

Guidance on preparing Pathways to Impact plans

This guide is aimed at researchers and support staff involved in writing and supporting Pathways to Impact applications at the University of Manchester.

Why is applying for impact-related funding important?

- The Impact agenda is driven by Government. With research councils investing around £3 billion each year, the idea is to give some indication as to what use that research will be put to. By producing credible impact plans we can maximise the chances of our work being funded.
- The quality of the research is still the main factor determining whether a proposal is funded or not. But where competition is tight, a strong 'Pathways to Impact' statement could be the "tie-breaker" for panels choosing between several similar high quality proposals.
- The University of Manchester expects all RCUK applications to cost in adequate Pathways to Impact funding.

What information do you need to provide?

An impact summary (4000 characters) and a 2-page Pathways to Impact Statement

1. Impact Summary

Here you will describe what impact your research will have on stakeholders/end-users (non-academic). You should describe what the Impact is, and how it will benefit people.

Who will benefit from this research?

Beneficiaries must consist of a wider group than that of the investigators' immediate professional circle carrying out similar research. For example:

- Commercial private sector?
- Policy-makers, within international, national, local or devolved government and government agencies or regulators?
- Public sector, third sector or any others who might use the results? Examples include museums, galleries and charities.
- The wider public?

How will they benefit from this research?

Describe the relevance of the research to these beneficiaries, identifying the potential for impacts arising from the proposed work. Please consider the following when framing your response:

Explain how the research has the potential to contribute to the nation's health, wealth or culture. For example:

- Fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom?
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy?
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output?
- What are the potential impacts likely to be, and what is their importance?
- What are the realistic timescales for the benefits to be realised, and how will this research contribute?
- What research and professional skills will staff working on the project develop which they could apply in all employment sectors?

Tips:

- Where possible, be specific and back your impact statements up with facts and figures.
- The benefits can be both economic and social, and you should try and list as many as are realistically possible.
- Collaborations with Industry, generation of new IP, teaching in schools, generation of government policies, public awareness of science, and career development of PDRA's are all good possible impacts.

2. Pathways to Impact statement

Co-design and collaboration with research users/stakeholders

In preparation for writing the Pathways to Impact section, applicants should ask themselves (and/or members of their team):

- How will they go about identifying key stakeholders?
- At what stage of the research process will users/stakeholders first become involved?
- What steps will be taken to engage with them?
- What activities will they be involved in?
- How will relationships with stakeholders be handled?

[Business Engagement and Knowledge Exchange services](#) at the University of Manchester can provide advice and expertise to academics on how to engage externally around their research. External stakeholders often have knowledge and skills to contribute at various stages of the process, e.g.

- At the planning stage of research design
- In developing methods/approaches prior to the research starting
- In testing theories against empirical evidence during data evaluation
- In helping plan wider impact activities
- In sharing and translating findings into practice

Think about who will be involved (post-docs, RAs, etc and also how to manage the partnerships/collaborations that may help advance the project (e.g. setting up a steering or advisory/peer-review group, organising regular meetings with key industry contacts, etc)

Focus on outputs and impact:

- What are the key outputs other than academic publications?
- Who are the users these outputs will be of most use to?
- How will you make potential users aware of your outputs?
- How will you make your outputs easy for users to access, understand and adopt?
- What is the impact you are seeking to have?
- How will you evidence impact of your research on users?

It is useful to distinguish between: **dissemination/outputs** (e.g. organising a seminar or publishing an article); **communication/translation** (e.g. informing debates, trialling and testing), how this leads on to **uptake/usage** (e.g. a policy is changed or someone implements your new process) and broader **impact** at a general and specific level (e.g. more choice for consumers, jobs created, a cost-effective solution to a problem, a new drug that will make a real difference to patients' lives).

Exploitation and application- (the mechanisms for exploitation which can be non-commercial as well as commercial)

- 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?
- If research is potentially patentable, then strategies also need to be described in the plan for how to manage this. Reporting your intention to publish findings in prestigious international journals is not enough and may even be very counter-productive if any potentially valuable IP is not protected. It might therefore be worth arranging a discussion with [UMIP](#) at an early stage of the project.

Resource allocation and costings

The Research Councils **minimum** expectation is for 5% of the overall grant funding should be for KE/impact-related activities, but this can rise closer to 10%, particularly if, for example, you include staffing resource for a KE specialist.

An obvious and important measure of commitment to engaging around your research is how much resource (money and time) you and your team propose to allocate to it. The idea that cheaper bids are more likely to be funded is a misperception. It is worth exploring the possibility of securing additional funding for engagement and KE activities or support in-kind from stakeholder partners or other sources. If you get such support obtain a "letter of support" from the partner concerned and incorporate this in the application. Letters of support that are essential to the research activity (e.g. database access) can be submitted as appendices. Applicants should ask themselves:

- Who is going to be implementing the impact plan, what is their track record in this type of activity and what is the cost? Do you need to think about employing specialist (external) expertise?

- Consider the wider resources and expertise already on offer in the University (e.g. Graphic Support Workshop, Media Services, Press Office, Conference facilities, Web expertise, etc.).

Researchers can and should seek resources to fund Pathways to Impact activities. Examples of some eligible activities include:

- specific training for a project member (eg RA, PhD student) such as secondments, training in commercial practices, knowledge transfer etc
- workshops, seminars and other networking events
- publicity, dissemination – traditional methods such as research summaries, targeted conferences, and new ICTs such as websites, podcasts, e-newsletters, blogs etc
- employment of specialist staff e.g. knowledge transfer specialists or business engagement staff to organise specific events
- travel to potential beneficiaries (eg industrial companies) to present results and secure buy-in.

When requesting resources, researchers should aim to show a clear link back to their specific research area and eventual impact potential.

Define milestones and evaluation strategies

You are expected to show how you will measure your performances and enable measurement of progress. This means you need to count the number of contacts you have with users/stakeholders, e.g. attendance at workshops. It is important to highlight **the key milestones** and **indicators** in the research plan. Mechanisms to help could involve using questionnaires, stakeholder surveys, collecting website statistics, and/or by conducting exit polls at the end of key activities to determine if the needs of user communities have been met.

Build in flexibility

Splitting funding across different phases of a programme/project can help you respond better to evolving needs. By allocating some resource as a contingency you can respond to arising questions and needs. For instance there may be an unforeseen need to interpret and communicate new knowledge generated by your research. Having adequate resources available will help incentivise research colleagues to do this.

Public engagement

Part of delivering impact can involve outreach to schools and the general public. This links closely with the University's work on its Social Responsibility agenda – Goal Three of the Manchester 2020 Strategic Plan and with the aim of 'widening participation', see more at <http://www.engagement.manchester.ac.uk/>. If your department already has a schools outreach programme then mention it in your impact plan. [Policy@Manchester](#) is another useful resource network at Manchester to mention if influencing policy is appropriate to your research outputs.