



# ISRIA

THE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
on Research Impact Assessment

8 - 12 OCTOBER 2017

Favrholm | DENMARK

HOSTED BY **NOVO NORDISK FONDEN**

## Evaluation





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## ISRIA 2017

How can we measure the societal impact of research?  
Which indicators should we use?  
How do we generate data most efficiently?

Those were some of the key questions discussed at the final and Fifth Edition of the International School on Research Impact Assessment (ISRIA) hosted and funded by the Novo Nordisk Foundation at the Favrholm Campus of Novo Nordisk in Hillerød, Denmark. More than 70 participants from 23 countries had signed up.

Research impact assessment is a new but growing field focusing on how to measure the societal impact of research, drawing on methods and theory from a variety of disciplines. Research impact assessment is not yet very widespread because of the complexity and diversity of methods. Thus, facilitating and supporting an initiative such as ISRIA is very important. The Foundation has had its own research impact assessment team since 2014, and it publishes an annual report on the societal impact of the Foundation's grants. Renowned academics and practitioners within the field taught and facilitated ISRIA, and the participants learned about research impact assessment through a combination of plenary and panel presentations, practical exercises and group discussions. A long list of faculty members as well as external speakers gave their perspectives.

The Foundation asked the ISRIA 2017 participants to complete a follow-up online survey conducted by the Foundation. This evaluation is based on this survey, which 39 participants completed.



Plenary session with Jonathan Grant, King's College London, co-founder of ISRIA

## WHO PARTICIPATED IN ISRIA 2017?

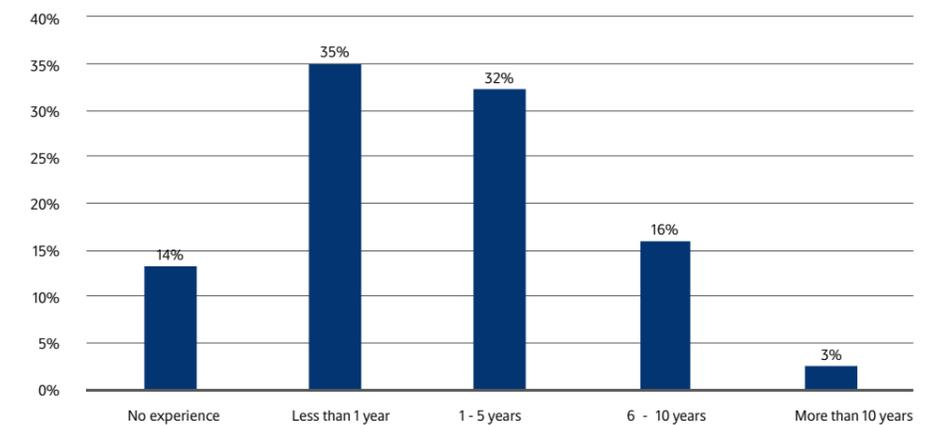
The largest group of respondents came from the health sector. Thirteen respondents (33%) indicated that they work within the health sector. Government was the second largest sector, with 10 respondents (26%). Six respondents work in education (15%) and seven in other sectors (18%). These other sectors include academia, foundations and consulting. Three respondents come from the environmental or commercial sectors (8%).

Regarding the type of organization the participants represented, slightly less than one third come from academia, and one in four come from a public research funding agency, with half of these indicating health as their sector. A similar share come from government. One in ten is employed in the private sector, and three respondents (8%) are from private research funding organizations.

## PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE

Figure 1 presents the participants' self-reported experience with research impact assessment. More than one in three had less than 1 year of experience, and a similar number had 1-5 years of experience. One in six had more than 5 years of experience, and around one in eight had no experience at all.

