A Guide to Impact in the Arts and Humanities

Please note this is a general guide to developing impact within Arts and Humanities disciplines and is not concerned with submissions to the REF 2021. For specific advice on REF Impact Case Studies please contact the central REF Team.

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Introduction:

The RCUK definition of impact is 'the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy'. This can be achieved through academic outputs, but the RCUK's definition is specifically concerned with impact beyond the academy; with making beneficial contributions to cultural understanding and accessibility, social equality and the development of society, or economic gain and improvement.

Within Arts and Humanities disciplines impact takes many forms. Research commissioned by the AHRC has shown that Arts and Humanities researchers are heavily involved in impact mechanisms which include people-based, problem-solving and community orientated activities. The definition of impact has moved beyond technology transfer, patents and spin-outs, to include the richness and extent of interactions between academics and the third sector or community groups, the press and the general public. Knowledge exchange processes are key to many successful impact projects, as is engagement with policy and education. See this CBR publication for further details.

Impact can also be conceived in the following ways:

**Instrumental**: influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour.

**Conceptual**: contributing to the understanding of problematic or challenging issues, reframing debates.

**Capacity building**: through technical and personal skill development.
What does this mean in practice?

Below is a list, by no means exhaustive, of practical ways to engage your research with social, cultural or economic impact.

- **Secondments** (inwards/outwards) with businesses, charities, NGOs or the government. Good if you may be able to offer a solution to an identified problem. There are multiple opportunities available within parliament and details can be found [here](#).

- **Development of teaching resources**, perhaps in collaboration with the Faculty of Education or the Fitzwilliam’s Learning Department. The impact in this case will be the effect of these resources, such as increased engagement with a certain subject or within a certain pupil demographic. The [Designing Our Tomorrow](#) project is a successful example.

- **Website or app development** - with external collaborators, or internally with the Computer Lab or UIS. You will need to have identified users/beneficiaries and devised a plan of how to engage them. See the [Support for Apps and Websites guide](#) for more detail.

- **Knowledge Exchange Workshops** – interactive and participative – with non-academic partners who may benefit from your research and be able to contribute to your understanding of how it can be used. The [Creative Labs initiative in the Leeds Cultural Institute](#) is an exemplar of Knowledge Exchange impact in the Arts.

- **Policy engagement**, through writing policy briefs, sitting on select committees or forming personal relationships with members of the Civil Service or MPs. However, it is the effect of the policy change/advice that is considered to be impact – so consider how you would track this. [History & Policy](#) are a good example of a research group who are very active in this area. A How-to Guide on Policy Impact can also be seen [here](#).

- **Paid or voluntary consultancy** for an organisation, with subsequent testimony identifying your contribution. Cambridge Enterprise can support consultancy arrangements, and their [website](#) includes a free training video.

- **Exhibitions, performances or festival events** – especially relevant if they are interactive, alter or influence public debate or improve professional practice. The [Festival of Ideas](#) offers excellent opportunities for increasing public engagement with the arts and humanities. You will need to collect feedback from participants - See advice on writing questionnaires, page 5.

- **Open Access databases or repositories**, with identified and targeted non-academic beneficiaries. Showcasing research findings publicly can lead to impact, but this needs to be accompanied by a well-considered communication/marketing strategy and methods of tracking uptake, reach and spread. If your research has been externally funded then you will need to adhere to the relevant [research data management](#) policy.

- **Development of a Continued Professional Development training course**, or contributing towards one, in collaboration with a professional institution or not-for-profit organisation. Feedback should then be collected on what the course contributed to the organisation or individual professional development.

