valued the ways in which the event brought together people with multiple perspectives and experiences, across disciplines and especially across sectors. Several respondents commented on how much they enjoyed having people from policy and public bodies in the room.

Although the Annual Assembly was hybrid, respondents who had attended in-person commented on how much they valued this aspect of the event (and we of course have to place these comments in the context of June 2022, with many conference-style events in the UK only just beginning to return to in-person at the time as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic). Several responses related to the informal networking opportunities afforded during breaks, meals, and break-out sessions, which was seen as a benefit of attending in-person.

Both the content and format of the Annual Assembly programme received positive comments from respondents. Presentations were considered interesting and of good quality, and respondents appreciated the mix of speakers from different sectors and at different career stages. The interactive sessions were also well received by respondents. Some respondents added that they had an increased understanding of the purpose and scope of ACCESS as a result of the Annual Assembly.

In terms of the overall event experience, those who commented on aspects such as catering, accommodation and organization were complimentary. The food was generally considered good, and people commented that the event appeared to be very well organized.

2. What could have worked better (suggestions for improvement)

Regarding the general experience of the event, most of the suggestions for improvements for future Annual Assemblies related to improving the hybrid aspect, especially the experience for those attending online. Comments indicated a need to involve online delegates more proactively, as well as finding ways to support interactions between online and in-person delegates.

² Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

Other suggestions for future Assemblies include providing more and longer opportunities across the programme, both for interactive sessions and for informal breaks. This holds for both in-person and online attendees.

3. Positive experiences relating to guiding principles

Positive comments relating to Environmental Sustainability were focused on the practical and logistical elements of the event. Respondents were pleased to see meat-free menus, appreciated the suggestion to bring water bottles to avoid single-use plastic, and valued seeing active travel being promoted during the event. The event being hybrid was also considered useful from a sustainability perspective.

In terms of Knowledge Co-production, respondents commented on the benefits of the inter/transdisciplinary nature of the programme, delegate list, and interactive sessions. People reported there being plenty of opportunity for interaction and engagement with various stakeholders.

Respondents were encouraged to see what they perceived to be a good mix in terms of gender and career stage amongst speakers, as well as a reasonable gender balance amongst the wider audience. One respondent commented that it is a positive step that ACCESS are explicitly discussing and considering ways of improving EDI in environmental social science.

4. Concerns about guiding principles (suggestions for improvement)

A couple of specific suggestions were provided about Environmental Sustainability at future assemblies: placing greater emphasis on low-carbon travel to and from the event (rather than during the event) and better control of food waste. However, some respondents provided comments around Environmental Sustainability along the lines of 'I cannot offer an opinion on sustainability, as I do not really know what efforts the organizers did / did not make'. No respondent raised any concerns or suggestions for improvements regarding Knowledge Co-production.

In terms of EDI, however, respondents raised concerns about the perceived lack of diversity amongst both delegates and speakers. Some of these comments related to where there was a clear lack of 'visible' diversity, particularly around race/ethnicity, visible physical disabilities/differences, younger ages, and early career researchers. Other respondents also raised concerns about a potential lack of 'invisible' diversity, such as e.g. neurodiversity, mental and physical health conditions, carers, parents, and other groups that may face additional challenges to attending events and/or being engaged and included in environmental social science.

Specific suggestions to increase diversity and inclusion at future Annual Assemblies were provided. Some related to providing financial or practical support for parents and carers, as well as considering use of face masks to support those with health conditions or with family members who are 'shielding' as a result of COVID-19 (and arguably other conditions, such as cancer). Another suggestion was to include programme sessions that are focused on groups who are marginalized/minoritized either within environmental social science, or by the climate and environmental challenges we currently face (e.g. invite Global South speakers, or have a Global South focus).

Delegate Characteristics

Professional characteristics

We had 25 responses from attendees at the Annual Assembly 2022; of these, 16 responses were from people who attended some or all of the sessions in-person, six were from people who only joined online and three were from people who joined some sessions in-person and some online. Most ($n = 16$) respondents had attended as delegates only, while the other nine respondents had attended as both delegate and speaker ($n = 7$), or attended in another capacity ($n = 2$).

Most respondents ($n = 15$) worked in academia (see Figure 1) and most ($n = 16$) considered themselves to be both research producers and users; three people identified as research users only and six as research producers only. Across academia and government, most respondents reported being in middle or more senior roles / career stages (see Figures 2 and 3). In terms of geographic spread for job location, the majority of respondents ($n = 19$) reported their role as being based in Southern England (see Figure 4).