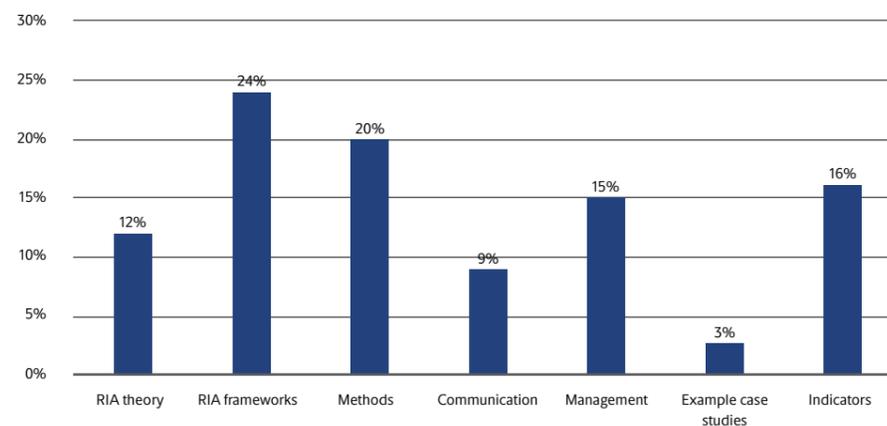
Figure 1.  
Number of years of experience in working with research impact assessment



## RESPONDENTS' INTEREST IN RESEARCH IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The respondents were asked to select two of the following topics they found the most interesting: research impact assessment theory, framework, methods, communication, management, example case studies and indicators (Figure 2). The two most interesting topics were framework (one in four respondents) and methods (one in five). In contrast, the respondents found example case studies to be least interesting.

Figure 2.  
Respondents selected the two most interesting topics in research impact assessment



## MOTIVATION FOR ATTENDING ISRIA 2017

This section examines the motivational factors for attending ISRIA 2017. The Foundation asked for the primary motivation for attending ISRIA 2017 in a categorized question with eight options (Figure 3).

Figure 3.  
Primary motivation for attending ISRIA 2017

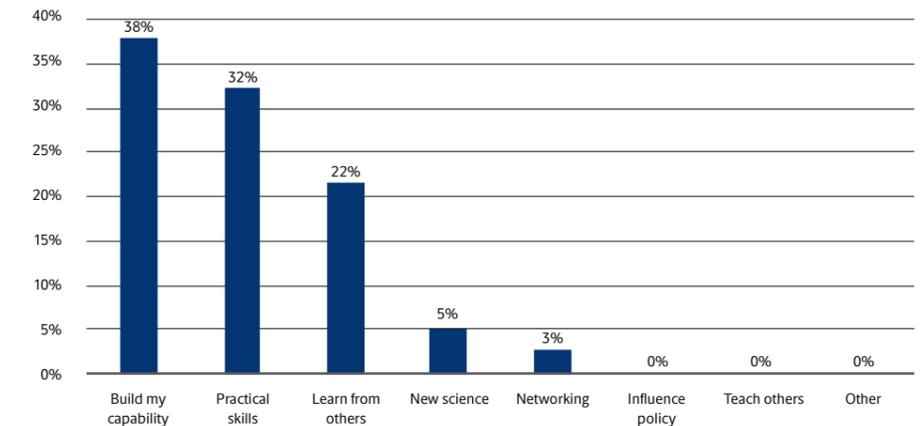


Figure 3 shows that most of the respondents attended ISRIA 2017 to build their capabilities and practical skills or to learn from others. This clearly seems to indicate that ISRIA has filled an existing need for organizations that want to improve the skills of employees who are relatively new to the field with competencies that enable them to perform tasks related to research impact assessment in their respective organizations. With this in mind, the next question is whether attending ISRIA 2017 improved the respondents' skills. According to the survey, more than three in five found that ISRIA 2017 improved their research impact assessment skills a great deal, and the remaining four in 10 reported that their skills improved somewhat. No one said that ISRIA 2017 did not improve their skills.



Paula Adam, PhD and Head of Research at AQUAS, giving a lecture on how to engage stakeholders.

