



# ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023: Event Guide and Evaluation Report

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# Executive Summary

This report evaluates the 2023 ACCESS Annual Assembly. It reports demographic details about attendees and analyses their perceptions of the event, using multiple data sources collected before and afterwards using surveys. In particular, it analyses general event feedback as well as issues relating to the ACCESS Guiding Principles, and Social Capital. The rationale for evaluation is to review our successes and challenges, and to feed into a process of continuous improvement, specifically planning for the 2024 event.

One of the ACCESS network's key aims is to address a fragmented environmental social science landscape that lacks visibility and wider appreciation of its diversity and relevance to achieve rapid change. The Annual Assembly is a key mechanism to achieve this goal. The 2023 event aimed to promote connectivity between participants across boundaries of career stage, discipline and sector, to showcase state of the art environmental social science research insights, and to improve understanding of the ACCESS work programme, while minimising environmental impacts. As with all aspects of our work programme, the Assembly provides a mechanism for ACCESS to act on our Guiding Principles, notably commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Knowledge-Co-Production (KCP) and Environmental Sustainability (ES).

The structure and format of the event built upon key characteristics of the first Assembly in 2022: an event that runs over two days, beginning and ending at lunchtime with one evening dinner, to enable same-day access via public transport; emphasis upon face-to-face attendance for relationship building, yet enabling remote participation for inclusion; a mix of different types of sessions, including breakout groups to encourage discussions amongst participants; sufficient breaks between sessions to encourage networking; sustainable food provision (meat-free, locally sourced where possible); and provision of an Inclusion Fund to enable wider participation.

The 2023 Assembly was attended by 82 individuals in total, with approximately 70 people attending each day and approximately 75% attending in person. The event was mainly attended by female participants, of White ethnicity, who were mostly based in Southern England. There was a good mix of age, career stage and discipline, and a predominance of people from universities and the public sector, with comparatively few individuals from third and private sectors. More than half of participants had caring responsibilities, and about 15% indicated some form of disability or impairment.

Findings show overwhelmingly positive feedback. The 2023 Assembly succeeded in bringing together a diverse mix of participants, and was delivered in a friendly atmosphere that was considered to be conducive to networking. The programme was appreciated as both diverse and of interest to participants, including a mix of keynotes by leaders from different sectors, Q&A discussions and breakout group discussions.

The Assembly was widely seen as delivering on the ACCESS Guiding Principles. Examples mentioned by participants included the provision of an accessible venue and plant-based catering (Environmental Sustainability); efforts made to support Equality, Diversity and Inclusion such as offering virtual attendance (the event was hybrid) and the provision of funding (the Inclusivity Fund); and use of

breakout rooms to support Knowledge Co-Production between diverse participants (e.g mix of sector, career stage and gender).

Data on social capital support the conclusion that the event was a success. There was a quantifiable increase in participants' understanding, trust and reciprocity from before to after the event. There was also a quantifiable increase in bonding and bridging social capital before and afterwards. Overall, the average number of connections held between participants nearly doubled during the 2023 Assembly. This demonstrates the positive impact of the event to enable network building amongst disparate participants. Those attending in-person created fewer new relationships but deepened existing connections. Those joining online showed a higher increase in developing relationships with new connections. The relatively greater importance of bridging for remote participants suggests a slightly different characteristic of online attendance, allowing ACCESS to connect individuals and organisations from different sectors who might not wish to invest two days of time to attend in person.

The evaluation also shows areas we could target for improvement when designing and delivering the 2024 Annual Assembly, including:

- Addressing imbalances in ethnicity, sector and geography
- Improving the planning and delivery of breakouts, as these are key spaces for cross-boundary encounters
- Finding ways to broaden understanding of EDI to also be about accessibility and the less visible aspects of diversity, as well as more visible aspects
- In advance of the event, providing a delegate list (name, organization, contact information) to all participants. This will help attendees to plan who to network with, and might also help with completion of the Social Capital Evaluation, reducing the chance for people to forget others' names.
- Providing spaces for ECRs in the programme, for example:
  - A Leadership College-focused session on Transitioning to Leadership in Environmental Social Science with a mix of invited speakers and a round table discussion
  - A session showcasing the findings of Flex Fund Round 1 awards with presentations delivered by ECR Principle Investigators





# Introduction

One of the key challenges that ACCESS aims to address is a fragmented environmental social science landscape that lacks visibility and wider appreciation of its diversity and relevance to achieve rapid change. We tackle the challenge of fragmentation by acting as a network, aiming to build collaborative, trusting relationships with individuals, projects and organisations that share our goals of advancing climate and environment social science. This aim of network building with diverse collaborators is also consistent with the ACCESS Guiding Principles, notably our commitments to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Knowledge-Co-Production and Environmental Sustainability.

We designed the 2022 Assembly to minimise environmental impacts, promote connectivity between participants, and design sessions that involved collaborations across boundaries of career stage, discipline and sector. From our evaluation of the 2022 event, we learnt two key things (see Golding, 2023<sup>1</sup>). First, that there was a strong appetite for face-to-face engagement across discipline and sectoral boundaries. In part, this may have been due to the disappearance of such spaces due to social restrictions arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, that there is a key difference in outcomes between how people attend, with different outcomes in terms of relationship building and social capital for those who attended in-person by comparison to online. Building upon these insights, we designed the Annual Assembly 2023 (Figure 1) with a primary emphasis upon face-to-face engagement, providing sufficient time for relationship building (e.g. by ensuring long duration breaks and a mid-event dinner), and using invited keynotes to showcase state of the art social science and build relationships with experts from outside the network.



Figure 1. Attendees at the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023

<sup>1</sup> Golding, S. E. (2023). *ACCESS Annual Assembly 2022: Event Evaluation Report (September 2022)*. <https://doi.org/10.15126/900786>

Given our objectives for the 2023 Assembly, we agreed that it is imperative to evaluate its outcomes, both to sense check our aspirations and to feed into a process of continuous improvement, specifically our approach to the 2024 event. This report evaluates the 2023 Assembly drawing on multiple data sources, collected both before and after the event. In particular, it spotlights EDI (via assessing attendee demographics) and the Network Building/Social Capital aspects of the Assembly. It also integrates feedback from attendees, both about the event in general and about their perceptions of the Guiding Principles at the Annual Assembly 2023.

## Data Sources and Methodology

### Equal Opportunities Monitoring Survey

To enable us to assess the diversity of attendees at the Annual Assembly 2023, we invited people to complete an optional Equal Opportunities Monitoring (EOM) survey during the registration process. The EOM survey included questions on participants' professional and personal characteristics (e.g., sector of work, career stage, age, gender, ethnicity etc.). A copy of the EOM survey, which was hosted on Qualtrics and was not linked to registrants' names or other identifiable information, can be found in Appendix A.

Invites to the Annual Assembly 2023 were sent to 200 people; 93 registrations were received and 55 people completed the EOM survey (response rate = 59.1%).

### Post-Event Feedback Survey

To enable us to evaluate and reflect upon the organization and running of the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023, 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.

We asked six open-ended questions about what attendees felt worked well at the Annual Assembly 2023 and where they felt there was room for improvement at future Assemblies – both in general terms and in relation to the Guiding Principles. See Appendix B for all feedback survey questions.

The Assembly was attended by 82 individuals in total, with approximately 70 people attending each day (day 1: 54 in person, 17 online; day 2: 52 in person, 16 online), with most people attending both days ( $n = 57$ ). The post-event evaluation survey was hosted online (using Qualtrics) and was sent to all those who had registered ( $n = 93$ ); 18 people provided responses to at least some of the questions (response rate = 19.3% of registrations, 21.9% of attendees).

### Social Capital Evaluation Survey

To meet its objectives of inter- and trans-disciplinary working across multiple organisations, ACCESS needs to build new connections between its members, and maintain existing connections. These connections, and the collective awareness of them, will inform the ways in which value can pass

between members and support the project objectives. A network can be understood as the structures and relationships that facilitate the movement of value – whether information, power, money, or other forms – and social capital is the way in which we can measure the potential for value exchange.