- **Commercial licencing or patenting** of a product, or an idea. Cambridge Enterprise should be engaged if you get to this stage. Read more about Jukedeck as an example of a start-up from the Arts and Humanities.
• **Media appearances** – feedback from public engagement (and research dissemination) can be used to demonstrate how your research has informed public debate. Social media can be used to track the viral spread and reach of ideas following an appearance. *Philosophy Bites* is a good example of a successful research podcast series from A&H. Further information and advice is available from the [Public Engagement](#) team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact Resources and Support available within the University</th>
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| **Commercialisation** | Cambridge Enterprise  
Guide to building websites and apps  
The University Enterprise Network brings together staff and students with an interest in enterprise.  
Cambridge Network is a membership organisation for the high-tech Cambridge cluster. |
| **Consultancy** | Contact the Consultancy Team at Cambridge Enterprise for advice – page features a link to their free online course. |
| **Education** | You may want to approach the Department for Education directly, or through a contact in the Faculty of Education. It can be a good idea to contact MPs or civil servants during the summer recess. |
| **Knowledge Exchange** | Centre for Science and Policy workshops  
The School Impact Coordinator can also assist with KE initiatives.  
AHRC’s Guide to Partnership Working in the Arts and Humanities |
| **Policy** | Research Strategy Office guidance  
Policy Impact: a ‘how-to guide’ for researchers  
Getting your research into Parliament  
Parliament’s Training for Academic Researchers  
CSaP can connect you with some of their contacts in policy-making  
POST – offers an academic fellowships scheme, open to researchers at all levels. These are funded by the ESRC IAA. |
| **Public Engagement** | Research Strategy Office guidance  
Public Engagement Team guidance |
| **Secondments** | Contact the School Impact Coordinator if you’re considering a secondment, as Research Operations may need to be involved in drawing up a contract. |
| **Training** | Public Engagement Rising Stars training  
PHEP (Pathways to Higher Education Practice) provide impact training for Early Career Researchers/new lecturers.  
Parliament’s Training for Academic Researchers (how to engage with policy-making)  
Departmental librarians can offer advice on tracking impact online.  
Contact Elizabeth Tilley for more information. |
The School Impact Coordinator can also provide bespoke tutorials or advice on any area of impact, or arrange training from external providers. The Schools of A&H and H&SS will soon be offering ‘Impact’ training for established researchers.

**REF**

The REF team are based within the Research Strategy Office and can advise on the creation and submission of REF Impact Case Studies.

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**Financial support for impact activities:**

The Cambridge Arts and Humanities Impact Fund is a School-level initiative that will support impact from research falling within the remit of the AHRC, as broadly defined. There are two calls a year supporting projects with budgets of up to £10,000, as well as a quick-access Flexi Fund which accepts proposals up to £2,000 on a rolling basis.

The ESRC Impact Acceleration Account may support applications from A&H disciplines if the proposed impact project falls within the ESRC remit. Practically, this can cover policy engagement or educational impact. There are two calls a year supporting projects with budgets up to £20,000. It also provide a discretionary fund with a rolling deadline, and funding for Knowledge Exchange workshops and events.

The AHRC offers Follow-on Funding for knowledge exchange, public engagement, active dissemination and commercialisation activities that arise unforeseeably during the lifespan of or following an AHRC-funded project. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis.

Innovate UK provide funding for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. KTPs are three-way partnerships between an academic, a business partner (including private sector companies, charities and public sector organisations) and a recent graduate or postgraduate (known as the Associate), who is employed to work on the specific project relevant to the business partner. The AHRC is one of a number of sponsors of this scheme and will support or co-sponsor projects that demonstrate and utilise knowledge, skills or technologies arising from all areas of arts and humanities research and which, broadly defined, focus on the creative economy. Speak to the School Impact Coordinator for further advice.
Developing an Impact Plan (Pathways to Impact/ Impact Summary)

It’s useful to include impact design in funding bids, or to start planning impact from an early stage in your research cycle.

There are various resources available within the university to help with this.

- The School Research Facilitators can offer support in writing Pathways to Impact statements.
- The School Impact Coordinator can help with impact planning more generally.
- The Pathways to Impact Tool is a University of Cambridge online impact planning aid with a lot of embedded information and links to external resources.
- Impact Workshops for Senior Researchers in AHSS (forthcoming).

Examples of impact in the Arts and Humanities

For some case studies and examples of best practice in A&H impact, please click on the links below.

Classics  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=35575
English  http://www.fasttrackimpact.com/english
Divinity  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=9235
History  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=44489
History  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=21034
History of Art  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=41291
Languages  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=41269
Music  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/CaseStudy.aspx?Id=32748
Philosophy  http://impact.ref.ac.uk/casestudies2/refservice.svc/GetCaseStudyPDF/27164
AHRC Case Studies  http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/research/casestudies/
Top tips for Impact Planning:

Identify your beneficiaries – be realistic, but do not limit yourself to too narrow a group. It may be better not to aim global, but to focus on meaningful local impact within wider Cambridgeshire (this is often somewhere Cambridge falls down).

Focus on your beneficiaries – they are fundamental to the impact process. What will they gain from your research; how long will your impact last; why is it important?

