

Impact: Some FAQs

The following are some Frequently Asked Questions that arose from an event held at the University of Bath. We wanted to share as we felt these maybe useful to others. Do let us know if you have any additional questions you think would be useful to add by e-mailing research-impact@bath.ac.uk

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Understanding and Achieving Impact

What is research impact?

Impact is the benefit that research can bring to society and the economy; in other words, the difference your research is making outside of academia. For example, your research on sustainable construction materials may result in a new product being developed that is taken forward by a start-up company (creating jobs/ adding value into the economy); commercial construction companies may go on and use that product, which in turn reduces CO2 emissions and increases their sales.

Why does it matter?

- Grant funding - research council grants, and many other funders, require you to describe what impact you expect to achieve and how you plan to do it
- Professional development – giving you new skills, profile, networks of influence
- Personal reward – seeing your research being used to make a positive difference
- And then there's REF – HEIs are judged by Research England on the impact of their research which it assess through Impact Case Studies submitted as part of the Research Excellence Framework

What is a pathway to impact?

The pathway to impact is about the how. How you will go about making sure your research achieves the impact it merits? Many grant applications have a pathway to impact section, where you will have to describe the activities you plan to undertake to achieve impact.

What is the difference between the pathway to impact and impact?

Impact is the end goal – the ultimate differences that your research might make to different groups of people, communities or regions, society, or the economy. Your pathway to impact is how you can achieve that goal.

What is the difference between knowledge exchange and impact?

Knowledge Exchange (KE) is a process that brings together academic staff, users of research and wider groups and communities to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise. KE activities can help you to increase the impact of your research.

I do lots of public engagement. Isn't that impact?

Public engagement encompasses a wide array of activities that share the benefits of higher education and research with the public. This engagement is usually “a two-way process, involving interaction and listening, with the goal of generating mutual benefit.” ([PEU](#)). Like Knowledge exchange it is the process, the how you can achieve impact. It helps to raise awareness of your research with different groups, such as school children, business, clinicians, or policymakers and can be a great pathway to impact, but that is where impact is only just beginning. Claiming impact means answering the question ‘what has changed?’ OR in some cases ‘what has not changed?’ (e.g. you've shown existing practice was safe). What difference has it made to the people who have heard about your research? For more

information about Public Engagement visit: <http://www.bath.ac.uk/marketing/public-engagement/>

What about patents? Do they count as impact?

It depends on the patent and how it has been used. Often, patents are part of the impact pathway; a step along the way to achieving impact by creating a new product or company based upon it. For REF Impact Case Studies, patents might serve as evidence of the research that underpins your impact.

I'm right at the start of my project, how can I know what the benefits will be?

Start by drawing up a list of the different groups of people who might potentially benefit – even if it is a very long way down the line before any benefits are likely to be realised. Think about: Who might be interested in the work? How might they use it? Are there industry partners who might want to take it forward? If it contributes to a new product, who might benefit from it? Are there any wider social benefits e.g. more sustainable use of resources, CO2 reductions – who are the people who can help you achieve those benefits? Then engage with your potential beneficiaries to inform and develop your research further and help you to identify your potential impact.

Evidencing impact

How do I start to capture my impact?

A good starting place is keeping a record of impact related activities and the outcomes they achieve:

- Keep a record of who you've talked to / collaborated with so you can document what has come of it or go back and find out – ask your collaborators what difference it has made to them
- Maintain a list of public engagement activities (e.g. media activity; presentations to policy makers; industry workshops, meeting notes) and record any outcomes; consider whether you can embed evaluation into any of these events
- Obtain and record feedback from any events you've run
- Monitor your web profile through e.g. Google Analytics and other relevant measurement tools
- Consider key activities and whether you can embed more formal evaluation into these or the research project / programme as a whole
- Use tools such as [Altmetrics](#) to explore and track your social media coverage and mentions in patents and policy documents; or [Hansard](#) to identify possible mentions in parliamentary debates; or your collaborators websites, reports and papers, for example

When should I start to capture impact?

Capturing impact starts early, runs throughout the project and often carries on after your research project is over. It is much easier to capture evidence at the time than trying to obtain retrospectively. As such, consider embedding into your research project / programme monitoring and evaluation plans.

How do I record evidence of impact?

You need to regularly record all impact related activities as well as evidence of impact. You can do that in [PURE](#) - the University's web-based platform for capturing research related outcomes and activities (including grants awarded, research projects, and impact). For support and guides visit [pure user guide](#) pages.

What evidence of impact should I capture?

Your evidence needs to demonstrate measurable and meaningful changes that have occurred as a direct result of your research. The most convincing evidence invariably comes from a third party, is empirical and refers specifically to the research or researchers and it often combines different types of evidence of e.g. company report, testimonial, sales figures, end user accounts.

