Thank you for your Freedom of Information request of 31 July 2017 in which you asked for information relating to the aims and objectives and outcomes of MRC funded grants.

How the MRC Funds Research
The Medical Research Council (MRC) supports research through range of funding mechanisms which include grants, fellowships and studentships, we also support research programmes within MRC research units and institutes.

In your request you have asked about MRC-funded grants. The MRC supports grants through two routes, firstly grants awarded through response mode applications made to one of the MRC’s Board and Panels and secondly through strategic schemes where there is a focus on key strategy areas for the MRC. Further information on how the MRC funds research can also be found at: https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/how-we-fund-research/.

Scope of this response
As you have requested information relating to the outcome of grants this response does not address other funding streams. This response also does not address the responsibilities of the Research Organisation holding the award and which is responsible for the conduct of the research, the use of public funds and for ensuring the proper financial management of grants. The MRC’s expectations for the management of the research grants are outlined in the MRC’s guidance for award holders (https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/guidance-for-mrc-award-holders/managing-your-award/) and the Research Councils UK (RCUK) Terms and Conditions (http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/funding/grantstcs/). Subject to the RCUK terms and conditions, grant funds may be used, without reference to the Research Council, in such a manner as to best carry out the research.

Response Mode Funding
The majority of the grants that are funded by the MRC are funded through ‘response mode’ applications that are made to one of our research boards. The MRC does not formally monitor the outcomes of grant and therefore we do not hold any information relating to the success of funded research against the proposed objectives, or sanctions imposed for failing to achieve proposed objectives.

Principal Investigators and Research Organisations inform the MRC of changes to their grant awards though the Post Award Amendment process, the MRC does not classify changes by scale and we cannot provide a breakdown showing major changes only. Where appropriate the MRC may obtain expert scientific advice to assess the request. The table below details the information that is held relating to change requests submitted relating to MRC grants between 2011/12 and 2016/17.

| Table 1: Post Award Amendment requests received for MRC grants 2011/12 to 2016/17 by financial year and type of request. |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Grant Extensions | 223 | 184 | 142 | 137 | 170 | 463 |
| Grant Suspensions | 25 | 59 | 25 | 37 | 23 | 44 |
| Grant Terminations | 7 | 17 | 16 | 8 | 9 | 30 |
| Grant Transfers | 20 | 35 | 22 | 19 | 17 | 19 |
| Resume Grant | 76 | 64 | 50 | 34 | 41 | 45 |
| Staff Change | 3 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 17 | 30 |
| Use of Funds | 12 | 33 | 26 | 14 | 13 | 23 |

There is no MRC requirement for annual reports to be submitted for response mode grants and final reports have not been required since 2013, however, the MRC does ask that the outputs of the research are entered onto Research Fish. Individual level outputs can be found with the funding
information for each grant on the RCUK Gateway to Research (http://gtr.rcuk.ac.uk/), and RCUK level information can be found at: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/researchoutcomes/submission/.

Strategic Schemes

The MRC does have some strategic schemes where outcomes are monitored, such as the Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme (DPFS) which has milestone monitoring through quarterly and milestone reports. In these schemes the release of the later components of the funding are contingent on the meeting of set criteria later in the award.

While there is formal monitoring on the progress of these awards the MRC does not hold information relating to the success of funded research against the proposed objectives, or sanctions imposed for failing to achieve proposed objectives. This is because there is no prescribed definition of success and failure.

The MRC can terminate DPFS awards early where they fail to meet a milestone. The milestones allow the DPFS to support projects that are risky in that there is a possibility that the objective of the project can’t be achieved. If it becomes clear that a project can’t meet its objective it can be terminated. The MRC would not classify a project as unsuccessful when it answered the question it set out to, for example, if we learned that you could not safely treat a particular disease with the specific therapeutic we may terminate the project but a useful scientific output has still been delivered.

Within DPFS projects we often see that as the project progresses a change is required, it is not that the objective can’t be met but can’t achieved in the way set out in the application. Such changes are considered through the Requests for Change process which is similar to the Post Award Amendment process referred to above. Many DPFS projects have requests for change and some have more than one, these vary in nature (scale and cost) from allowing a little extra time (for example, to facilitate patient recruitment if it is slower than expected) to altering a specific criterion of a milestone. These changes typically do not alter the overall objective of the project. The MRC will sometime iterate with an award holder to agree the best way forward for a project. If a request for change is considered significant the MRC may terminate the project and ask for a new application to be submitted to allow the revised plan to be fully reviewed by relevant experts. Again, these projects would not be classified as unsuccessful as it maybe that they are simply not yet successful. Similarly such requests are also not classified by scale.

For the DPFS scheme a final report is required in order to release the funds for the final quarter.

Further information on the DPFS can be found at: https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/browse/biomedical-catalyst-dpfs/biomedical-catalyst-developmental-pathway-funding-scheme-dpfs-mar-2017/

Summary of responses to your specific questions

Question 1: Documents detailing the measures enacted by MRC to monitor whether grant holders are achieving their original proposed research objectives.

The MRC does not routinely monitor the outcomes and proposed objectives of MRC funded grants, where monitoring is a requirement of a specific scheme the requirements will be outlined in the published Guidance for Applicants and any scheme specific Terms and Conditions, for example information on the MRC’s DPFS award which has milestone monitoring is available on our website: https://www.mrc.ac.uk/funding/browse/biomedical-catalyst-dpfs/biomedical-catalyst-developmental-pathway-funding-scheme-dpfs-mar-2017/

Question 2: The broad scale outcomes of this formal monitoring process, i.e. not individual grant specific outcomes of monitoring but overall ‘success rates’. For example, what proportion of research programs funded by MRC achieved proposed objectives.

As the MRC does not monitor success against proposed objectives no information is held.
Question 3: The frequency that grant holders have contacted MRC to inform you of major changes to the proposed programme of research. Where this has occurred, the frequency that MRC has approved the changes.

As explained above the MRC considers changes to awarded grants through the Post Award Amendment process. Information on the use of the process is provided in Table 1 above.

Question 4: The frequency that major changes to a proposed programme of research has occurred without MRC being informed by the grant holder.

As the MRC does not classify Post Award Amendments by the scale of change proposed no information is held.

Question 5: The frequency that sanctions have been imposed on grant holders/research organisations for failing to achieve proposed research objectives.

As the MRC does not monitor success against proposed objectives no information is held.

Question 6: The frequency that grant holders have failed to submit annual reports and final reports.

MRC grant holders are not generally required to submit annual and final reports. As noted above final reports are required for some strategic schemes, for example DPFS award holders are required to submit a final report to release funds for the final quarter, if you would like further information on the DPFS scheme please do let us know.

I hope that you find this information useful. If you are not satisfied that this response has been handled appropriately; you may appeal using the MRC’s complaints procedure. Details are on the MRC website at: http://www.mrc.ac.uk/about/information-standards/complaints/. You may contact the MRC Complaints Officer at:

The Complaints Officer,
Medical Research Council,
14th Floor, One Kemble Street.
London,
WC2B 4AN.
email: customer.service@headoffice.mrc.ac.uk

If you remain dissatisfied with the handling of your request or complaint, you have a right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at:

The Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.
Telephone: 0303 123 1113.
Website: www.ico.org.uk

There is no charge for making an appeal.

Yours sincerely,