Communication and engagement – how will you ensure that identified beneficiaries have the opportunity to benefit from your research? Explain how you’re going to do this, and not just what you want to achieve. Engagement methods include interactive workshops, websites, public events, targeted communications, press releases etc.

Ongoing impact – how will you manage the legacy of the proposed activity to increase the likelihood of it providing lasting value to participants, stakeholders and the wider community? Can the project ultimately become self-sustaining? Could it be adopted and run by non-academic partners?

Dissemination vs. Impact. There is often a lot of focus on research dissemination, which can be confused with impact. Dissemination of research is the first stage in the impact journey – what you want to know about (and have the means to evidence/record) is the effect your research will have in the long run.

Don’t lose sight of your end goal. Remember your beneficiaries and how you want to help them.

Don’t be too generic, provide detail of the pathways you’ve identified towards your ultimate goal.

Impact is often a long-term outcome of research endeavours, which may appear in ways that are unexpected. Be realistic, patient, keep an open mind and be consistent in recording the outputs and outcomes of your impact project.
Impact versus Pathways to Impact

In the diagram below, the yellow strips represent examples of pathways to impact and the white squares represent examples of ultimate impact. It can be helpful to think about the ideal final destination or effect of your project when designing an impact plan, and always keep your identified beneficiaries in mind. You may not be able to reach or achieve the final impact goal, but it is important to be able to demonstrate that you planned a route towards it.

Capturing Impact

Consider both the reach and the significance of your impact when capturing evidence.

Reach refers to the quantitative number of people who are exposed to your research, and may include audience figures, numbers of downloads, library borrowing figures, number of social media comments, number of schools involved, number of professionals trained, or the number of press articles/releases.

Significance refers to the depth or quality of your impact, and capturing this information may be achieved through questionnaire results from audience members, testimonies from users, feedback from library borrowers, social media comments, increased engagement within schools, feedback on training courses, reviews or shifts in funding trends.

Remember to log all of your evidence in Symplectic on an ongoing basis. Not only does this provide a useful repository for your own purposes, but it will also feed into the University’s REF submission. Further information is available from the Research Information team or the REF team.
Impact Evaluation

Where funders and the REF are concerned, it is best to start collecting evidence of research impact from very early on in the research cycle. Building up a body of evidence can also be beneficial to your reputation and career. Bear in mind that it can take a long time for impact to become demonstrable, just as it may happen in ways that are tangential to your original plan. Below is some guidance on the types of evidence that can be collected:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Type of evidence</th>
<th>Best practice guidance</th>
<th>Advantages</th>
<th>Disadvantages</th>
<th>Related evidence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of people qualifying in new skills or completing CPD courses. Collect after Secondments, Consultancy or Education Impact.</td>
<td>Statistics about those qualifying shows impact on professional ability or capacity</td>
<td>Relatively easy to collect – survey alumni or use online tools (such as LinkedIn).</td>
<td>Surveys only give a sample of responses. May be difficult to attribute directly to research.</td>
<td>Testimonials from professionals will enhance the statistical data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Evidence. Collect after consultancy, secondments or policy engagement.</td>
<td>Cited changes to legislation as a result of research findings or advice. Testimonials noting a direct link between research and changes.</td>
<td>Changes to legal process or regulations can have wide and lasting impact.</td>
<td>Further evidence required to demonstrate impact of the changes.</td>
<td>Stakeholder reports or testimonials about impact of legal changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media data. Collect after media appearances or publication of press articles.</td>
<td>Best examples will directly link research to a change and focus on beneficiaries.</td>
<td>Can demonstrate how research has informed public debate or raised awareness about a topic.</td>
<td>Does not demonstrate what has changed as a result of heightened awareness – which is the ultimate impact.</td>
<td>Quantitative reports which demonstrate the resultant change, if possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy changes. Collect after secondments to governments, select committee appearance etc.</td>
<td>Documentation directly mentioning research contribution, or documents showing change as a result of researcher’s advice.</td>
<td>Public policy changes can have wide-reaching impact both geographically and demographically.</td>
<td>Policy changes are rarely attributed or cited to academic research, and it may be necessary to show how policy changes are adopted.</td>
<td>Testimonials relating the change to research. Further reports (perhaps from ONS) about impact of changes. Petitions and campaigns data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Practice Guidelines. Collect after secondment, consultancy, knowledge exchange activity.</td>
<td>Provide a narrative that demonstrates how your research informed those guidelines, in addition to evidence of the change/development.</td>
<td>Professional bodies that provide guidance are often well respected and have robust processes. Can demonstrate the prevention of risky activity or adoption of best practice.</td>
<td>The guidelines may not be followed in practice.</td>
<td>Data or testimonials showing the adoption of the guidelines in practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media metrics. Collect after media appearances, workshops, OA publications.</td>
<td>Data with a context, real engagement through comments and replies, and evidence of a change in debate/behaviour or narratives which describe impact. See Page 7 for further details.</td>
<td>Can show how research has informed debate and raised public awareness.</td>
<td>Social media data often does not reveal what has changed as a result of increased awareness - the ultimate impact.</td>
<td>Quantitative reports showing the resultant change (e.g. increased museum attendance or book purchases).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Testimonials. Collect after Knowledge exchange activities, Public Engagement events or secondments/consultancy.</td>
<td>From an independent, respected figure, directly mentioning how your research has affected them. Provide clear guidance, or even a template, of what to cover. Make people aware early on that you’ll be requesting testimonies.</td>
<td>Can demonstrate specifically how research led to impact, can demonstrate significance of impact if the reach is small and beneficiaries are few.</td>
<td>Ideally, they should be from senior figures, which can be difficult. Can be seen as inherently biased.</td>
<td>Quantitative reports to back up testimony claims. Periodic testimony is good for demonstrating continued impact, i.e. directly after the impact event, then six months later.</td>
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</table>
**Web sites/links.** Use after public engagement events or public release of websites.