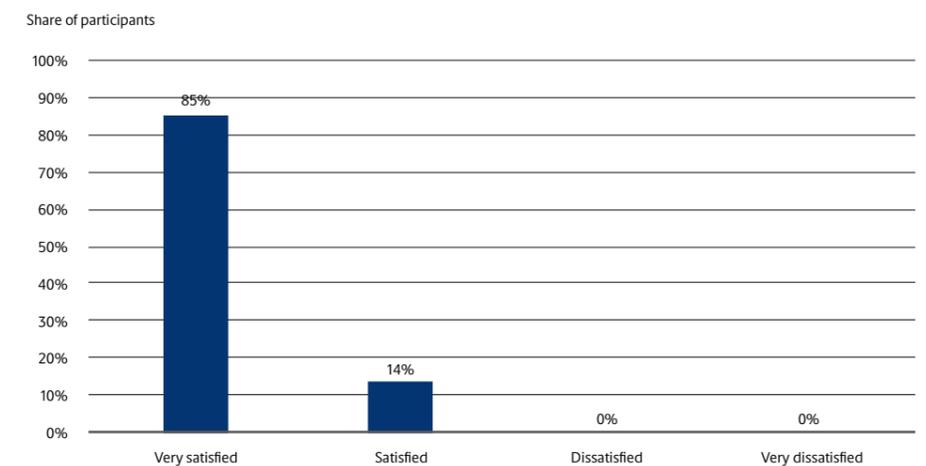
## EVALUATING THE ELEMENTS OF ISRIA 2017

The following section focuses on evaluating the event as a whole and subsequently evaluating the various elements of ISRIA 2017 in more detail. First, the overall satisfaction with the event is presented followed by element-specific evaluations, including the school format, content of the building blocks, length and pace, faculty, networking opportunities, facilities and social activities.

### OVERALL SATISFACTION WITH THE EVENT

During ISRIA 2017, participants repeatedly informed the Foundation staff members that they were very satisfied with the execution and the content. The survey responses also support the impression of the staff based on the oral feedback (Figure 4).

Figure 4.  
Overall satisfaction with the event



A total of 87% were very satisfied with ISRIA 2017 overall, and 13% were satisfied. No respondents were dissatisfied. The distribution was similar for rating whether the school format was fruitful for learning, building capabilities and networking. This indicates that ISRIA 2017 overall was very successful in facilitating learning, building capacity and creating new network links. Further, a few participants commented on their feedback on the overall experience. One respondent commented:

*"... the content was very interesting for my organization, and all the facilities contributed to create a very great stay".*

Another respondent added:

*"It was fabulous, and it was one of the very best conferences I have ever been to. Many congrats to the team. I hope there will be other ISRIAs, since the community really needs this school!"*

Such comments emphasize that a platform is needed for training and knowledge-sharing in research impact assessment like that ISRIA has supported. One respondent even said that it was the best training the respondent had ever experienced:

*"Best training I've been on to date, great people, great place and great quality of teaching."*

Another respondent said it was the most professional development the respondent had experienced

*"The most worthwhile professional development I've ever undertaken. Extremely well organized, both in terms of the learning outcomes and overall environment. Thank you to the Novo Nordisk Foundation for making such an event both possible and so enjoyable."*

The quality of teaching was mentioned several times, not only regarding the competencies of the lecturers but also their communicative capacity:

*"The lecturers were not only competent but good speakers."*

Finally, one respondent wanted the school to continue in the future:

*"Please don't stop this excellent course :-("*

The respondents agreed that ISRIA 2017 was at a high level and a well-executed school. To determine why ISRIA 2017 was perceived this positively, the following section investigates further the individual building blocks of the school – what worked well and the opportunities for improvement.



During plenary sessions, the participants were activated through group exercises.