Figure 1. Number of respondents working in each sector ($n = 25$)

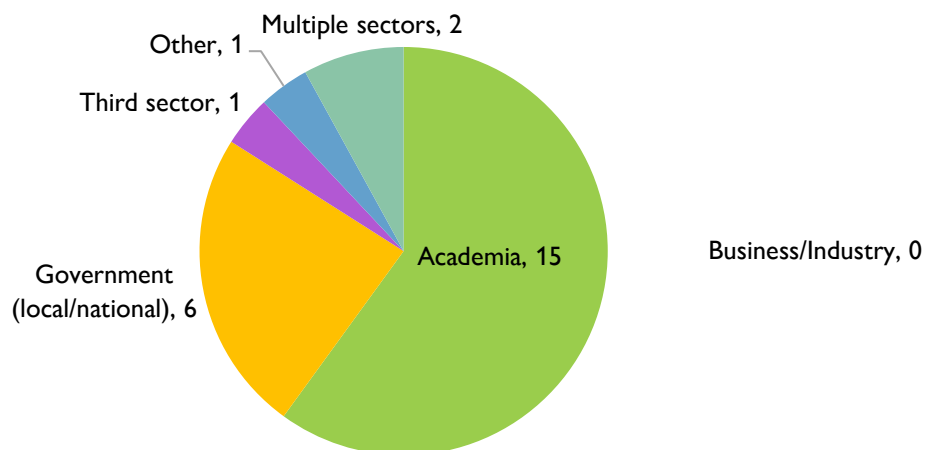


Figure 2. Number of respondents at each career stage, academia ($n = 15$)

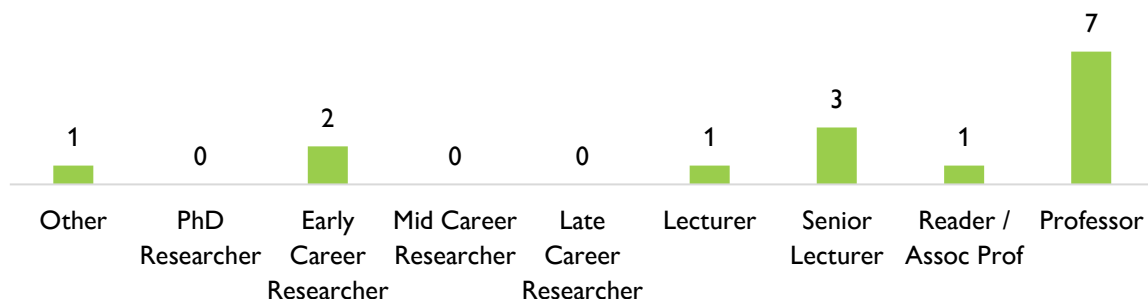


Figure 3. Number of respondents at each career stage, government (n = 6)