| Best examples of web links are independent. For websites you have produced, get metadata to show reach – page visits and location of viewers. Try Google analytics. | Can demonstrate the efficacy of public engagement events. Where a website is the impact outcome, detailed meta-data is required to demonstrate its scope and reach. | This evidence does not show what actions have been taken as a result of people visiting the website. | Quantitative meta-data reports. |

For further information see the [Best Practice guidance](#) from the Research Strategy Office.

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### Tools to track Impact on Social Media

There are a range of online tools you can use to track the impact of either publications, events or other resources. Others can be used to create a narrative from interactions on social media, which is useful for demonstrating impact reach and significance.

- **https://iftt.com** A web automation tool that can be used to collect data related to social media activity through causal links. Doesn’t specifically track impact or engage in any analysis, but it is flexible, accurate and easy to use.

- **https://www.altmetric.com** Tracks DOIs and Pubmed IDs for publications and builds an impact profile from citations and social media mentions, which it can also do retrospectively. Geographically locates these interactions to show where your impact is greatest.

- **https://storify.com** Curates posts from social networks to create a story or timeline around an event or news topic. Different media can be embedded into the story, such as slides or video clips from YouTube. However it is not automatic, so you have to remember to search for content to add. It does work retrospectively, but only covers the previous 10 days.

- **https://analytics.twitter.com** Log in with your Twitter username and password to compare your Tweet activity and followers, and see how they trend over time. Click on any Tweet to get a detailed view of the number of Retweets, replies, likes, follows, or clicks it receives. Get detailed insights into who engages with your Tweets and download your Tweet metrics.

Departmental librarians can offer support in using these tools, and for more detailed information and links to other tools, see: [https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/269624](https://www.repository.cam.ac.uk/handle/1810/269624)
Writing effective questionnaires

Impact can be demonstrated by evaluating a public event, training course or workshop through questionnaires or surveys. A good survey should allow you to focus on the objectives or outcomes which directly relate to your intended impact. It will also allow you to build a better understanding of your participants, to inform any future plans by assessing which engagement or learning method is the most effective, and to know whether you have achieved your objectives. For public engagement events, ask respondents to complete before and after questionnaires so you can measure any change in their attitudes/learning/interest. A badly designed survey, however, can give false data and biased results.

Use standardised, relevant questions that can be easily understood by your respondents. Use consistent phrasing and keep the questions brief. Use a clearly legible font and format your survey consistently (avoid mixing bold and italic).