Group photo of the participants, faculty and organizers in front of the main building of the Favrholm Campus

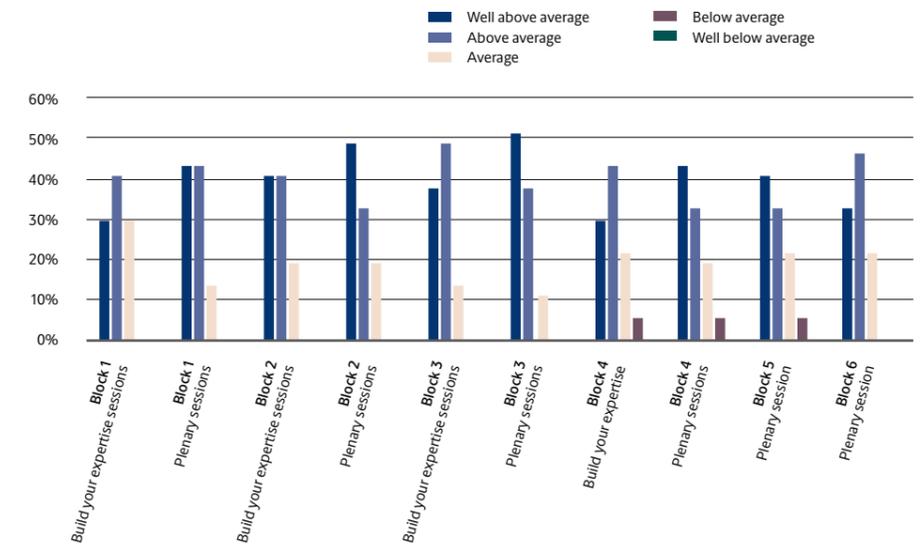
# BUILDING BLOCKS: BUILD YOUR EXPERTISE SESSIONS AND PLENARY SESSIONS

ISRIA 2017 was structured in six building blocks with various themes that worked as a stepwise overview of the processes of conducting research impact assessment:



The respondents were asked to give feedback on each building block regarding enabling the participants to perform research impact assessment in the future after the event. Figure 5 presents the respondents' feedback for the *plenary sessions* and the *build your expertise sessions*. The plenary sessions were mainly lectures for all participants, but the build your expertise sessions were breakout sessions in which the participants were divided into smaller groups based on their level of experience within research impact assessment. Here, the format was dialogue and discussion-oriented, with room to discuss the participants' own projects.

Figure 5.  
Respondents' assessment of the six building blocks



The respondents generally rated the plenary sessions more positively than the build your expertise sessions based on the share of the respective blocks rated "well above average". Only blocks 4 and 5 were rated below average. About 5% rated the quality of blocks 4 and 5 to be below average, equivalent to two respondents per block and three unique respondents across all blocks. These three respondents had intermediate or advanced knowledge of research impact assessment before ISRIA 2017, which might indicate that the level was too basic for them. Further, they were employed in government and the private sector and had less than 1 year of research impact assessment experience. One of the three responded in a note that generic topics such as communication and theory of change were overemphasized, which limited opportunities to focus on more technical discussion areas.

About half the respondents reported that all blocks were either above average or well above average. Some respondents appreciated the chance to hear about the experiences of other participants and faculty members, and the respondents generally perceived the level of teaching as being very high. One respondent critiqued the session design, noting that the broad diversity in the professional background of the participants caused difficulty in individually appropriating the plenary sessions and build your expertise sessions so they could be relevant to everybody. One lesson learned from this could be to divide the breakout groups by another indicator than the level of research impact assessment experience, such as by sector, professional background or similar characteristics.