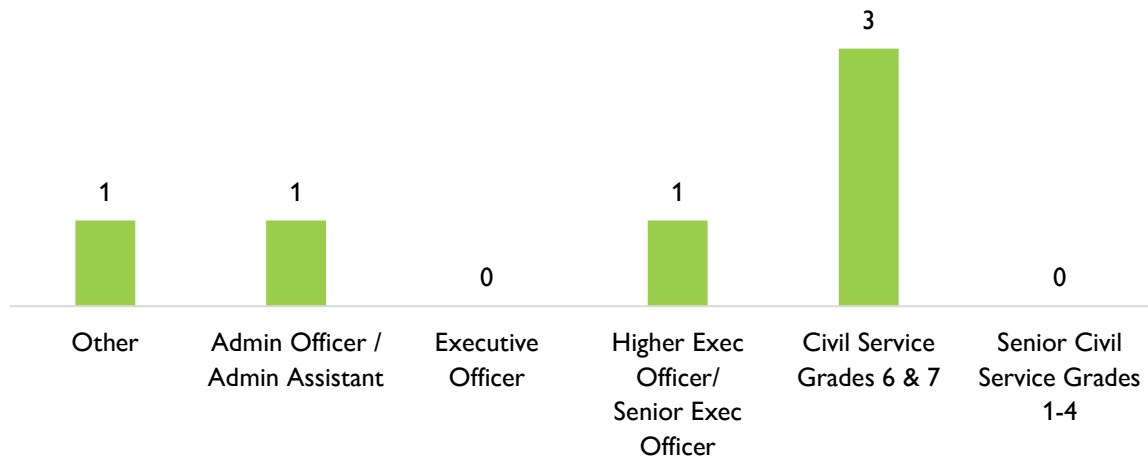
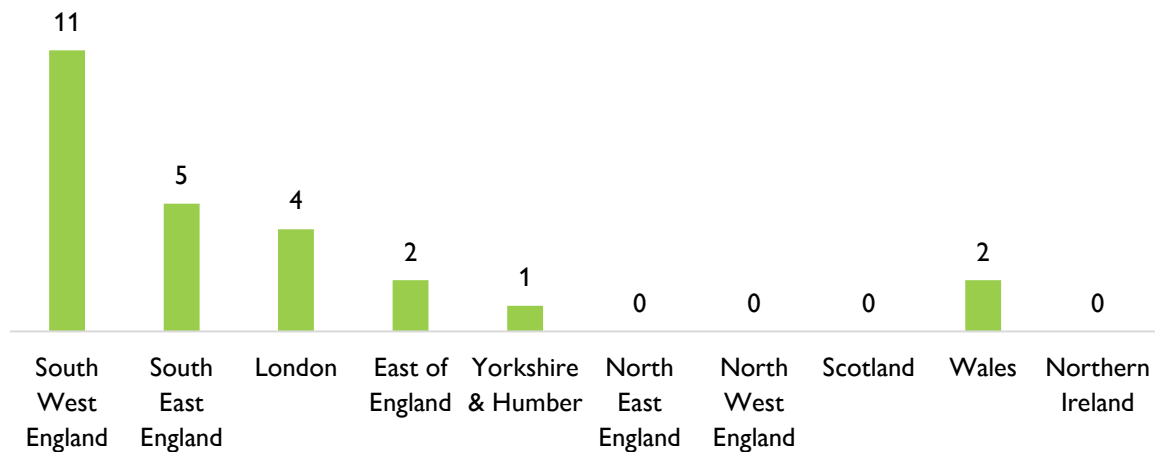


Figure 4. Location of respondents' job roles in each UK region (n = 25)



Based on self-described disciplinary backgrounds, 11 respondents were classified as being aligned to social science disciplines, five were classified as aligned with STEM disciplines, and 5 were classified as inter-disciplinary (4 respondents either left this question blank or wrote N/A). The word cloud in Figure 5 shows the phrases used by respondents to describe their disciplinary backgrounds. Some respondents used more than one phrase to describe their discipline(s), with the most commonly used phrases being geography ($n = 5$), sociology ($n = 4$), and psychology ($n = 3$).