At Annual Assembly 2023, two social capital evaluation surveys were completed – one before the event began, and one at the end (see Appendix C). Both surveys were completed by 34 participants (compared to a total response of  $n = 38$  in 2022), which represents just under half of total attendees (a response rate of 42%). Of these respondents, 53% attended in 2022, while 47% were new to the Assembly; 84% attended in person, with the remainder joining online.

## Delegate Characteristics

### Professional characteristics

We had 55 responses to the EOM survey from registrants at the Annual Assembly 2023; of these, 38 responses were from people who intended to attend some or all of the sessions in-person, 13 were from people who intended to only join online, 2 were from people who intended to join some sessions in-person and some online, and 2 were from people who had yet to decide how they would attend.

Most respondents worked in academia ( $n = 27$ ) or the government/public sector ( $n = 20$ ; Figure 2). Across academia, respondents represented a mix of early-, mid-, and late-career roles (Figure 3). Across those working in other sectors, most respondents reported being in mid to high-level roles (Figures 4 and 5). In terms of geographic spread for job location, just under half the respondents ( $n = 25$ ) reported their role as being based in South West England (see Figure 6).

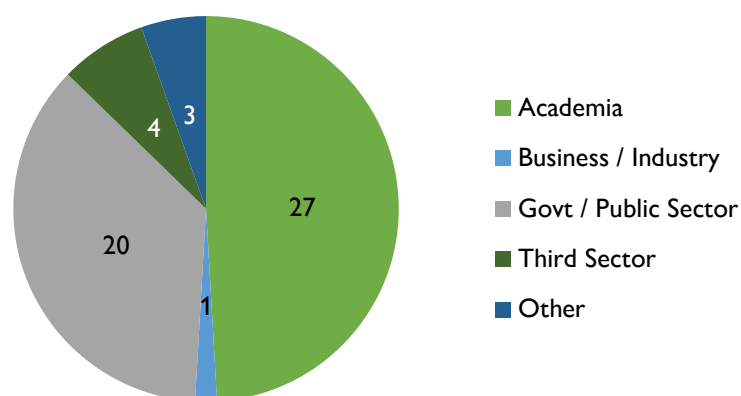


Figure 2. Number of respondents working in each sector ( $n = 55$ )

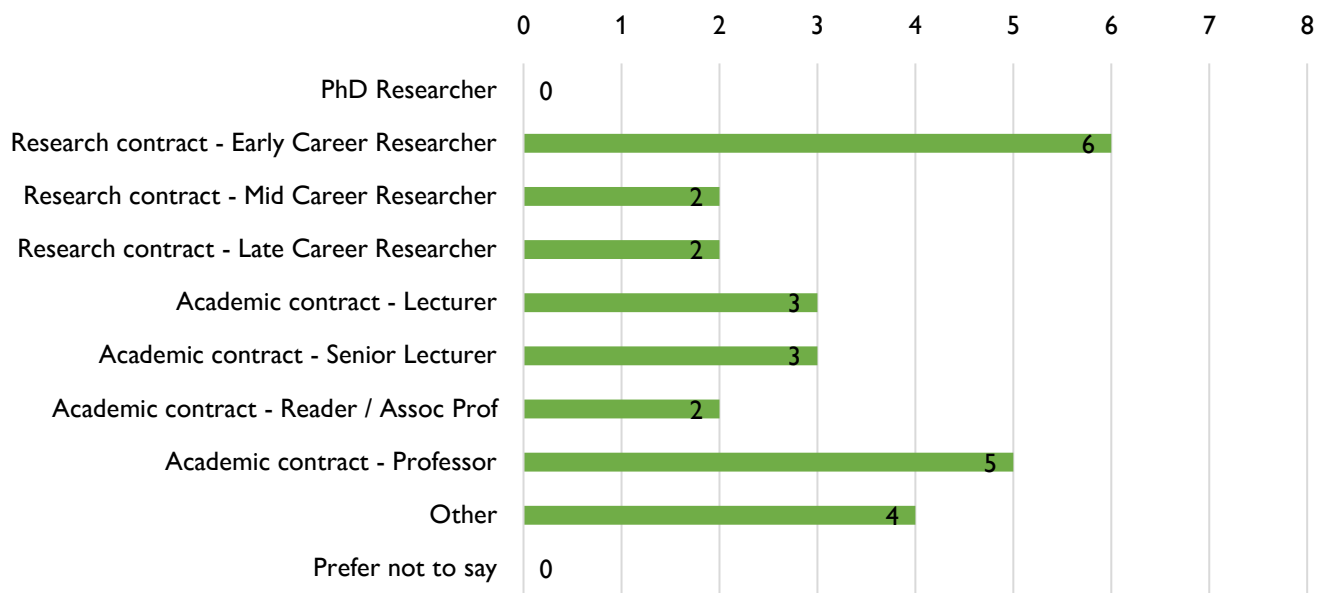


Figure 3. Number of respondents at each career stage, academia (n = 27)

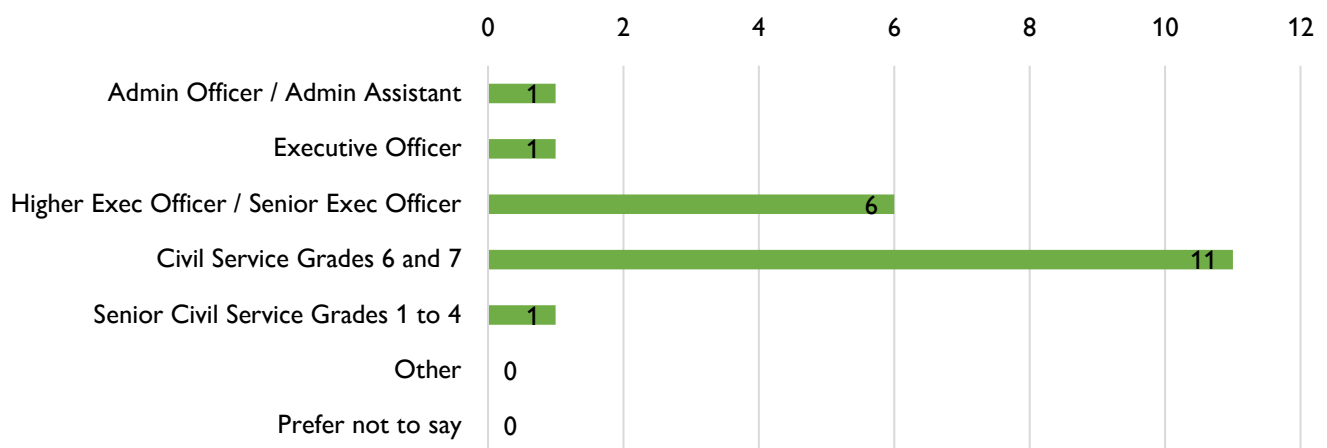


Figure 4. Number of respondents at each career stage, government/public sector (n = 20)

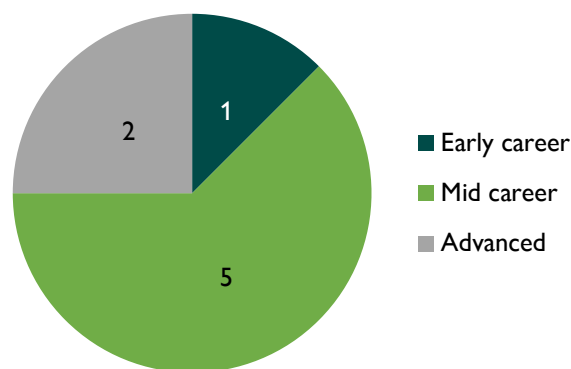


Figure 5. Number of respondents at each career stage, business/third/other sector<sup>2</sup> (n = 8)

<sup>2</sup> Coded based on open-text responses.



