



NOVA  
Research  
Impact  
Narratives

# Challenging NOVA Researchers to showcase the impact of their research

Scientific research, whether fundamental or applied, is one of the fundamental pillars of NOVA University Lisbon, with a potential impact on all aspects of society, at academic, social, environmental, cultural and economic levels.

More and more, decisions, whether in a political, business or even individual context, are based on science, which requires Universities to prepare and encourage researchers to communicate the impact of their research in a language that is clear and accessible to all.

Research and Innovation Funding agencies, both national and European, have been placing increasing emphasis on the importance of research impact. At the European level, there is also a clear stimulus for the adoption of assessment methodologies that are simultaneously more qualitative, robust and integrated, as exemplified by CoARA – Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, of which NOVA is an initial signatory.

Considering the transformative potential of scientific research it is extremely important that the impact arising from research activities is properly communicated and understood by society.

The **Research Impact Narratives Challenge** aims to distinguish research narratives, with a focus on impact, to be developed by all teachers and researchers affiliated with any of the Academic Units of NOVA University Lisbon.

Check the Regulation and **submit your application by June 9th, 2023**.

More information available here: <https://www.unl.pt/en/research/impact>

## RESEARCH IMPACT NARRATIVES – SUPPORT MATERIAL

This document provides you with resources to help you understand the impact of your research.

### Defining Research Impact

The term “research impact” can have many definitions, but most of them refers to how excellent research makes a **demonstrable contribution to society and the economy**. Indeed, the European Commission defines it as, “A change or a benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life”.

### Types of Impact

Research impact has to represent a demonstrable contribution, and can be broadly divided in two categories:

- **Academic impact:** reflects what excellent research represents to academic advances across and within disciplines. Examples: what consequences does the funded research have on the organization of research? If there is investment in a certain field of research, how does this affect this field scientifically and how are related fields affected? To what

extent are the research questions directed towards the needs of society or how risky they are?

- **Societal and economic impact:** meaning what excellent social and economic research brings to society and the economy, as a benefit to individuals, organisations and nations. Examples: what does society gain in the form of better products, better services, healthier lives, better welfare, a sustainable development?

In more detail, research impact can be divided into several categories (Figure 1):

- **Academic:** contribution to the subsequent progress of knowledge, the formation of disciplines, training and capacity building.
- **Technological:** contribution to the creation of product, process and service innovations.
- **Economic:** contribution to the sale price of products, a firm's costs and revenues (micro level), and economic returns either through economic growth or productivity growth (macro level).
- **Social:** contribution to community welfare, quality of life, behaviour, practices and activities of people and groups.
- **Political:** contribution to how policy makers act and how policies are constructed and to political stability.
- **Environmental:** contribution to the management of the environment, for example, natural resources, environmental pollution, climate and meteorology.
- **Health:** contribution to public health, life expectancy, prevention of illnesses and quality of life.
- **Cultural:** contribution to understanding of ideas and reality, values and beliefs.
- **Educational:** contribution to curricula, pedagogical tools, qualifications.