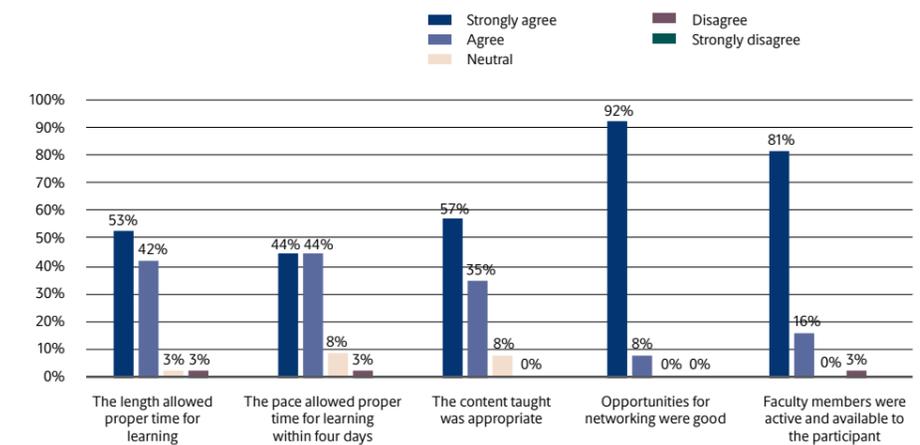
The build your expertise sessions allowed participants to discuss challenges regarding their own impact assessment projects

## OTHER MEASURES FOR EVALUATING ISRIA 2017

The respondents were also requested to give feedback on the length and pace of the activities, the content taught, opportunities for networking activities and availability and activity of the faculty members (Figure 6). The respondents were asked to rate the following questions, presented as statements:

- The length allowed proper time for learning.
- The pace allowed proper time for learning within 4 days.
- The content taught was appropriate.
- The opportunities for networking were good.
- The faculty members were active and available to the participants.

Figure 6.  
Feedback from the participants



Most respondents strongly agreed or agreed with all the statements (Figure 6). The last two statements on networking opportunities and the availability and activity of faculty members received very positive feedback: nine in 10 respondents strongly agreed that the opportunities for networking were good, and the rest agreed. The pattern was similar for the availability and activity of faculty members.

Regarding the length and the pace, two and four respondents, respectively, were neutral or disagreed. One respondent would have liked more time to discuss the participants' own projects in plenary and added that an extra day of ISRIA would be a way to move this issue forward and allocate extra time for this. Overall, the respondents were very satisfied with ISRIA 2017 as measured by the five parameters in Figure 6.



Build your expertise session with Dr Saba Hinrichs-Krapels, Senior Research Fellow in the Policy Institute at King's College, London



Panel on opportunities and challenges for impact assessment.

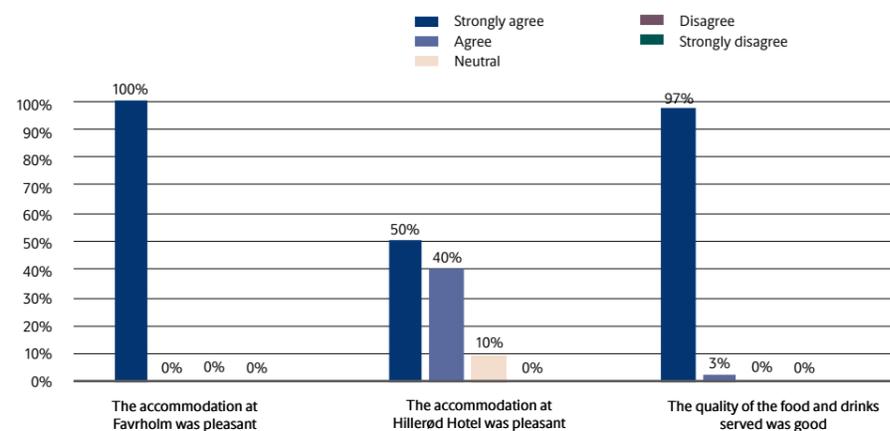
## EVALUATION OF THE FACILITIES AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

The respondents were asked about their perception of the facilities, food and drinks and the social activities taking place during ISRIA 2017. Most of the participants stayed at the Favrholt Campus, where ISRIA 2017 was held. A few participants stayed at the nearby Hotel Hillerød because the Favrholt Campus could not accommodate all participants. The respondents were asked to rate the following statements on the facilities:

- The accommodation at Favrholt was pleasant.
- The accommodation at Hillerød Hotel was pleasant.
- The quality of the food and drinks served was good.