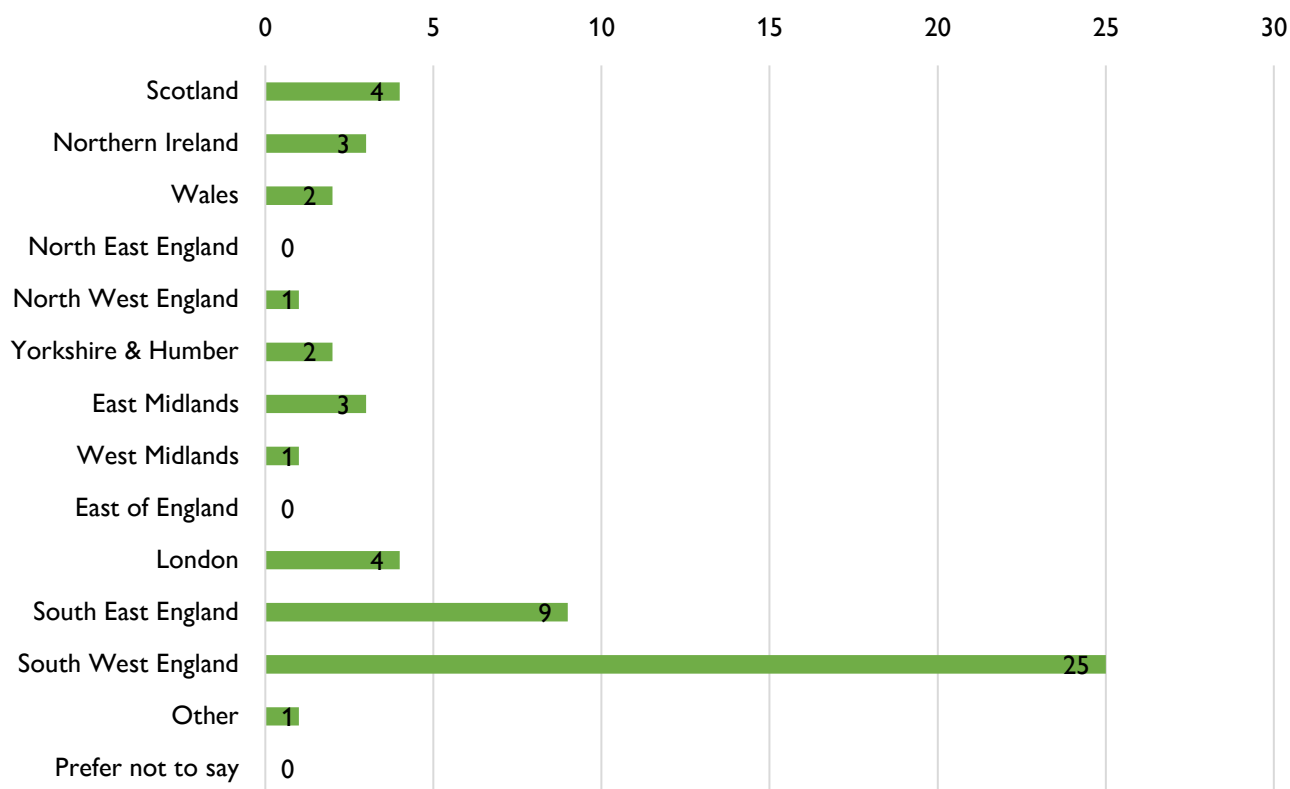


Figure 6. Location of respondents' job roles in each UK region ( $n = 55$ )

Based on self-described disciplinary backgrounds, 25 respondents were classified as being aligned to social science disciplines, 5 were classified as aligned with STEM disciplines, 9 were classified as inter-disciplinary, and 7 were classified as other<sup>3</sup> (9 respondents either left this question blank or wrote N/A). The word cloud in Figure 7 shows some of 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, Social Science, and Sociology. There were 48 different phrases used by respondents.

<sup>3</sup> Coded based on open-text responses. Respondents were classified as 'inter-disciplinary' if they reported disciplinary backgrounds that crossed STEM and social science boundaries. It should be noted that some respondents in the STEM and social science categories also reported multiple disciplinary backgrounds. Most respondents classified as 'other' mentioned disciplines from the Arts & Humanities.

environmentalpsychology  
 environmental law  
 coastalzonemanagement  
 biologicalanthropology  
 computerscience psychology developmentstudies  
 communications ecology atmosphericscience  
 community **socialscience** drama engineering  
 interdisciplinary **geography** analytical  
 english arts **sociology** behaviourchange  
 criminology humangeography datascience  
 earthscience anthropology ecologicalscience  
 carboncapturestorage  
 environment  
 environmentalmanagement  
 environmentalscience

Figure 7. Example phrases used by respondents to describe disciplinary background

## Personal characteristics

Full details of response distributions to the demographic questions in the EOM survey are shown in Figures 8-16.

Respondents' ages ranged from 25-29 ( $n = 1$ ) to 65+ ( $n = 1$ ), with the most common age ranges being 40-44 and 50-54 (respectively,  $n = 13$  and  $12$ ). Most respondents identified as women ( $n = 41$ ), as cis gender ( $n = 54$ ) and as White ( $n = 50$ )<sup>4</sup>. Most identified as heterosexual ( $n = 46$ ) and most reported having no religion ( $n = 36$ ). The majority reported having no disability, impairment or health condition ( $n = 45$ ) and around 71% reported having some form of caring responsibilities ( $n = 39$ ). 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 ( $n = 39$ ).

<sup>4</sup> Response categories for ethnicity question based on UK census. White (English)  $n = 22$ ; White (British)  $n = 18$ ; White (Any other White)  $n = 4$ ; White (Northern Irish)  $n = 3$ ; White (Irish)  $n = 2$ ; Mixed/Multiple (Asian and White)  $n = 2$ ; Asian/Asian British (Indian)  $n = 1$ ; Asian/Asian British (Bangladeshi)  $n = 1$ ; Asian/Asian British (Any other Asian)  $n = 1$ ; White (Welsh)  $n = 1$

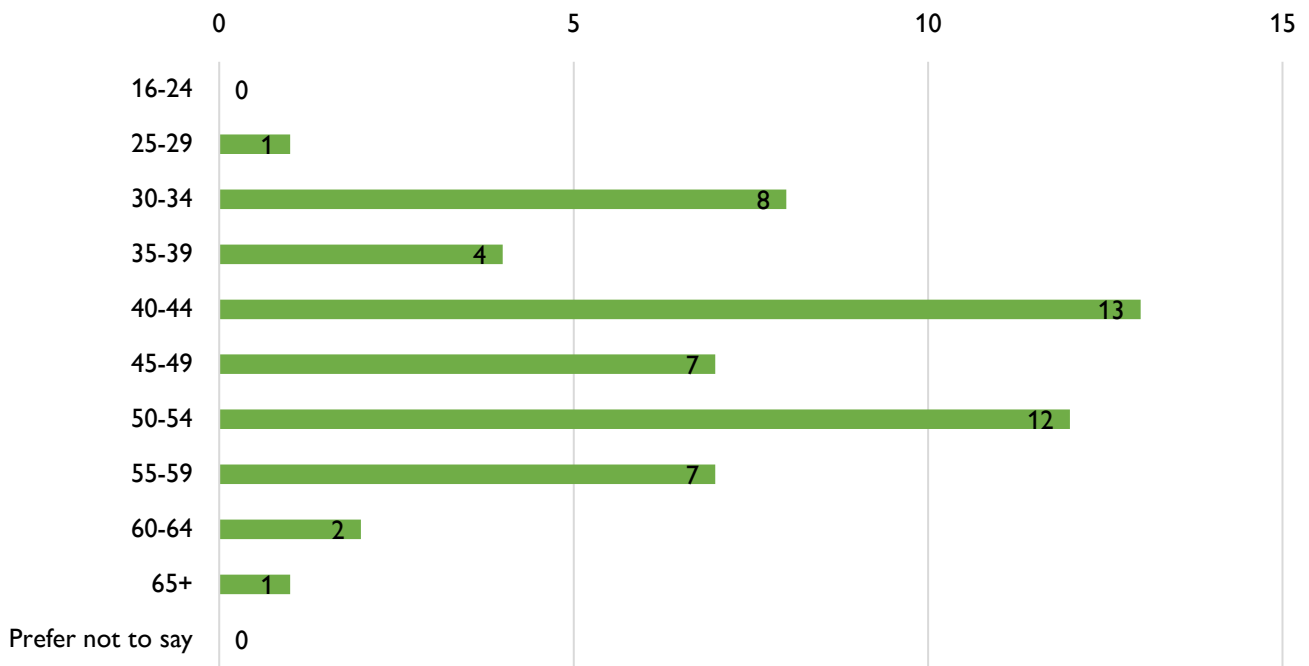


Figure 8. Responses to 'What is your age?' (n = 55)