## Types of Impact

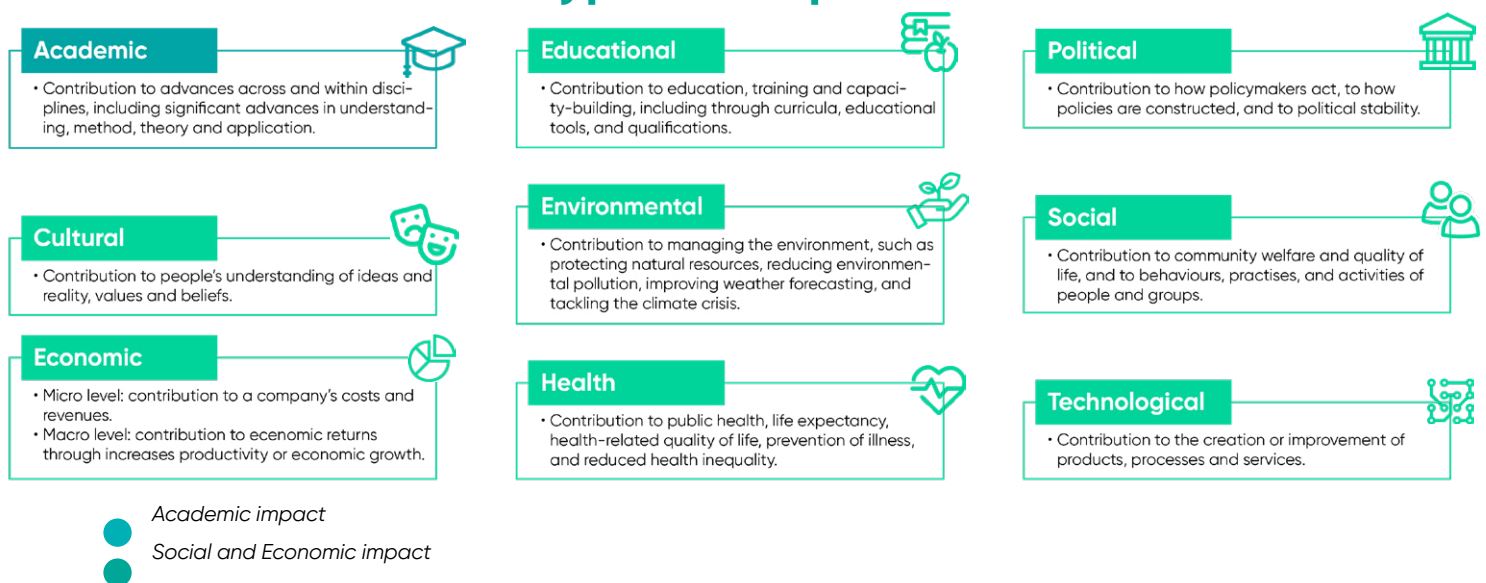


Figure 1: Types of Impact (adapted from [stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit](https://stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit))  
(European Commission 2010; Delanghe and Teirlinck 2010)

## Misconceptions about the meaning of impact in research

Researchers often misunderstand the meaning of impact. In research, the term is commonly used to refer to the broader societal or practical outcomes of research findings. Below, a short-list of misconceptions about the meaning of impact in research:

- **Limited to Academic Outputs:** while academic publications are an important aspect of research impact, they do not fully capture the broader societal or practical outcomes that research can have, such as influencing policies, improving practices, or benefiting communities and individuals.
- **Short-term Focus:** research impact can unfold over a long period, and it may take years or even decades for research findings to be fully realized in terms of their societal or practical outcomes. It is important to consider the long-term implications and potential for impact when evaluating research.
- **Linear Relationship:** some researchers may assume that research impact follows a linear and predictable path, where research findings lead directly to specific outcomes. However, the relationship between research and impact is often complex and multifaceted. Research findings may be interpreted differently by different stakeholders, and the impact of research can be influenced by numerous contextual factors, including policy environment, societal values, and economic considerations.
- **One-size-fits-all definition:** impact can mean different things in different research domains or disciplines. For instance, in basic scientific research, impact may be measured in terms of advancing knowledge or contributing to theoretical frameworks, while in applied research, impact may be measured in terms of solving practical problems or improving real-world outcomes. It is important to consider the specific context of research when defining and evaluating impact.
- **Sole Responsibility of Researchers:** another misconception is that researchers are solely responsible for achieving impact from their research. While researchers play a critical role in generating research findings, achieving impact often requires collaboration and engagement with other stakeholders, such as policymakers, practitioners, industry partners, and communities. Impact is often a collective effort that involves multiple actors working together to ensure that research findings are translated into meaningful outcomes.

In conclusion, **impact in research** is a multifaceted and complex concept that goes beyond academic outputs and requires careful consideration of various contextual factors.

## The impact journey

The **impact journey** describes how research can lead to impacts on society and academia. It traces research over time, distinguishing between five different stages on the pathway to impact (Figure 2).