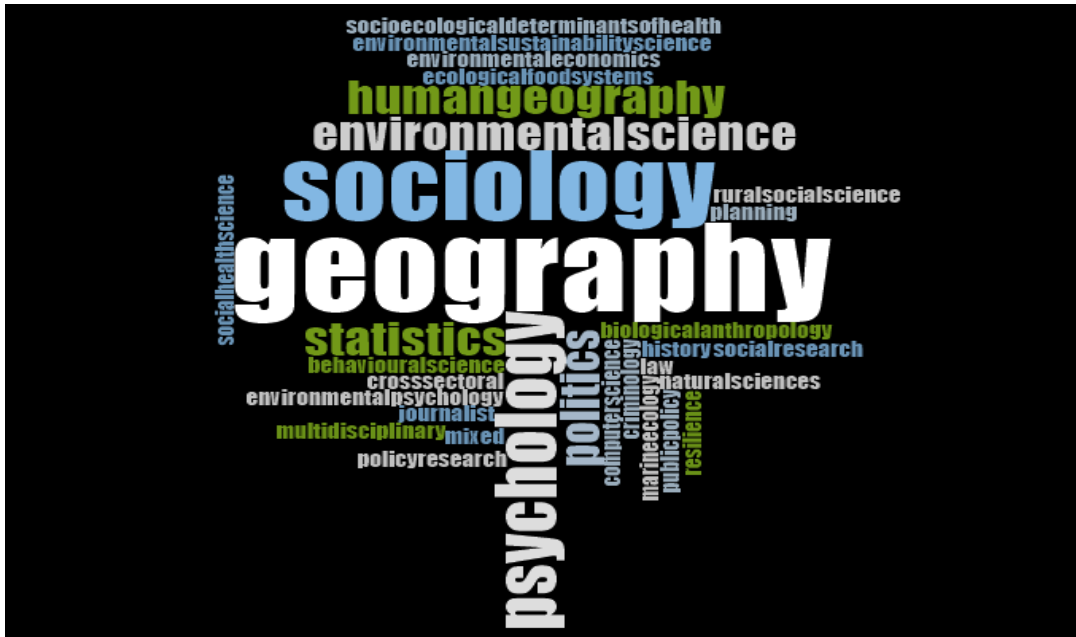


Figure 5. Phrases used by respondents to describe disciplinary background

Personal characteristics

Of the 25 respondents, 19 provided some or all of the demographic information requested. Full details of response distributions are shown in Figures 6-14.

Respondents' ages ranged from 30-34 ($n = 2$) to 65+ ($n = 1$), with the most common age ranges being 40-44 and 45-49 (both $n = 4$). Most respondents identified as women ($n = 15$) and all but one identified as cis gender ($n = 18$). All 19 respondents identified as White (White (English), $n = 11$; White (British) $n = 7$; White (Other) $n = 1$). Most identified as heterosexual ($n = 15$) and most reported having no religion ($n = 14$). The majority reported having no disability, impairment or health condition ($n = 16$) and around two-thirds reported having some form of caring responsibilities ($n = 12$). Finally, most respondents reported having at least one parent or guardian who was educated to at least degree level by the time the respondent was aged 18 ($n = 13$).

Figure 6 – Responses to 'What is your age?' ($n = 19$)

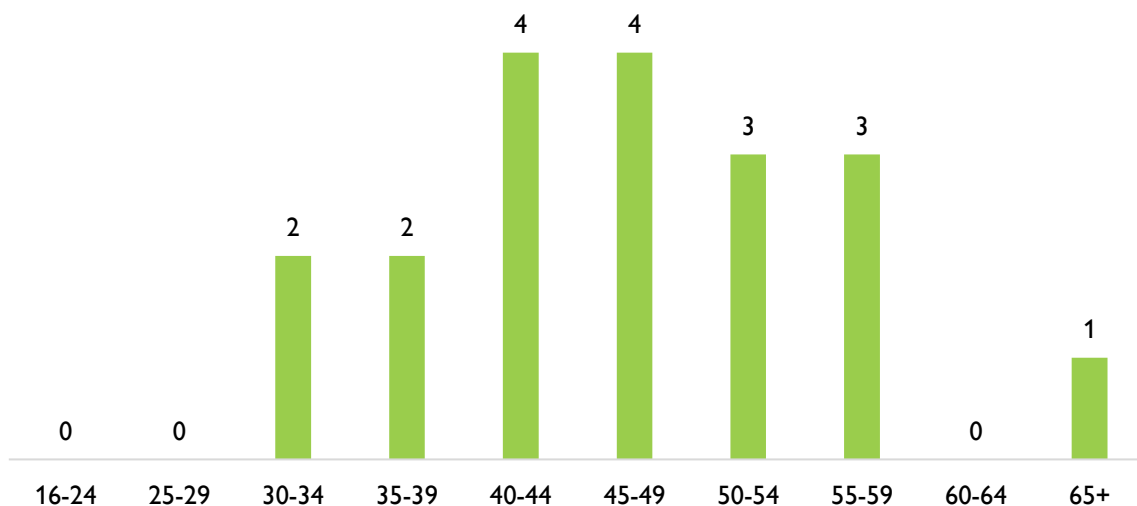


Figure 7 – Responses to ‘What is your gender?’ (n = 19)

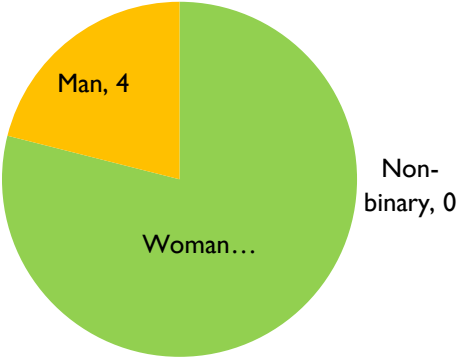


Figure 8 – Responses to ‘Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were originally assigned at birth?’ (n = 19)