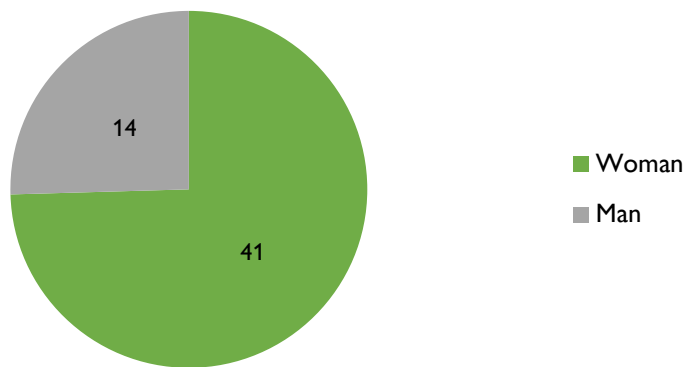


Figure 9. Responses to 'What is your gender?' (n = 55)

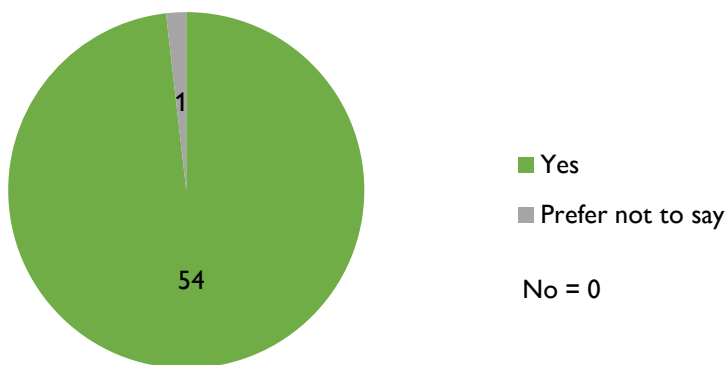


Figure 10. Responses to 'Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were originally assigned at birth?' (n = 55)

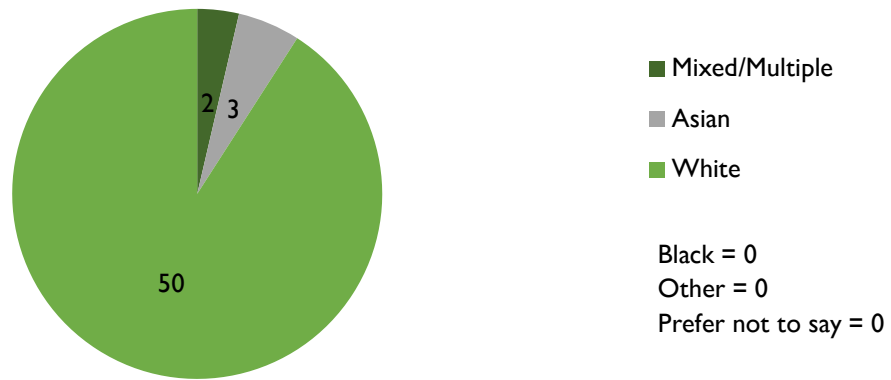


Figure 11. Responses to 'What is your ethnicity?' (n = 55)

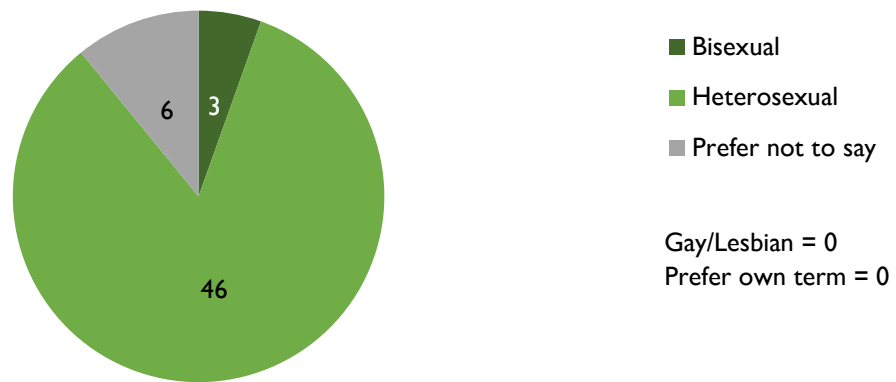


Figure 12. Responses to 'What is your sexual orientation?' (n = 55)

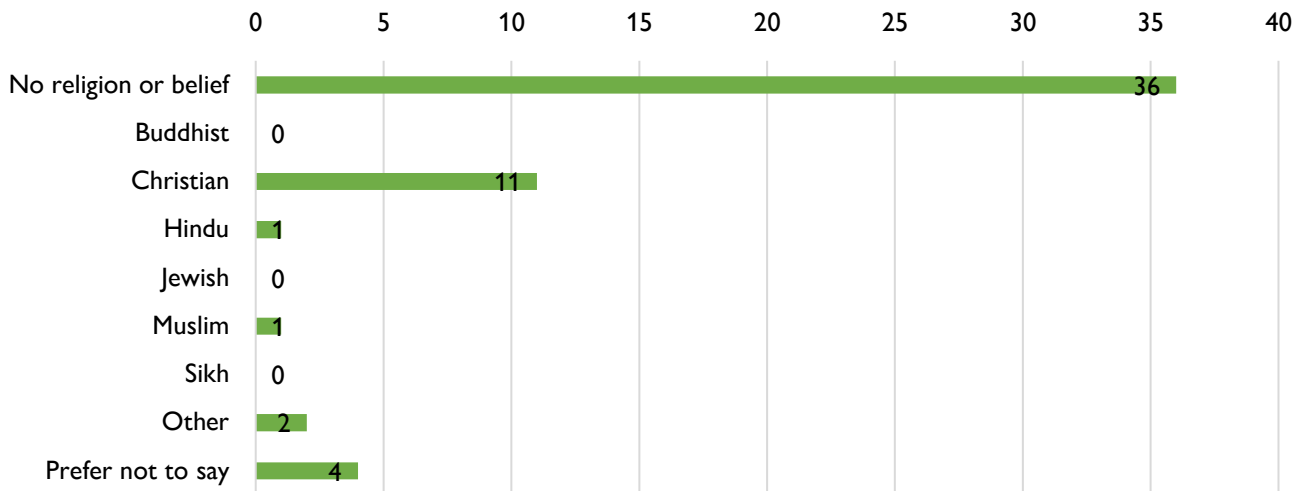


Figure 13. Responses to 'What is your religion or belief?' (n = 55)

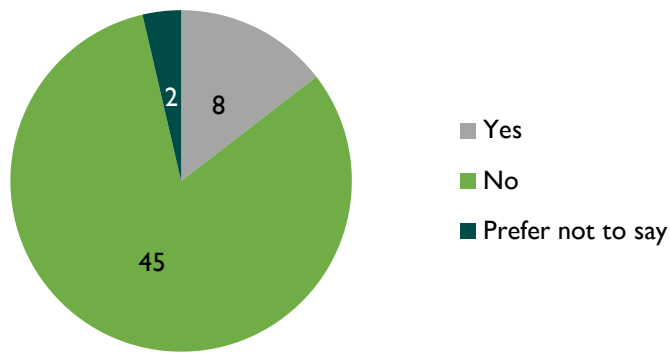


Figure 14. Responses to 'Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or health condition?' (n = 55)