Figure 7 shows the responses. Everyone strongly agreed that Favrholt was pleasant. The 10 respondents on the statement about Hotel Hillerød were less enthusiastic, perhaps because they had to be transported between the hotel and the Favrholt Campus. Nevertheless, the responses were still mostly positive, with nine in 10 of the respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement and one respondent being neutral. Note that the responses to the question about Hotel Hillerød might be erroneous, since fewer than 10 participants stayed at Hotel Hillerød. This suggests that some respondents answered the question without knowing precisely what Hotel Hillerød was.

Figure 7.  
Rating of the facilities

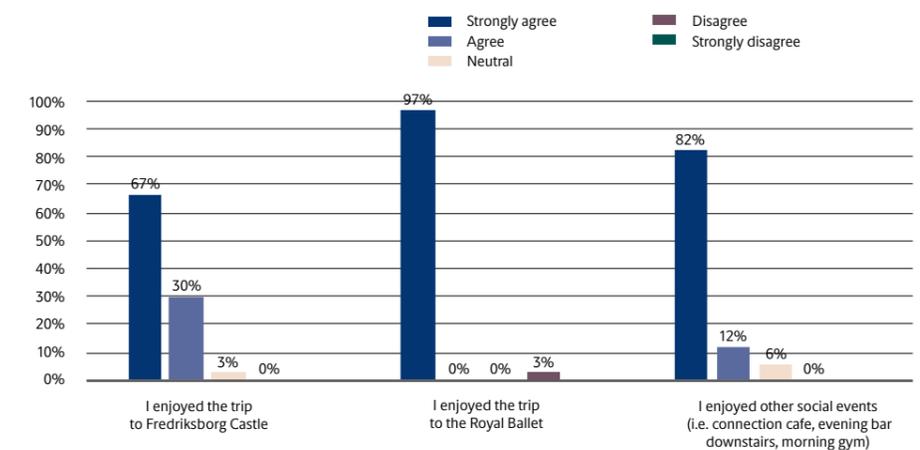


The Foundation had arranged cultural, social and networking activities between and after the sessions of ISRIA 2017. These included a guided tour of Frederiksborg Castle, a performance of the Royal Ballet and a dinner at the GL STRAND art society. In addition, morning exercise, networking cafés and more were also planned. The respondents were asked to rate the following three statements:

- I enjoyed the trip to Frederiksborg Castle.
- I enjoyed the trip to the Royal Ballet.
- I enjoyed other social events (i.e. connection café, evening bar downstairs, morning gym).

Figure 8 presents the respondents' evaluation of the activities. Similar to the rest of the feedback on ISRIA 2017, the vast majority of the respondents were very positive. Everyone except for one respondent enjoyed the ballet performance, and three respondents in total were neutral towards the excursion to Frederiksborg Castle and other social events. With these exceptions, the remaining respondents agreed that the activities the Foundation facilitated were enjoyable.