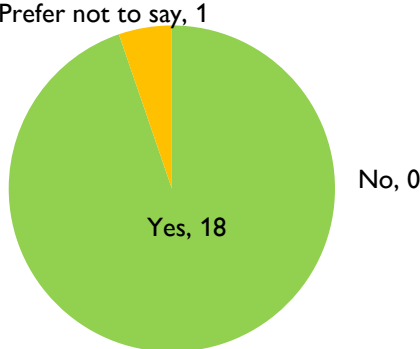


Figure 9 – Responses to ‘What is your ethnicity?’ (n = 19)

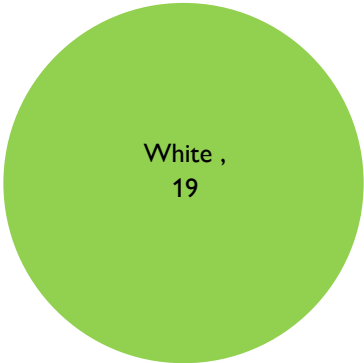


Figure 10 – Responses to ‘What is your sexual orientation?’ (n = 19)



Figure 11 – Responses to ‘What is your religion or belief?’ (n = 19)



Figure 12 – Responses to 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or health condition?' (n = 19)

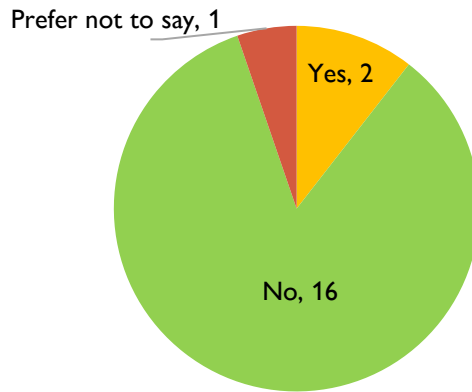
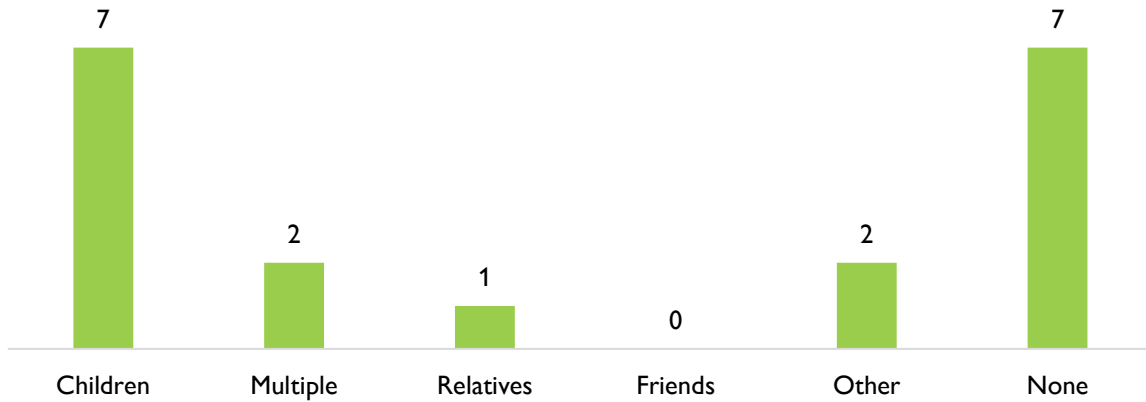
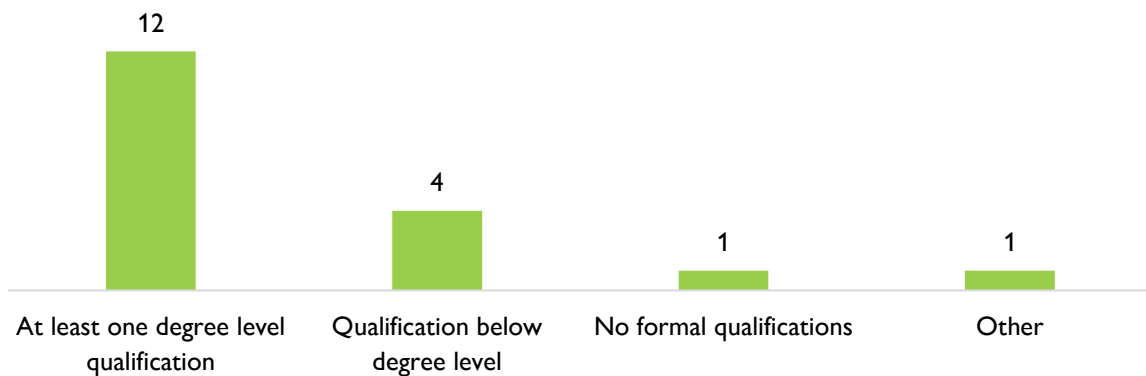


Figure 13 – Responses to 'What caring responsibilities do you have?' (n = 18)



Note: Respondents could select more than one option – for those who did so, these responses have been recoded as 'Multiple'.