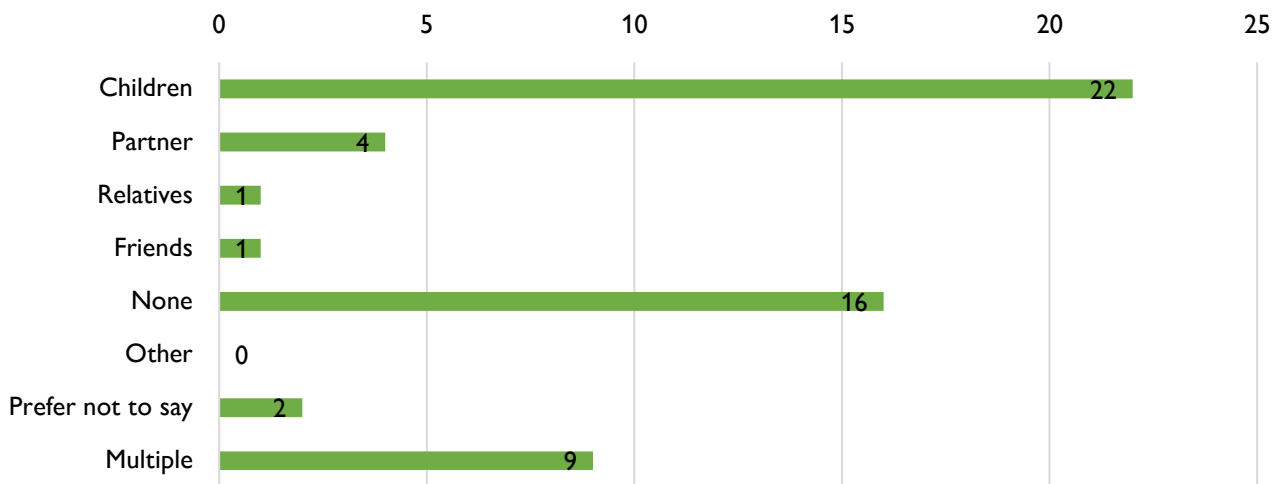


Figure 15. Responses to 'What caring responsibilities do you have?' (n = 55)<sup>5</sup>

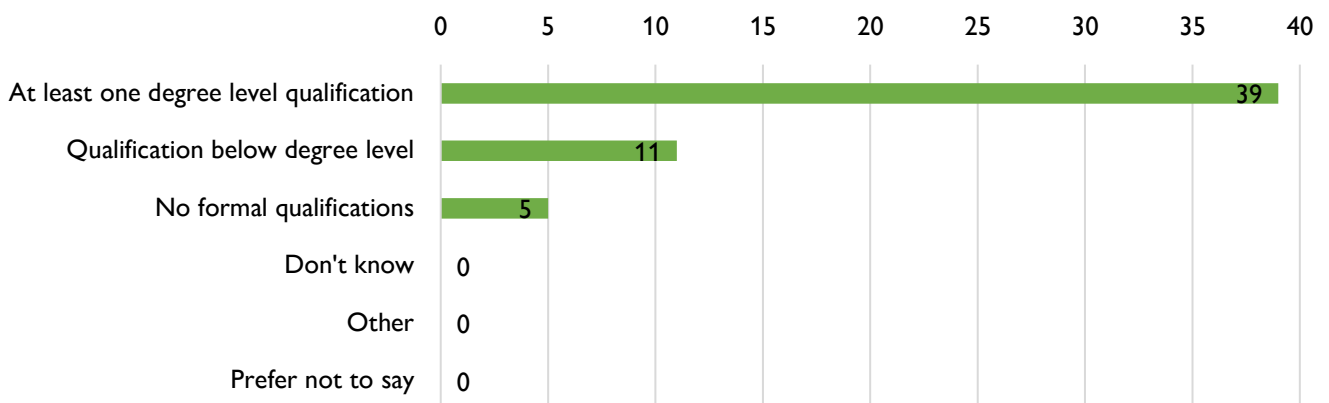


Figure 16. Responses to 'What is the highest level of qualification achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?' (n = 55)

<sup>5</sup> Respondents could select more than one option – for those who did so, these responses have been recoded as 'Multiple'.



# Qualitative Feedback on Event

We received responses to the Feedback Survey from 18 people who had attended the Annual Assembly 2023. There were six open-ended questions in the survey, but not all 18 respondents provided comments for every question. It is therefore important to note that the summaries presented below may not be representative across all Assembly attendees.

Using Thematic Analysis<sup>6</sup>, the comments provided were coded by SEG into four, pre-determined themes. The codes themselves were inductively generated from the data and form the basis of the text summaries presented in the four themes presented below.

## What worked well in general - what people valued about the Assembly

Comments from the respondents suggested that the overall experience at the Annual Assembly 2023 was positive. People perceived the organization to be very good, and the venue was considered suitable. Two aspects in particular were repeatedly commented on.

Firstly, the **programme content and structure** appeared to be very well received among our respondents. Their comments indicated that they greatly valued the mix of different types of sessions (e.g., keynotes, other presentations, breakout sessions) across the two days. Respondents also valued the variety in terms of topic and professional backgrounds of presenters/facilitators. Encouragingly, some respondents also felt they came away with a greater understanding of the work of ACCESS and how the network is growing and developing. Finally, people also noted the impact-oriented nature of many of the sessions – this emphasis on impact and practical action (rather than theory) was valued.

Secondly, the importance of the Assembly as an opportunity for **meaningful cross-discipline and cross-sector interactions** was highlighted. Many of the respondents felt the Assembly offered useful networking opportunities, facilitated by the “welcoming and friendly” atmosphere, the breakout sessions and the regular breaks and social slots. The breakout sessions in particular were felt to be key in helping to facilitate these new interactions and break down barriers between delegates from different disciplines or sectors.

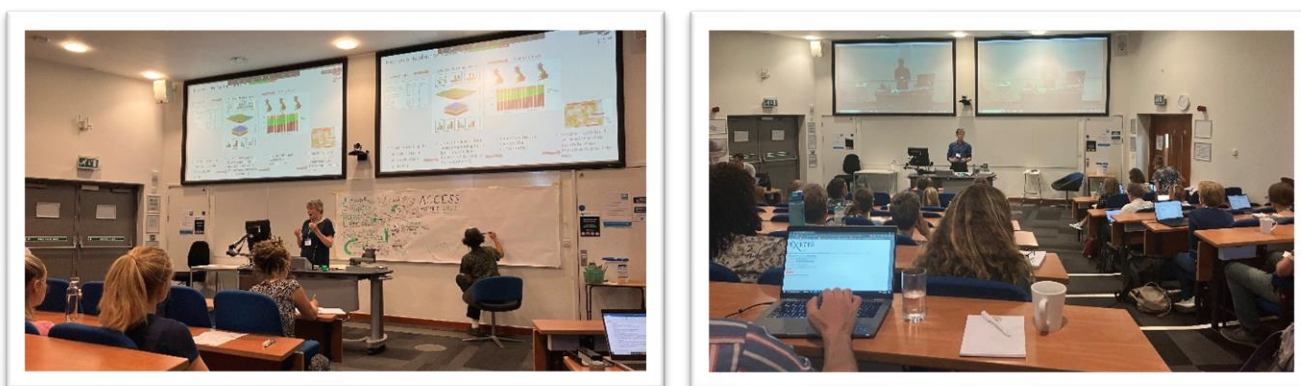


Figure 17. Speakers in plenary sessions at Annual Assembly 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

## What could have worked better in general - suggestions for improvement

The vast majority of comments received about the overall experience at the Annual Assembly 2023 were positive, with only a few comments offering improvement options. Specific suggestions included:

- Consider shorter talks (but not the breakout sessions)
- Consider offering at least some parallel streams, to provide choice of presentation topic
- Provide a delegate list (name, organization, contact information) on or before Day 1. This might also help with completion of the Social Capital Evaluation, as people forget others' names.
- Find a mechanism for involving / showcasing the work of / hearing from those involved in other ACCESS activities, such as the Early Career Researcher Summer Schools and the Leadership College.