Figure 8.  
Respondents rated the social activities

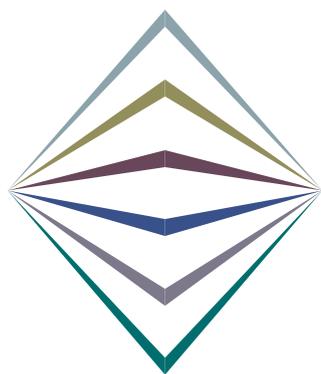
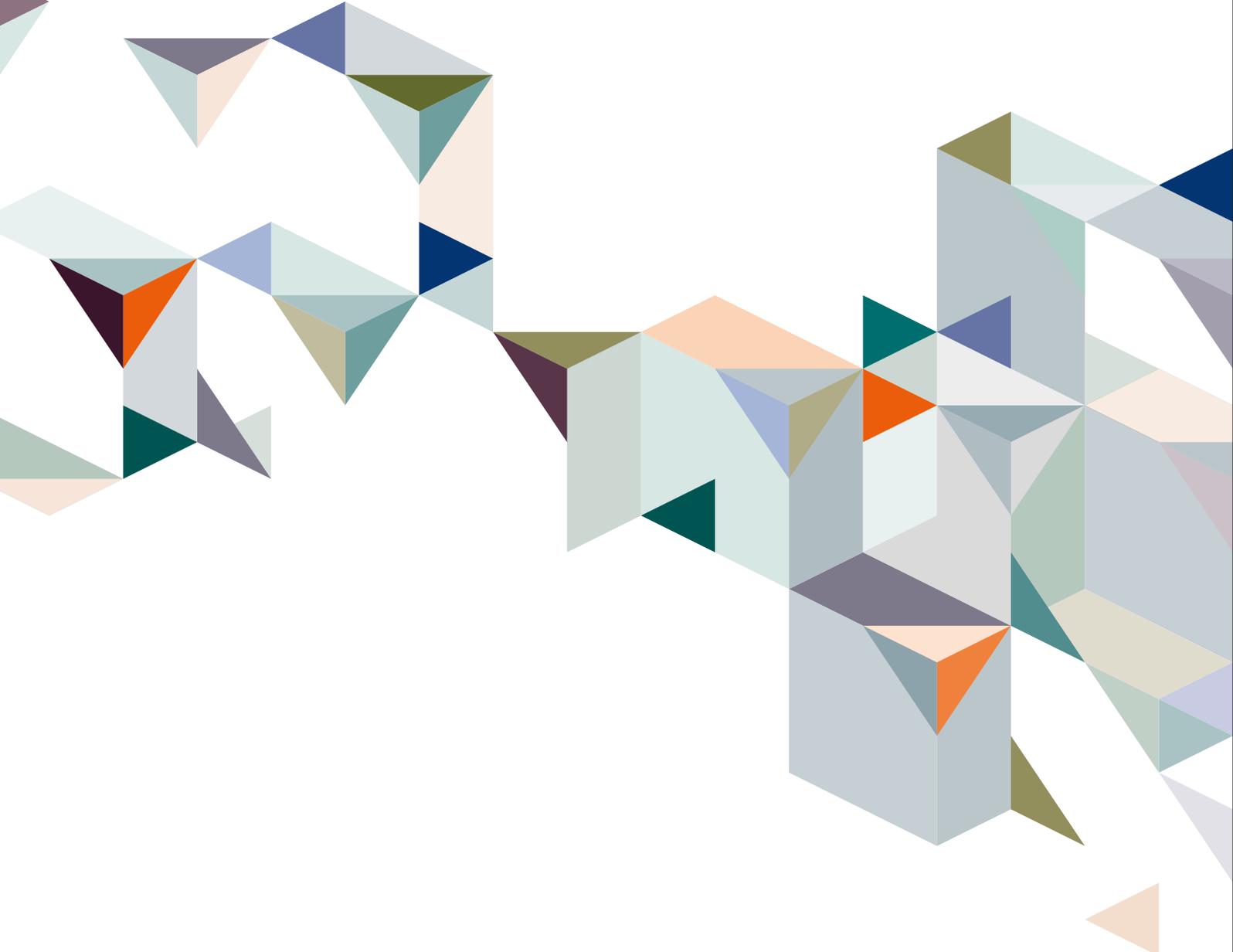


## CONCLUSIONS

The Novo Nordisk Foundation hosted ISRIA 2017 at the Favrholm Campus of Novo Nordisk in Hillerød, Denmark. This evaluation has presented the feedback of 39 respondents obtained through an online survey conducted by the Foundation.

The overall findings of this evaluation are very positive. The vast majority of the respondents had a very enlightening and good experience attending ISRIA 2017. The respondents provided very positive feedback on everything from the facilities to the content of the sessions. Only a few aspects have room for improvement, including too general a focus and too limited time for discussing the participants' own projects.

ISRIA 2017 contributed to improving the competencies, knowledge and expertise of professionals conducting research impact assessment throughout the world and has strengthened the development of an international interdisciplinary research impact assessment network.



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*“Learning to assess research with  
the aim to optimise returns”*