Figure 14 – Responses to 'What is the highest level of qualification achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?' (n = 18)



Recommendations and Next Steps

Overall, qualitative feedback received from this post-event evaluation survey suggests that (at least for our respondents!) the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022 was well received. Amongst those respondents who provided information about their personal and professional characteristics, there is evidence that the group was diverse on some dimensions but not others.

Our evaluation suggests the following recommendations for future Assemblies and similar events:

- **Improve the hybrid experience** – at times, online attendance might be preferable for delegates (e.g., if carbon-intensive travel is the only option for in-person attendance or time limited), so virtual and hybrid engagement needs to be sufficiently planned, resourced and executed. In particular, focus on providing opportunities for networking amongst online delegates and for supporting them to engage more with speakers and in-person audience during sessions
- **Proactively communicate measures taken around Environmental Sustainability** – for example, publish details of measures taken by planning committee or venue, or more explicitly encourage low-carbon travel (while also considering tensions around inclusion for those not so able to use public transport)
- **Reflect upon lack of concerns / suggestions for improvements raised around Knowledge Co-production** – did ACCESS get this right in this first Assembly, or is there a potential ‘understanding gap’ around what Knowledge Co-production means to different stakeholders and across different contexts?
- **Examine options for increasing diversity at future Assemblies and other ACCESS events** – draw on best practice from other projects or events to facilitate greater inclusion of speakers and delegates who collectively represent a wider range of characteristics, backgrounds and experiences.

The ACCESS Guiding Principles Team are currently developing core principles and components to integrate into the ACCESS Guiding Principles Charter, which will be a publicly-available, living document. To inform the Charter, we are drawing together best practice and guidance from a range of sources, including insights gathered from evaluations such as that reported here. We hope that through a continual process of reflection and review the Guiding Principles Team, and the Charter we develop (co-produced of course!) will provide a source of leadership and guidance for people working in environmental social science and beyond, as well as informing the development of more sustainable, diverse, co-produced events such as the ACCESS Annual Assemblies.

Appendix – Post-Event Evaluation Survey

Annual Assembly 2022 – Post-Attendance Evaluation

Thank you for attending the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022. We would like to gather feedback about the event from attendees, as well as some additional information about attendees. This is so we can evaluate who attended the event, what worked well about this year's event, and how we might improve future Assemblies. This short survey is anonymous and should take about 5-10 minutes to complete. You can choose to answer all, some, or none of these questions. All data will be stored securely in line with data protection regulations.

Please indicate which sessions and in what format you attended the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022:

	Wednesday PM	Thursday AM	Thursday PM
Online			
In-Person			

In what capacity did you attend?

- Delegate only
- Speaker only
- Delegate and Speaker
- Other (please provide details)
- Prefer not to say

In what sector do you work?

- Academia
- Business / Industry
- Government (local or national)
- Third Sector
- Other (please provide details)
- Multiple sectors (please provide details)
- Prefer not to say

[If Academia selected] What is your career stage? (Please select the option which mostly closely matches your job grade, even if this is not your exact title)

- PhD Researcher
- Research only contract - Early Career Researcher
- Research only contract – Mid Career Researcher
- Research only contract – Late Career Researcher
- Academic contract - Lecturer
- Academic contract - Senior Lecturer
- Academic contract - Reader / Associate Professor
- Academic contract - Professor
- Other (please provide details)
- Prefer not to say

[If Government selected] What is your career stage? (Please select the option which mostly closely matches your job grade, even if this is not your exact title)

- Administrative Officer / Administrative Assistant
- Executive Officer
- Higher Executive Officer / Senior Executive Officer
- Civil Service Grades 6 and 7
- Senior Civil Service Grades 1 to 4
- Other (please provide details)
- Prefer not to say

[If Business / Third Sector / Other selected] How would you describe your career stage? _____

In your primary role, do you consider yourself to be a research producer, research user, or both?