## Positive experiences relating to Guiding Principles

Respondents shared their views on all three aspects of the Guiding Principles (Environmental Sustainability (ES); Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI); Knowledge Co-Production (KCP). Most comments relating to perceptions about how the Guiding Principles were enacted at the Annual Assembly 2023 were positive.

In terms of ES, the provision of plant-based catering (at both the main event and the conference dinner) was very well received, with several respondents commenting explicitly on this (e.g., “loved the veggie food!”). People also valued that the venue could be easily accessed via public transport and that private driving was discouraged around the event (e.g., shared taxis were provided for the conference dinner).

Several respondents expressed positive views of efforts made to support EDI such as offering virtual attendance (the event was hybrid) and the provision of funding to support attendance (the ACCESS Inclusivity Fund). One person commented that the half-day structure of the programme (starting late-morning, ending mid-afternoon) assisted with childcare.

Respondents felt that KCP was “woven” across the programme. The breakout rooms were highlighted as being a good vehicle for supporting KCP between different people. Respondents valued the diversity of voices represented amongst participants in breakout rooms (e.g, mix of sector, mix of career stage, mix of gender).

Some of these positive comments also highlight how the different aspects of the Guiding Principles intertwine. For example, while some valued the hybrid nature of the event in terms of EDI, others recognized that this could also be beneficial from an ES perspective.



Figure 18. Attendees engaged in breakout sessions.

## Concerns about Guiding Principles - suggestions for improvement

Respondents also commented on areas where there is room for improvement around ES, EDI and KCP.

In terms of ES, a couple of comments were received that suggested food waste could be further reduced, and that the use of plastic cutlery should be avoided. One person felt the venue was not very well served by public transport.

Two key concerns about EDI were raised by respondents. One concern related to **the lack of ethnic diversity** amongst both delegates and speakers, with the suggestion made that the Assembly team identifies mechanisms to include more People of the Global Majority (PoGM). This concern is supported by the demographic data presented earlier in this report.

The other EDI concern related to an apparent lack of awareness/emphasis by some people during some of the breakout discussions or Q&As that EDI is about more than visible diversity (e.g., ethnicity, age, gender, physical disability) - **EDI is also about invisible diversity, as well as accessibility, and perhaps ACCESS could help broaden this understanding.** One specific comment related to the 'busyness' of slides from some presenters, with the suggestion that guidance about accessibility be shared with presenters for future events (e.g., font size and colour, reduced amount of text, etc.).

A couple of respondents commented that they felt **best practice around KCP could be improved in the breakout sessions.** Although almost all comments received about breakout rooms were positive, a couple of respondents felt that facilitation could sometimes be improved, in particular to ensure that all participants in a breakout group were encouraged and supported to contribute. Another respondent also felt that some voices were more dominant in the main plenary Q&As, with the suggestion that an electronic option for providing comments and questions be provided (e.g., slido, padlet) to support those who are less comfortable speaking up in larger groups.

As with the positive comments, some of the concerns raised by respondents **help to highlight the importance of considering ES, EDI and KCP together,** as efforts to improve one aspect may also support efforts on other aspects. As an example, increasing ethnic diversity or increasing understanding around invisible diversity (and enabling these different voices to be heard) can support efforts to improve both EDI and KCP.

# Social Capital Evaluation - Results

Through analysis of responses to the Social Capital Evaluation Surveys (one before and one after the event), we can evaluate the impact of the Assembly on the social capital of the ACCESS partnership, including the differing experiences of online and in-person participation, and a comparison with the impact of the first Assembly in 2022.

**Key message:** Each participant’s score is highly relative, and little meaning can be inferred from the size of the numbers, but the change in scores from before to after the Assembly, including magnitude and direction, gives an indication of how the different experiences of the event informed how attendees perceive the ACCESS partnership.

**Key message:** A minority of participants completed both surveys (47%), therefore caution must be expressed in generalising the findings to all Assembly participants.

## SCE Part 1 - Perceptions of the Partnership

For a network to function, it must foster and maintain specific characteristics which give its members the ability, opportunity, and motivation to contribute to the sharing of value. These characteristics are:

1. Shared Understanding – members having a mutual comprehension of the purpose and form of the network, creating the ability to meaningfully connect within it.
2. Trust – the belief that other members will act with the network’s best interests at heart, increasing their motivation to do the same.
3. Reciprocity – the opportunity for members to both give and receive value within the network.

Participants were given a brief overview of each characteristic, and then asked to rate their perception of each one out of ten.

### Overall change in characteristics

Across all participants, Shared Understanding increased 12% by 1.1 from 7.2 to 8.3. Trust increased 8% by 0.7 from 8.1 to 8.8. and Reciprocity increased 13% by 1.2 from 7.3 to 8.5.

	2022			2023		
	Before	After	Change	Before	After	Change
Shared Understanding	6.5	8.0	+1.5	7.2	8.3	+1.1
Trust	7.3	8.3	+1.0	8.1	8.8	+0.7
Reciprocity	6.3	7.7	+1.4	7.3	8.5	+1.2

Table 1. Changes in social capital dimensions – shared understanding, trust and reciprocity – before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

**Key message:** These increases are all smaller than in 2022, but the before and after scores were both higher in each case, indicating that the threshold for increased scores is lower but that the Assembly demonstrated continued growth of each characteristic among participants. Not all scores

increased, but across each respondent the numbers for Shared Understanding went up for 76.9% of them. For Reciprocity, it was 73.1%, and for Trust it was 38.5%.

**Key message:** This does not indicate a reduction in trust, rather it is a reflection of the significantly high rating (8.8) and the reduced opportunities for trust to increase compared to the other characteristics.

### Differences between online and in-person participation

As in 2022, for online participants the increases were smaller (0.4/5%, 0.1/1%, and 0.2/3% respectively) than for those taking part in person (1.0/13%, 0.7/7%, and 1.1/13% respectively).

	2022			2023		
	In person	Online	Difference	In person	Online	Difference
Shared Understanding	2.2	1.3	0.9	1.0	0.4	0.6
Trust	1.4	0.5	0.9	0.7	0.1	0.6
Reciprocity	2.0	0.5	1.5	1.1	0.2	0.9

Table 2. Comparing in-person and online attendees in changes in social capital dimensions – shared understanding, trust and reciprocity – before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

**Key message:** In-person attendance continues to demonstrate both a greater rating for each characteristic, and a greater increase in ratings. However, the differences were reduced in 2023, suggesting that the experiences were more similar than in 2022. We can expect this trend to continue over time.

### Differences in repeat and first-time attendance

The increases were higher for those who either did not attend in 2022 (16%, 10%, 16% respectively) or attended online (18%, 10%, 12% respectively).

	Previous attendees			First-time attendees		
	Before	After	Difference	Before	After	Difference
Shared Understanding	7.4	8.4	1.0	6.9	8.2	1.3
Trust	8.1	8.6	0.5	7.9	8.8	0.9
Reciprocity	7.2	8.5	1.3	7.0	8.4	1.4

Table 3. Comparing previous and first-time attendees in changes in social capital dimensions – shared understanding, trust and reciprocity – before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

Those who attended in person in the first year showed smaller increases (7%, 4%, 8% respectively).

**Key message:** The greater average increase from first time attendees indicates the subjective nature of the process, and that those new to ACCESS will perceive a more significant change than those with



a longer period of involvement. This sudden increase is important in establishing new members within the Partnership.

## Conclusions about partnership characteristics

These findings suggest that the Assembly had a positive impact on the way that the ACCESS partnership is perceived by its members. This impact was lessened for those participating online, potentially caused by a relative lack of networking and active contribution opportunities and the reduced attendance from online participants. However, the results also suggest that those who have attended online can still gain a greater increase in their understanding of and connection to the partnership by attending future events in person.

