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# **Designing practitioner research for impact**

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# Outline

- What is impact?
- Impact and public funding
- Evidencing and measuring impact
- Why does impact matter?
- Making an impact in practitioner research
- Designing practitioner research for impact





# What is impact?





# What is impact?

## Oxford Dictionaries:

- “The action of one object coming forcibly into contact with another”

Or

- “A marked effect or influence”





# Research impact

- **Research Councils UK (RCUK):**
  - "*Academic impact* - The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory and application."
  - "*Economic and societal impacts* - The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy." (RCUK, 2014a)
- **REF2014:** "an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia" (REF, 2012a, p.26)





# Academic impact

The traditional approach to research?

- Advancement of knowledge is an end in itself
- Researchers communicate via scholarly societies and journals
- Kudos is achieved from peer recognition, through citation and review
- Often little attempt to engage with the non-academic community
- But now...





# Economic and societal impact

- The government wants evidence of economic and social return on their investment in research
- Funders such as RCUK, HEFCE (via the REF) and JISC have responded by explicitly including impact in their requirements
- In REF2014 research impact carried a weighting of 20% of the outcome of each submission, demonstrated in impact case studies
- Most applicants for RCUK funding are now expected to complete an '**impact summary**' describing who will benefit from the research, and how, and to outline '**pathways to impact**' showing what the researcher will do to ensure this benefit is delivered (RCUK, 2014b)





# RCUK Impact Summary

- The impact summary must address the questions:
  - Who will benefit from the research?
  - How will they benefit from the research?
- RCUK expects beneficiaries to come from beyond academia e.g. commercial organisations, public sector, governmental, policy-makers, general public etc.
- Ways of benefitting can include economic, social, health, cultural, policy, environmental and quality of life enhancements
- Researchers are asked to indicate the timescales over which the benefits will be realised and the contribution the research will make to these

[RCUK, \[n.d.\]](#)





# Pathways to impact

- Describe the activities that will help deliver the impact of the research to those who will benefit from it, for example by:
  - Identifying the research outputs that are most likely to generate impact
  - Undertaking promotional activities such as targeted communications, workshops, events etc.
  - Producing publicity materials appropriate for different audiences
  - Exploiting existing professional networks, especially those with capacity to reach intended beneficiaries
  - Encouraging collaborative partners to use and promote the research





# Evidencing and measuring impact





# Evidencing academic impact

- Traditionally we have used bibliometrics to help researchers measure their scholarly impact:
  - Citation counts
  - Journal impact factors, eigenfactors
  - H-indexes, g-indexes, ... (personal, research group or institutional)
- And now we have altmetrics too:
  - Downloads, page views, 'likes', re-tweets, blog comments, links etc.

Which of these do you use when supporting researchers?





# Evidencing social and economic impact

- Impact on economy, society, culture, etc. is more complex
- The REF impact pilot exercise produced examples of good practice in demonstrating impact ([REF, 2012b](#)), including:
  - Use of research outputs (e.g. theories, systems, tools, products) in commerce, industry and services
  - Development of national or international standards, guidelines or policy
  - Public recognition e.g. through prizes, critical acclaim, book sales, take-up of work by national media (radio, TV etc.)
  - Attributed testimonial support from experts and beneficiaries
  - Citations in non-academic publications

How can these be measured? Is there a role for libraries in finding supporting evidence?





**But most of us won't be entered in the REF  
or applying for RCUK funding.**

**So why does impact matter to us?**





# Impact matters because...

- Funders demand it
- Justify use of resource (researcher time, costs etc.)
- Demonstrate value for money
- Attract interest from potential participants
- Build (own and organisational) reputation / raise profile
- Benefit career
- Generate positive benefit for service, economy, society, culture, ...
- Make a difference!





# **Making an impact in practitioner research**





# Impact and practitioner research

- 'Practitioner' research in LIS usually has a different agenda to 'academic' research:
  - Focused on current problem or need
  - Pragmatic approach to theory and methodology – often investigative or evaluative
  - Results inform practice – support decision-making for immediate benefit
  - Audience includes colleagues, user groups and other practitioners; further dissemination is often a secondary consideration
- So what does 'impact' mean in this context?...





**Q1: What constitutes 'impact' in LIS practitioner research?**

**Q2: What evidence would you collect to demonstrate this?**





# Impact of LIS practitioner research

Some examples:

- Generation of new knowledge
- Creation of innovative processes, methods and tools
- Changes to organisational culture and practice
- Improvements in service efficiency and effectiveness
- Enhancement of institutional reputation
- Improvements in student/user experience
- Increased engagement with social and economic communities





# Evidence of impact of LIS research

Usage statistics

User feedback

Social media  
referrals

Downloads (of  
reports,  
software etc)

Staff time  
saved

Behavioural  
change

New policies  
created

Citations

Cost savings

Invitations to  
speak at  
conferences 😊

Uptake of new  
services by  
users

Adoption of ideas /  
processes / policies  
by others





# **Designing practitioner research for impact**





# Building impact into your research

- Think about impact at every stage of the project:
  - What difference do you want to make, and to whom?
  - How will you ensure that stakeholders are able to benefit?
  - How will you measure the impact that you are having?
- How will you engage with stakeholders, both during and after the project?
- How will you collect evidence of impact throughout the project and afterwards? (Be open to identifying new impacts as a project progresses)





# Example: reading lists project (1)

- Research topic: use of annotated reading lists as a pedagogical tool to support information skills development amongst students
- Desired impact:
  - Adoption of good practice in reading list design
  - Improvement in pedagogical value of reading lists
  - Enhancement of information skills among students
- Stakeholders:
  - Academic tutors (creators of reading lists)
  - Students (consumers of reading lists)
  - Library staff (supporting information skills development)





## Example: reading lists project (2)

- Delivering benefit to stakeholders:
  - Invite participation in project via interviews and focus groups
  - Promote good practice via internal meetings and liaison channels
  - Seek commitment from senior staff and opinion leaders to act as champions of good practice
  - Provide training and development opportunities for academic staff
  - Disseminate research outputs to professional colleagues via traditional and new scholarly communication channels (including social media (as recommended by Cruickshank *et al.*, 2011))

Based on [Rose and Siddall \(2012\)](#)





## Example: reading lists project (3)

- Gathering evidence of impact:
  - Metrics e.g.
    - Number of academic staff participating in interviews and focus groups / development opportunities
    - Number of new annotated reading lists
    - Usage of annotated reading lists
  - Feedback from academic staff, students and librarians
  - Downloads of good practice guidelines
  - Citations of research papers and presentations





# Exercise

- Choose a research topic that you might wish to explore.
- For this potential project:
  - State one difference that you would like to make
  - Identify one stakeholder that will benefit from the research
  - Describe one way that you will ensure they have the opportunity to benefit
- Now turn to your neighbour and answer the same questions for their chosen topic.





## So what?

- Funders, employers, managers all want a return on their investment so impact is here to stay
- Practitioner researchers have an immediate advantage because our research has application and impact built in
- As librarians we already have good skills in advocacy, engagement and promotion of our services – these can easily be harnessed for generating impact
- So let's go for it!!





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