# Impact Journey

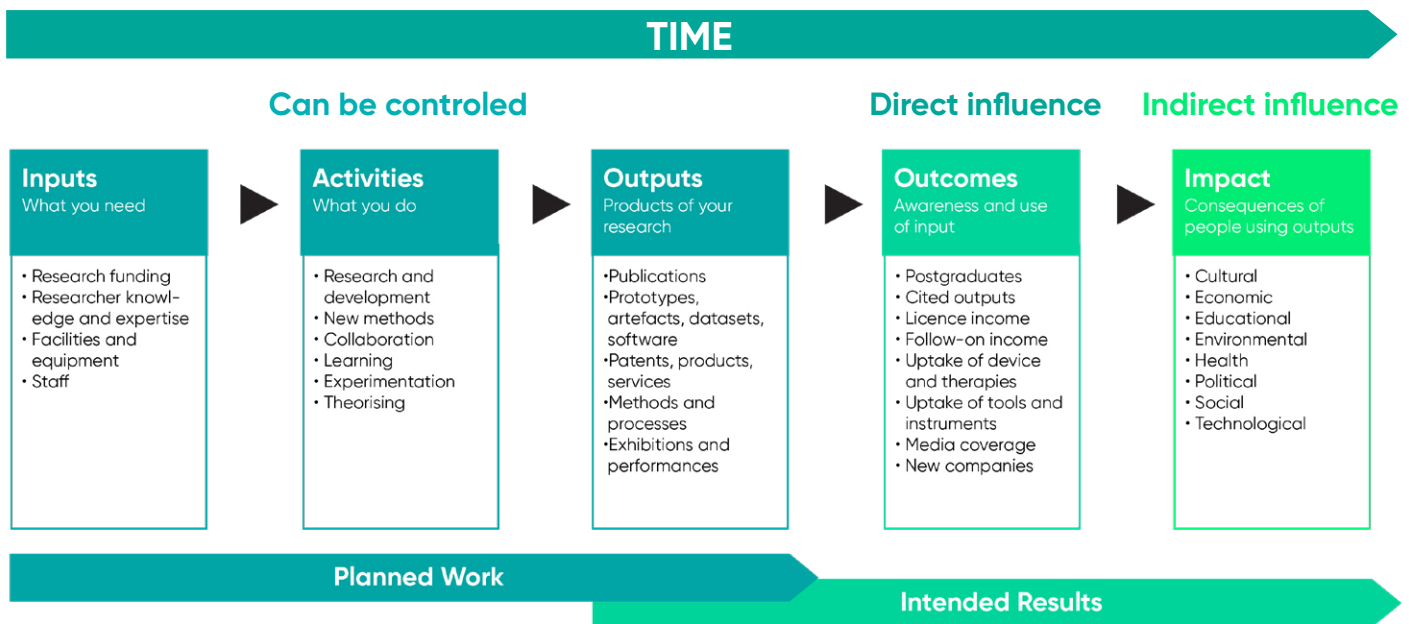


Figure 2: The Impact journey (adapted from [stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit](https://stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit))

- **Inputs:** What researchers need;
- **Activities:** What researchers do;
- **Outputs:** The products of research;
- **Outcomes:** People becoming aware of, and using, these products;
- **Impacts:** Changes in society that result from outputs and outcomes.

Impact resulting from research can take years or even decades for research findings to be fully realized in terms of their societal or practical outcomes. Research impact can be seen from different perspectives, such as:

- Advancing knowledge whilst generating new ideas
- Solving societal problems through the development of new solutions
- Enhancing policy and society
- Enriching creativity and culture
- Improving health and well being
- Realising potential through data and enabling technologies
- Generating quality jobs and economic growth
- Sustaining our planet and people
- Increasing researchers' prestige and funding with impact as a quality and productivity metric of evaluation.

Research impact is not the underlying activities or pathways that aim to effect these changes. However, it is important to fully understand the research impact journey as its stages for impact are a crucial part of the journey. It is thus important not to underestimate the importance of publishing academic papers, using media and social media coverage to discuss one's research ideas and results, presenting one's work at conferences, etc.

# NOVA University Lisbon

## Research Impact Narratives' workshops\*

"Research impact narratives are powerful tools used to communicate the tangible outcomes and benefits of research to various stakeholders, including policymakers, funding agencies, and the public. They highlight how research has made a difference in the real world and can be used to demonstrate the value and significance of research findings (*University of Galway*)".

NOVA University Lisbon has prepared two workshops to help you evidence your research impact and write your impact narrative.

### **3 May 2023 (online) "Introduction to Research Impact"** - *an hour in duration*

In this first webinar, there will be a simple explanation of what research impact means based on the REF definition, versions of which are widely used around the world. Referencing the Horizon Europe definition of impact and providing examples from the UK REF database to illustrate the meaning.

Rebecca Blease will deliver the session.

#### *Rebecca Blease, Senior Research Impact Consultant, WCL*

Since joining WCL in 2022, Rebecca has facilitated the development of a Faculty Research Strategy, developed an impact toolkit for a life sciences charity, and has led tutorials and workshops for Impact Integrators. Between 2019 and 2021, she developed REF impact case studies and environment statements across a range of faculties for the University of Bristol. Prior to this, Rebecca co-designed a pilot research evaluation exercise at the University of Gothenburg (2017-2019). The report from the exercise has informed ongoing policy decisions at the University and universities across Sweden.

### **5 May 2023 (online) "How to Write an Impact Narrative"** - *an hour in duration*

In the second webinar will be on why narrative is a useful tool to evidence impact. It will cover best practice drawing on examples from the UK (referencing the examples from the first lecture in more detail), relating it to the competition template to align with the task being set. Saskia Walcott will deliver this session.

#### *Saskia Walcott, Founder, WCL*

Saskia founded WCL in 2010 but has been involved with helping to define and apply research impact since the mid-2000s when she was Head of Communications at the Economic and Social Research Council. WCL was one of the first consultancies in the UK focused on supporting researchers with guidance on impact and has worked with 100s of researchers across a range of disciplines in the UK, Ireland and East Asia, providing the tools to embed impact into their research practice. She has also worked with university senior management to help them to develop strategies to support research with impact.

\* Both webinars will be recorded. Upon request by email to [nova.research@unl.pt](mailto:nova.research@unl.pt), we will give access to the recorded webinars, to those researchers with an affiliation to NOVA University Lisbon.

## References:

- Delanghe, H. and Teirlinck, P. (2010). Optimizing the Policy Mix by the Development of a Common Methodology for the Assessment of (Socio-) Economic Impacts of RTDI Public Funding, Idea Consult.
- European Commission (2010). A vision for strengthening world-class research infrastructures in the ERA.
- European Science Foundation (2012). The Challenges of Impact Assessment – Working Group 2: Impact Assessment.
- University of Galway webpage ([stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit](https://stories.nuigalway.ie/research-impact-toolkit)).