Consistent with 2022 findings, the majority of participants rated trust as the highest scoring characteristic, which is perhaps unsurprising given the existing relationships between many participants, and the involvement of many participants in the formation of the partnership. Reciprocity, meanwhile, is traditionally the hardest characteristic to build, which in 2022 was reflected in its slightly lower score but this year a relatively higher score and greater increases suggests that opportunities to give and receive value to the partnership have become significantly clearer.

## SCE Part 2 - Connections

The second aspect of social capital is in the number, type, and strength of connections between network members. In the before and after surveys, participants were asked to self-identify the connections they had with other participants. These connections could be one or more of the following types:

1. Bonding – within the same social group or with others who are primarily like you.
2. Bridging – between social groups, with others who you may not naturally connect with.
3. Linking – across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society.

As with characteristics, there is inherent subjectivity in what each participant identifies as a connection. But again, the useful information is in both the changes in identified connections and the differing experiences of those participating online or in-person.

## Overall changes in connections

From the 34 participants who completed both pre- and post-Assembly surveys, the initial average number of connections had almost doubled (42.1 up from 21.5).

**Key message:** This increased connectivity suggests the strong maintenance of connections established throughout the first year of the ACCESS partnership, and the sustained impact of the Assembly in facilitating new connections.

The number of overall connections increased from 1,432 to 1,616, an increase of 13%. As with characteristics, compared with 2022 data, the increase is smaller (down from 35%).

**Key message:** The reduction in overall connection increase since 2022 is an indication that a network has a ceiling on potential connections, and that after a burst of new connections at the formation stage, the rate is more likely to decelerate than accelerate.

### Changes in types of connections

In 2022, Bonding connections were initially the most common and increased by the smallest amount. In 2023, Bridging connections were the most common before the Assembly (626, or 43.7% of the total, compared to 498, or 34.8% for Bonding), but Bonding connections increased by the greatest amount (25%, compared to 3% for Bridging). Linking remained the least common connection type, increasing by 13% from 308 to 349 connections. Linking connections are generally less common in networks, but again while the increase in 2022 was greater (33%), the average number per person has increased.

	2022 (n=38)			2023 (n=34)		
	Before	After	Change	Before	After	Change
All participants						
Total connections	823	1,130	+37%	1432	1616	+13%
Bonding	352	452	+28%	498	623	+25%
Bridging	344	508	+48%	626	644	+3%
Linking	127	170	+34%	308	349	+13%

Table 4. Comparing changes in connections, bonding, bridging and linking social capital before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

	2022 Average connections			2023 Average connections		
	Before	After	Change	Before	After	Change
All participants						
Total connections	21.7	29.7	+37%	42.1	47.5	+13%
Bonding	9.3	11.9	+28%	14.6	18.3	+25%
Bridging	9.1	13.4	+48%	18.4	18.9	+3%
Linking	3.3	4.5	+34%	9.1	10.3	+13%

Table 5. Comparing average changes in connections, bonding, bridging and linking social capital before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

**Key message:** This suggests that the role of the Assembly has changed for participants since the partnership formed, with Bridging connections having been made at previous meetings and events, and consolidated into Bonding connections through the opportunity to make deeper and more social relationships in person.

### Differences between online and in-person participation

The analysis of connections can also tell us more about the state of the ACCESS partnership and the impact of the Assembly. Compared to the 2022 Assembly, where in-person participants reported a significantly higher increase in connections than online participants, in 2023 the findings were reversed. In total, connections went up by 3% for in-person attendance, while for online the figure was 49%.

However the changes in types of connection can give us more information about the impact of the event. For online participants, Bonding connections showed no increase, while Bridging went up by 111%, and the small number of Linking connections increased by even more. For in-person participants, meanwhile, Bridging reduced by 9% and Linking stayed very similar, from a significantly smaller sample size, while Bonding increased by 27%.

**Key message:** This highlights a key difference between online and in-person participation, with those attending physically focusing less on creating new relationships and instead on deepening existing ones into new Bonding connections. Those joining online had fewer opportunities for Bonding, and instead showed a much higher increase in developing new Bridging and Linking connections.

Compared to 2022 data, the connection changes between different types of participation are significant.

Changes only	2022		2023	
	In person	Remote	In person	Remote
Total connections	57%	13%	3%	49%
Bonding	31%	24%	27%	0%
Bridging	96%	5%	-9%	111%
Linking	47%	13%	1%	193%

Table 6. Comparing changes for in-person and remote attendees in connections, bonding, bridging and linking social capital before and after the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

**Key message:** In the first Assembly, an overall increase in all connections was expected. The changes in the second Assembly, explained above, can be understood as differences in both opportunity and motivation in joining the Assembly online or in person, as well as the relative different opportunities for change once a significant number of connections had already been created.

### Changes in pre-existing connections

Of the 1,616 connections identified after the Assembly, 31% were connections sustained from before the event, and 69% were new connections. Of those new connections, 64% were new types of connections within existing relationships, and 36% were entirely new relationships.

**Key message:** Both of these changes are important for network building, the increase in inter-connection and the strengthening and diversifying of connection types which enable different forms of value to move between members.

In 2022, 26% of connections were sustained from before the Assembly (with 74% new connections), so a slight increase in that percentage supports the idea that the connections across the partnership are being maintained and growing at a slower pace since its launch.

This diversifying of connections is made up of 102 (33%) new Bonding connections, 139 (45%) new Bridging connections and 65 (21%) new Linking connections that were created between existing relationships. These complex combinations of connections are harder to create but significant in building social capital. This development demonstrates the impact of the Assembly in strengthening bonds and creating new opportunities for connections to grow. These figures are very similar to those from 2022, where the ratio was 34% for Bonding, 51% for Bridging, and 16% for Linking connections.

Types of new connections	2022		2023	
	n	%	n	%
Bonding	160	34%	102	33%
Bridging	239	51%	139	45%
Linking	75	16%	65	21%

Table 7. Comparing changes in new connections, bonding, bridging and linking social capital for the 2022 and 2023 ACCESS Annual Assemblies

**Key message:** This starts to show a pattern of the ways in which existing relationships are consolidated and expanded through the experience of attending the Assemblies.

### Reciprocal relationships

Another insight is the development of reciprocal relationships. Before the Assembly, only 5% of the connections were reciprocal, i.e. both members identified a connection between each other rather than only one of them, compared to 10% afterwards. The specific percentage is highly subjective, as different members may identify connections differently, but the doubling of the percentage of relationships identified as reciprocal, it demonstrates the importance of the Assembly in strengthening the perception of connections.

The nature of the reciprocal relationships can also tell us more about how connections were formed during the event. Before the Assembly, 62% of reciprocal relationships were Bonding, with 26% Bridging and 11% Linking. After the event, that changed to 90% of reciprocal relationships as Bonding, and 10% Linking, with no reciprocal Bridging relationships identified.

**Key message:** This demonstrates both the subjectivity of the connections and the potential for participants’ understanding of them changing over time, but also the potential for Bridging connections to develop into Bonding connections through the experience of the Assembly, which can increase collaboration and connection across a network.

Lastly, there is no discernible correlation between the changes in an individual’s connections and the changes in their scoring of the characteristics.

**Key message:** This reinforces the fact that the results of these surveys are highly subjective, and can only be usefully interpreted within their existing parameters.

# Conclusions and Next Steps

This report evaluates the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023. The rationale for evaluation is to review our successes and challenges, and to feed into a process of continuous improvement, specifically planning for the 2024 event. Findings show overwhelmingly positive feedback on the Annual Assembly 2023. It succeeded in bringing together a diverse mix of participants, and was delivered in a friendly atmosphere that was considered to be conducive to networking by those in attendance. The programme was appreciated as both diverse and of interest to participants, including a mix of keynotes by leaders from different sectors, discussions and breakout group discussions.