- Research Producer
- Research User
- Both Producer and User

Please briefly explain your choice _____

Please describe your disciplinary background (if applicable) _____

Where is your job geographically based (if you currently/mostly work from home, where is your institution primarily located)?

- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- Wales
- North East England
- North West England
- Yorkshire & The Humber
- East Midlands
- West Midlands
- East of England
- London
- South East England
- South West England
- Other (please provide details)
- Prefer not to say

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Please tell us what you thought were successful aspects of the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022 _____

Please tell us what you most enjoyed or valued about the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022 _____

ACCESS is underpinned by three cross-cutting themes: Equality, diversity and inclusion; Sustainability; Co-production.

Please share any reflections you have about your experiences in relation to these three themes at the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022 _____

Please share any suggestions you have for how we might improve future ACCESS Assemblies in relation to any or all of the cross-cutting themes (Equality, diversity and inclusion; Sustainability; Co-production)

If you have any other general suggestions for how we can improve future ACCESS Assemblies, please share your comments here: _____

If you have any questions or concerns about the cross-cutting themes at the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022, please contact the relevant ACCESS theme lead:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Lead: Kate Burningham k.burningham@surrey.ac.uk

Sustainability Lead: Stewart Barr s.w.barr@exeter.ac.uk

Co-Production Lead: Sarah Hartley sarah.hartley@exeter.ac.uk

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ACCESS is committed to advancing equality, diversity and inclusion in climate and environmental social science and we recognise that many groups are under-represented in our disciplines. We would like to collect some information about your demographic characteristics to help us understand more about who attended the 2022 Annual Assembly. By collecting this information, it will help us assess where we are as a programme and where we need to do further work to advance equality, diversity, and inclusion. All information you share will be stored securely and processed in the strictest confidence and in accordance with current data protection regulations.

The following information will be used to:

- 1) Understand within ACCESS more about the demographic characteristics of delegates and speakers who attended the 2022 Annual Assembly
- 2) Help us assess whether our delegate and speaker pools become more diverse across subsequent ACCESS Annual Assemblies
- 3) Assist with our reporting of activities (i.e., we may use this data at an anonymised, aggregated level to describe sample characteristics of Annual Assembly attendees in project reports for the ACCESS team and/or for our funders, who are the Economic and Social Research Council)

If you are willing to provide information to aid our Equal Opportunities monitoring, please complete the questions below.

What is your gender?

- Woman
- Man
- Non-binary
- If you prefer to use your own term, please provide details: _____
- Prefer not to say

Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were originally assigned at birth:

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What is your age?

- 16-24
- 25-29
- 30-34
- 35-39
- 40-44
- 45-49
- 50-54
- 55-59
- 60-64
- 65+
- Prefer not to say

What is your ethnicity?

Ethnic origin is not about nationality, place of birth or citizenship. It is about the group to which you perceive you belong. Please tick the appropriate box

- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups
 - Black Caribbean and White
 - Black African and White
 - Asian and White
 - Any other mixed background (please provide details)
 - Prefer not to say

- Asian/Asian British
 - Indian
 - Pakistani
 - Bangladeshi
 - Chinese
 - Any other Asian background (please provide details)
 - Prefer not to say
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
 - African
 - Caribbean
 - Any other Black/African/Caribbean background (please provide details)
 - Prefer not to say
- White
 - English
 - Welsh
 - Scottish
 - Northern Irish
 - British
 - Gypsy or Irish Traveller
 - Any other white background (please provide details)
 - Prefer not to say
- Other ethnic group
 - Arab
 - Jewish
 - Any other ethnic background (please provide details)
 - Prefer not to say

What is your sexual orientation?

- Bisexual
- Gay/lesbian
- Heterosexual
- If you prefer to use your own term, please provide details: _____
- Prefer not to say

What is your religion or belief?

- No religion or belief
- Buddhist
- Christian
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Other religion or belief, please provide details: _____
- Prefer not to say

Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or health condition?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

What caring responsibilities do you have? Select all that apply.

- Children
- Partner
- Relatives
- Friends

- None
- Other, please provide details: _____
- Prefer not to say

What is the highest level of qualification achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?

- At least one degree level qualification
- Qualification below degree level
- No formal qualifications
- Don't know
- Other
- Prefer not to say