A standard survey structure includes:

1. A title and the version number
2. A brief introduction stating the aim
3. Numbered questions
4. Your contact information
5. Thanks respondents for participating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Types</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Open ended</td>
<td>What comes to mind when you think of ‘art’?</td>
<td>This allows for direct access to your respondents’ opinions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classification or</td>
<td>Age, level of education, etc. But think very carefully about what</td>
<td>Collects facts about respondents, may be relevant if you are assessing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demographic</td>
<td>information you really need to gather.</td>
<td>social/cultural impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranked response</td>
<td>On a scale of 1 to 5, how much did you learn today?</td>
<td>Be sure to include a ‘don’t know’ response option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>Select one, Select all that apply</td>
<td>Provides pre-determined response options which must be unambiguous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likert scale</td>
<td>Strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree (also a</td>
<td>Should be used for levels of agreement, concern, or confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>‘don’t know’/’no opinion’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tips:

- Don’t put too many questions on one page, as it can look intimidating.
- Questions should go from general to specific, easy to hard.
- Minimise ambiguity in the questions and in the response options. Avoid any jargon or acronyms.
- Don’t use biased or leading questions.
- Binary questions (yes/no, good/bad) are best avoided as they only allow restricted answers.
- Double-barrelled questions (2 questions in 1) should be avoided as they confuse your results.
- Response categories should always include a ‘don’t know’ option; otherwise respondents may guess or give inaccurate answers.

Bias needs to be avoided in order to collect accurate and representative data which relates to your objectives.

Adapted from ‘Types of Survey Bias to Avoid’ from Doing Real Research by Jensen, E. and Laurie, C. (SAGE, 2014).

Summary:

If you want to assess the impact of an event/workshop/festival, you should do a before and after assessment of your respondents’ attitudes.

Survey design is a complicated process that needs careful consideration.

Questions should be varied in type, easy to understand and avoid biases.

Survey templates can be obtained from the Impact Coordinator

For further information and external training opportunities:
https://www.methodsforchange.org/
Knowledge Exchange Case Study

Below is an annotated case study from the University of Leeds, which demonstrates some examples of good practice in Knowledge Exchange projects. Lessons to draw from this are that the impact goal was identified early, the research beneficiaries were engaged in a symbiotic learning process and treated as equals, follow-up events were used to track ongoing impact and further funding bids/research questions emerged from the knowledge exchange process.

Based at the University of Leeds, Dr Helen Kennedy’s field is New Media and a simple description of her research would be ‘about people who make the web’, particularly in terms of questions around equality, diversity, inclusion and exclusion. In one research project on the development of a virtual learning environment for people with cognitive disabilities she investigated the impact of contexts of consumption on the success of the product; and the process of production and how they impacted on the final product and subsequently on the success of the product. Although the research project was seen as successful, Kennedy felt ‘we need to know more about the embeddedness of accessibility in the work practices of web designers and developers if we want to make accessibility actually happen’ for people with cognitive disabilities. A new project used action research to enhance web designers’ understanding of the accessibility needs of people with intellectual disabilities, and hence to encourage change in web design practices. The expectation was that web designers would build a product and test it with people with intellectual disabilities, during a series of workshops.

Recruitment of web designers and developers to the project was through existing networks; via a website; by Kennedy standing up in a session at a major web design conference and challenging people to become more creative in their approach to accessibility; and by contacting field leaders in the UK web design industry. Included in four of the workshops were people with intellectual disabilities (recruited through an intermediary organisation), who acted as experts in their accessibility needs rather than as research subjects and were paid for their time. According to a freelance web design participant, ‘the highlight was we actually got to work with user groups, [...] to try our individual practical projects out on the real users’. As a part-time Further Education teacher of web design this participant was acutely aware of the gap between IT teaching and practical workplace skills, so she was actively transferring what she learned in the workshops to her students, raising their awareness of intellectual disability in web design.

Dr Kennedy and her colleagues staged an additional meeting six months after the workshops because of the level of enthusiasm and commitment they found among the participants. In her words, ‘the feedback on the workshops was positive and people were grateful for the opportunity that we have given them to learn and participate. I would also say that there were unexpected outcomes [...] Quite a few of our participants went on and did paid work for the Rix Centre [a learning disability and innovation centre at the University of East London], which hires in freelance designers and developers.’ Kennedy is also finishing a book, which talks about this willing volunteering of labour which comes from an ethical commitment to accessibility as a cause.

Something else that emerged through the process of the project was a bid with another academic and three participants for funding to research how to create an entirely visual social networking application for people at the profound end of the intellectual disability range, who cannot read, write or speak. Rather than simply focussing on the best methods for producing this application, the research will concentrate to a greater extent on its potential social impact.

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