

## **Thinking about and planning for impact in your research project**

This guidance document contains questions and examples to help researchers think about how to engage more effectively around their research and structure impact plans in grant applications.

### **What sort of difference could your research make?**

<b><i>Some examples of Impact types</i></b>	
<p><b>ECONOMIC</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Patents, spin outs</li> <li>- Wealth creation</li> <li>- Inward investment</li> <li>- New products and processes</li> <li>- Knowledge economy</li> <li>- Savings in healthcare, social care or life costs (<i>difficult to estimate</i>)</li> </ul>	<p><b>TECHNOLOGICAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Advances in biology and healthcare/bioengineering</li> <li>- Alternative energy and environmental solutions</li> <li>- Information technology for society (e.g. robotics, lasers)</li> <li>- High-tech entrepreneurship</li> </ul>
<p><b>SOCIAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improvements to quality of life</li> <li>- Better public health</li> <li>- Improved social equity, inclusion or cohesion</li> <li>- Increased accessibility of government services</li> </ul>	<p><b>HEALTH</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improving quality of care and outcomes</li> <li>- Providing novel treatment options or early diagnosis</li> <li>- Taking account of patient concerns</li> <li>- Increasing public awareness of health risk/benefit</li> </ul>
<p><b>POLICY</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Producing and presenting evidence</li> <li>- Informing better decision making</li> <li>- Building partnerships between researchers, policymakers and policy end-users</li> </ul>	<p><b>SKILLS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Building the capability of individuals, groups and institutions</li> <li>- Transferring and embedding knowledge</li> <li>- Encouraging innovation</li> <li>- Public communication</li> <li>- Schools outreach</li> <li>- Research training</li> </ul>
<p><b>CULTURAL</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engaging local communities in the arts</li> <li>- Increasing public access to libraries, museums, etc</li> <li>- Communicating heritage and cultural assets to wider publics</li> <li>- Initiatives such as citizen science, engagement in community festivals</li> </ul>	<p><b>MULTIDIMENSIONAL</b></p> <p><i>Research projects may have many different types of impact, e.g.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A play representing the results of a topical research project could have social and cultural impacts</li> <li>- A start-up firm creating 10 new jobs will have economic, social and skills impacts</li> </ul>

## Building an impact plan for your research project – some prompts...

<p><b>1. What is the potential impact of your research and does it fit into a ‘bigger picture’?</b></p>	<p>Can you summarise in a couple of sentences how your research could impact outside the academy?          Could your research eventually lead to new products and processes, improve quality of life, increase public awareness or inform better decision making? (see ‘Examples of impact types, above’ for more ideas and suggestions).          If your research is at a fundamental level, could it inform the more applied research of colleagues? Highlight working across teams and interdisciplinary working.</p>
<p><b>2. Who are the target audiences, including potential beneficiaries (direct or indirect)?</b></p>	<p>Identify who may be interested in, or benefit from, your project at the outset so you can speak to them and involve them. This should improve the eventual uptake of your research outputs.          Examples might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Your immediate <b>partners and collaborators</b>, including academics from other disciplines, Institutes, Universities, etc., industrial and organisational partners. These partners/collaborators can provide useful routes and access to beneficiaries and users of your research.</li> <li>- Potential <b>direct beneficiaries</b>, such as service users, health workers, patient groups, SMEs, software developers, community groups etc will also be interested in your activities and accessing your findings</li> <li>- <b>Influencers and decision makers</b> – these are the people who can make things happen, so it is useful to keep them informed. In policy-related research this could mean senior civil servants or key think tanks, in organisations it may be members of the Board, heads of division or representative bodies such as trade associations. Established academic colleagues may hold positions of influence that could be relevant.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. What are the shared interests and mutual benefits?</b></p>	<p>The stakeholders you have defined will have problems, issues and needs that your research can help address. For example, your work may provide them with stronger evidence for decision-making, help them access funding or build skills and in turn they may be able to help you with access to equipment, user communities, etc.</p>
<p><b>4. Who should you plan to communicate with, when and how?</b></p> <p><b>Consider three main groupings:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. People you need to involve from the start e.g. to sit on an advisory board/steering group</li> <li>2. People who can help with ongoing feedback and communications during the project, e.g. through face-to-face meetings and targeted events?</li> <li>3. Those who need to be informed of the project findings. Communications should be tailored to the different groups, e.g. through research summaries, media, blogs, toolkits, exhibitions, film, etc.</li> </ol> <p><b>Examples of some eligible activities to consider including:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- workshops, seminars and other networking events</li> <li>- publicity, dissemination – traditional methods such as research summaries, targeted conferences, and new ICTs such as websites, podcasts, e-newsletters, blogs etc</li> <li>- employment of specialist staff e.g. knowledge transfer specialists or business engagement staff to organise specific events</li> <li>- travel to potential beneficiaries (eg industrial companies) to present results and secure buy-in</li> <li>- specific training for a project member (eg RA. PhD student) such as secondments, training in commercial practices, knowledge transfer etc</li> </ul>	

Consider what mechanisms are in place for both commercial and non-commercial exploitation of research results. Is it worth speaking to UMIP at an early stage? Who might be worth approaching to trial a pilot?

### 5. How will you capture evidence of change – milestones and indicators

Ideally, plan your evaluation strategy at the beginning of a project. It is very useful to highlight the key impact-related milestones and indicators (evidence) in your research plan – even as a simple graphic. Think about: whether you have met your objectives, what changed as a result of the activity, how it could have been more effective and if there were any unintended outcomes. This will help you to communicate not only what happened but also why something worked or didn't work. **It is important to keep track of and store this evidence of change.**

Milestones might be, for example, engagement with specific stakeholders at a defined point in the project or attendance annually of at least one external training or development course

Examples of data that could contribute to building impact evidence could involve:

- Citations in official/research user publications (e.g. Govt papers, company reports and case studies)
- Responses to questionnaires,
- website/blog statistics,
- Testimony letters from stakeholders,
- Visitor/audience numbers
- Mentions in parliamentary debate or Select Committees
- Incorporation of research in training/CPD materials
- Evidence of cost savings or economic benefits, e.g processes amended, jobs created.

### 6. What are the resource needs?

Think about the costs (travel, room hire, design and editorial expertise) associated with these sorts of activities and the resources that you may need to request., as well as internal expertise you can draw on and request enough money to deliver them. More detail on this is available in the 'Costing and resourcing impact' guidance document.

### Writing your plan

Questions to consider? *	Examples
What is on your target audience's agenda right now – and in the near future? How will your research contribute to this?	Stronger evidence for decision-making, new ideas to help solve an issue. Explain what would happen if this research wasn't done.
What opportunities could the project bring them?	Involvement in Project engagement, funding/co-funding for activities that are of direct relevance to their organisation, skills development
What insights, contributions and resources (in-kind and financial) could they bring to the project?	Access to direct beneficiaries, decision-makers and influencers, knowledge about how guidelines and policies are interpreted and used on the ground, etc.
What form might their involvement take?	Membership on advisory group, co-organiser of events, assistance with dissemination to target groups, direct involvement in research... Consider short, medium and longer term plans – can these be visually represented?

*Thanks to A.S. Laegran, University of Edinburgh for use of this table*