Where can I look for evidence?

- National or local statistics
- Reports, reviews, web links or other documented sources of information in the public domain
- Individual user/beneficiary names (those benefiting from or affected by research outputs, including those in society, industry, charities and government) who could be contacted to corroborate claims
- Factual statements provided by users/ beneficiaries that corroborate specific claims

Is it enough to show my research has been cited in a policy document or industry standards?

This depends, influencing policy is often a great start, but it is often seen as an early impact. The question is then whether there is any measurable difference on the ground as a result of the new policy or standards. For example, what behaviours have changed as a result of the policy? Or how well are manufacturing guidelines or standards being adopted in practice and what are the resultant efficiencies/costs/other benefits/ impacts.

What needs to be included in a testimonial letter?

There is no fixed template but it needs to spell out that your research made a vital and unique contribution to whatever has happened e.g. *“As a result of the work conducted by xxx at the University of Bath, we did xxx and this resulted in yyy. This would not have been possible without the contribution of University of Bath.”* It might be helpful to provide your contact with a draft text where appropriate.

Sales data are freely available, do I really need a letter from the company?

Combining sales data with a letter from the company makes a powerful case.

A letter from a company can be explicit about how your research contributed to their sales figures and the extent to which sales etc. are directly attributable to the application of your research.

How do we calculate / quantify environmental impact?

- Consider approaching experts in the field such as the Carbon Trust to evaluate your environmental impact – you may be able to get funding from the University's Impact Fund for this
- Talk to other academics at the university who might be able to help e.g. e.g. Marcel McManus' team in Mech Eng.
- Get your industry partner engaged. They might be willing to provide the data you need if they know that they'll get evidence about environmental benefits for free.

What help is available with capturing evidence?

RIS Impact Team can provide tailored advice on how to capture evidence and they also provide support in evidence searches. You can apply to the Impact Fund if you need financial support for an evidence gathering activity e.g. visit to a company using your technology to obtain more information about its impact on them e.g. sales, job creation, product development, impact on customers. For more information visit the [research impact team page](#).

And if you are involved in a REF impact case study...

How do stakeholders/ users assess the impact case studies?

The role of stakeholders seems to vary across UoAs, however a the peer review panel will be made up of both researchers from HEI and potential end users of your research. They may be from within one of the companies using your technology/ research and therefore have a very good idea about the scope of your impact, or it may be outside of their field therefore you need to make it accessible.

What level do we pitch it at? Rocket scientists or impact for dummies?

Your ICS should be pitched at 2nd year undergraduate level. They should have a basic understanding of the subject. Some UoAs have been grouped together e.g. engineering is now grouped under one 'general engineering' sub-panel so you can't assume an expert in your field will be reading the ICS.

Will the panel look at the evidence?

Panel reviewers are very unlikely to look at your supporting evidence unless they are seeking clarification or are concerned about the claims being made. Incorporate everything they need to see within the ICS, for example, include key quotes from testimonial letters and brief extracts from reports that reference your research. Don't rely on embedded hyperlinks – the panel won't follow them.

If I include the number of jobs created and it is e.g. only 10 - will that be judged poorly against Impact Case Studies that have created 100s of jobs?

The important thing is to include the context. If it is a new sector then the actual number will be less relevant. Reviewers do not look at the content of case studies comparatively - they are judged on their individual merits and what difference has been made in a given context.

Will the impact team help with getting the details of the grants that underpinned the research?

You should be able to access this information easily in PURE.

Will the faculty provide a writer to standardise our impact case studies?

No, we recommend that the ICS is written by the lead researchers in collaboration with their stakeholders, Impact Directors and University's Impact Team. Some institutions do employ science writers or consultants, but we do not intend to. If you would like help with writing your impact case study contact research-impact@bath.ac.uk

If the research was done before 2000 does that count?

The research needs to have been conducted between 1st January 2000 and 31 July 2020.

Do we name the company in the ICS summary section?

Name the company in the summary section if it is a household name – as it will help to hook in the reviewer. If panel members are unlikely to have heard of it then save the name for the impact section.

Do pictures/ diagrams count towards the word count?

Images can really help lift an ICS, convey information succinctly and augment the text. However, the requirements are for 5 pages – rather than a specified word count. Any images or diagrams included will take up part of the allocated space. If you want to include images then make sure they tell as much as the words that you are replacing them would have done.

How do I make sure I cover everything?

Create a checklist:

- Claim specific impacts
- Don't overclaim
- Quantify impact wherever possible
- Articulate **reach** and **significance** and use that terminology
- Include your evidence in the text
- Distinguish between pathway to impact and the impact itself
- Explain how the underpinning research links to the impact

We will be publishing a comprehensive guide and checklist in due course – watch this space.