The Assembly was widely seen as delivering on the ACCESS Guiding Principles. Examples included the provision of an accessible venue and plant-based catering (Environmental Sustainability, ES); efforts made to support Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) such as offering virtual attendance (the event was hybrid) and the provision of funding (the Inclusivity Fund); and use of breakout rooms to support Knowledge Co-Production (KCP) between diverse participants (e.g mix of sector, career stage and gender).

Data on social capital show a quantifiable increase in understanding, trust and reciprocity before and after the event. There was also a quantifiable increase in bonding and bridging social capital before and afterwards. Overall, the average number of connections held between participants nearly doubled during Annual Assembly 2023. These demonstrate the positive impact of the event to enable network building amongst disparate participants. Those attending in person created fewer new relationships but deepened existing connections. Those joining online showed a higher increase in developing relationships with new connections. The relatively greater importance of bridging for remote participants suggests a slightly different characteristic of online attendance, allowing ACCESS to connect with individuals and organisations from different sectors who might not wish to invest two days of time to attend in person.

The evaluation also shows areas we could target for improvement when designing and delivering the Annual Assembly 2024, including:

- Addressing imbalances in ethnicity, sector and geography
- Improving the planning and delivery of breakouts, as these are key spaces for cross-boundary encounters
- Finding ways to broaden understanding of EDI to also be about accessibility and the less visible aspects of diversity, as well as more visible aspects
- In advance of the event, providing a delegate list (name, organization, contact information) to all participants. This will help attendees to plan who to network with, and might also help with completion of the Social Capital Evaluation, reducing the chance for people to forget others' names.
- Providing spaces for ECRs in the programme, for example:
  - A Leadership College-focused session on Transitioning to Leadership in Environmental Social Science with a mix of invited speakers and a round table discussion
  - A session showcasing the findings of Flex Fund Round 1 awards with presentations delivered by ECR Principle Investigators



# Appendix A – Equal Opportunities Monitoring Survey

## **ACCESS ANNUAL ASSEMBLY 2023**

Thank you for registering to attend the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023. We would like to gather some additional information about attendees as part of our general project monitoring and evaluation activities.

This short survey is anonymous and should take no more than 10 minutes to complete. You can choose to answer all, some, or none of these questions. All data will be stored and processed securely in line with data protection regulations.

[Q1] Please indicate whether you will be attending the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023 online or in-person

- Online
- In-Person
- Both
- Not sure yet

[Q2] In what sector do you work?

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

[Q2a – Display if Q2 = Academia] 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 student
- 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

[Q2b – Display if Q2 = Government] 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

[Q2c – Display if Q2 = Third Sector / Multiple / Other / Prefer not to say] How would you describe your career stage?

\_\_\_\_\_

[Q3] Please describe your disciplinary background (if applicable)

\_\_\_\_\_

[Q4] 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

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 will be attending the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023. 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:

- Understand within ACCESS more about the demographic characteristics of people who plan to attend the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023
- Help us assess whether the diversity of the Annual Assemblies changes across subsequent meetings
- 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 following questions.**

[Q5] What is your gender?

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

[Q6] Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were originally assigned at birth?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

[Q7] 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

[Q8] 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
- Asian/Asian British
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- White
- Other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say

[Q8a – Display this if Q8 = 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

[Q8b – Display this if Q8 = Asian/Asian British]

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

[Q8c – Display this if Q8 = Black/African/Caribbean/Black British]

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other Black/African/Caribbean background (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

[Q8d – Display this if Q8 = White]

- English
- Welsh
- Scottish
- Northern Irish
- Irish
- British
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other white background (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

[Q8e – Display this if Q8 = Other ethnic group]

- Arab
- Jewish
- Any other ethnic group (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

[Q9] What is your sexual orientation?

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

[Q10] 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

[Q11] Do you consider yourself to have a disability, impairment or health condition?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

[Q12] What caring responsibilities do you have? Select all that apply.

- Children
- Partner
- Relatives
- Friends
- None
- Other (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say



[Q13] What is the highest level of qualifications achieved by either of your parent(s) or guardian(s) by the time you were 18?

- At least one degree level qualification
- Qualification(s) below degree level
- No formal qualifications
- Don't know
- Other (please provide details) \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to say

# Appendix B – Post-Event Evaluation Survey

## ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023 - Post-Event Evaluation

Thank you for attending the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023. We would like to gather feedback about the event from attendees, so we can evaluate what worked well about this year's event, and how we might improve future Assemblies.

This short survey is anonymous and should take 5-10 minutes to complete. You can choose to answer all, some, or none of these questions. All data will be stored and processed securely in line with data protection regulations.

[Q1] Please indicate which sessions and in what format you attended the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023:

	Wednesday 14th June - Afternoon	Thursday 15th June - Morning	Thursday 15th June - Afternoon
Online	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In-Person	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

[Q2] In what capacity did you attend?

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

**For the following questions, if your comments are specific to the experience of attending in-person or online, please highlight this in your feedback.**

[Q3] Please tell us what you thought were successful aspects of the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023.

\_\_\_\_\_

[Q4] Please tell us what you most enjoyed or valued about the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023

\_\_\_\_\_

**ACCESS is underpinned by three Guiding Principles: Equality, diversity and inclusion; Environmental sustainability; Knowledge co-production.**

**Please share any reflections you have about your experiences in relation to these three Guiding Principles at the ACCESS Annual Assembly 2023. We welcome both positive and constructive feedback - we are keen to hear what we got 'right', as well as where we might be able to improve.**

**Please consider any area of relevance (this might include travel, accommodation, venue, food, social events, presentations, and pre-planning and preparation)**

[Q5] Please share any reflections relating to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

For example, you may wish to reflect on different aspects of EDI, such as how well accessibility needs were met (whether you disclosed any needs or not), your thoughts on (visible and invisible) diversity in the room, or any other aspects of EDI in relation to the event.

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Q6] Please share any reflections relating to Environmental Sustainability.

For example, you may wish to reflect on your perceptions of different aspects of the event in terms of resource use and environmental impact

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[Q7] Please share any reflections relating to Knowledge Co-production.

For example, you may wish to reflect on to what extent you feel different voices were represented / heard / included throughout the event, or to what extent there were opportunities to build relationships with others who have different perspectives

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[Q8] If you have any suggestions for how we might improve any aspect of future ACCESS Assemblies, please share your comments here:

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# Appendix C – Social Capital Evaluation Survey

## Social Capital evaluation survey: Pre-Assembly and Post-Assembly

**Name:**

**Organisation:**

**Did you attend the ACCESS Assembly in 2022?**      No    Yes (in person)    Yes (online)    Yes (hybrid)

### Section 1: Partnership characteristics

Please indicate your current view of the strength of the following characteristics of the ACCESS partnership:

**Shared Understanding:** Agreement on the purpose of the partnership

(lowest) 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10 (highest)

**Trust:** Belief that others will act in the best interests of the partnership

(lowest) 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10 (highest)

**Reciprocity:** The ability to give and receive value from the partnership

(lowest) 1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10 (highest)

### Section 2: Partnership connections

On the following pages, please indicate what existing connections you have with the other attendees of the ACCESS Assembly by ticking the appropriate boxes. If you have multiple connections with someone, tick multiple boxes. If you have no connection with someone, leave their row blank.

#### Bonding

Within the same social group or with others who are primarily like you (e.g. within an organisation, or the same discipline). There is an existing perceived similarity that allows connections to occur naturally.

#### Bridging

Between social groups, with others who you may not naturally connect with (e.g. across different sectors, or disciplines). There is an existing perceived gap that has been bridged by specific actions such as a conference.

#### Linking

Interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalised power or authority gradients in society (e.g. between funders and recipients of funding, or decision makers and decision influencers). You might provide or receive access to power in a linking connection.

#### Attendees

Name	Organisation(s)	Bonding	Bridging	Linking
<i>N.B. The list of names has been anonymised for this report</i>				

Thank you for completing the Pre-Assembly survey, please hand it in once you have finished.