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.
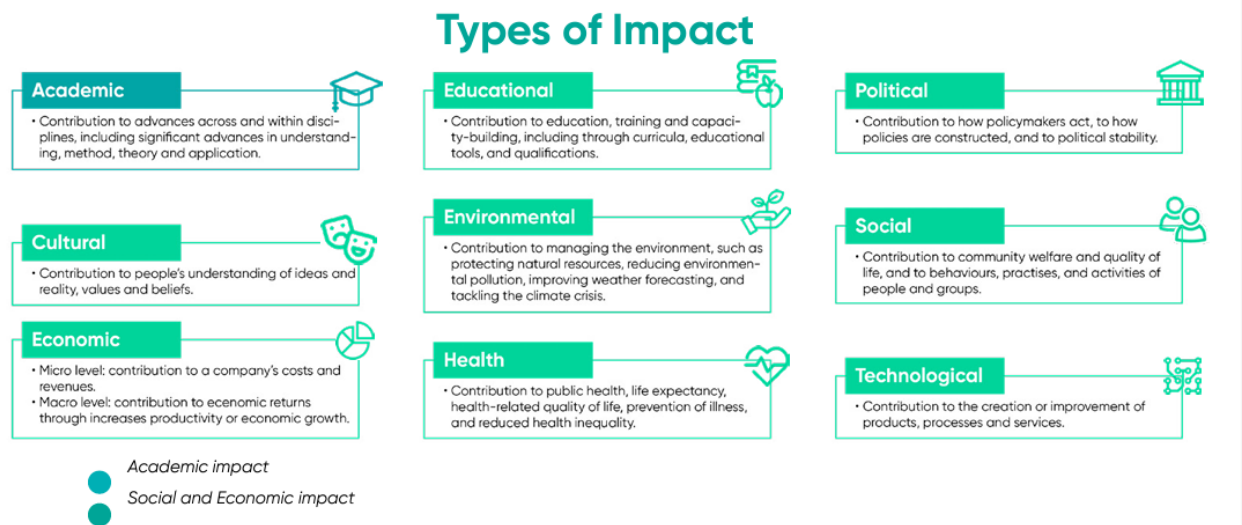- **Educational**: contribution to curricula, pedagogical tools, qualifications.

Types of Impact

Academic
- Contribution to advances across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, method, theory and application.

Cultural
- Contribution to people's understanding of ideas and reality, values and beliefs.

Economic
- Micro level: contribution to a company's costs and revenues.
- Macro level: contribution to economic returns through increases productivity or economic growth.

Educational
- Contribution to education, training and capacity-building, including through curricula, educational tools, and qualifications.

Environmental
- Contribution to managing the environment, such as protecting natural resources, reducing environmental pollution, improving weather forecasting, and tackling the climate crisis.

Health
- Contribution to public health, life expectancy, health-related quality of life, prevention of illness, and reduced health inequality.

Political
- Contribution to how policymakers act, to how policies are constructed, and to political stability.

Social
- Contribution to community welfare and quality of life, and to behaviours, practises, and activities of people and groups.

Technological
- Contribution to the creation or improvement of products, processes and services.

- Academic impact
- Social and Economic impact

Figure 1: Types of Impact (adapted from 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 it 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

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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).
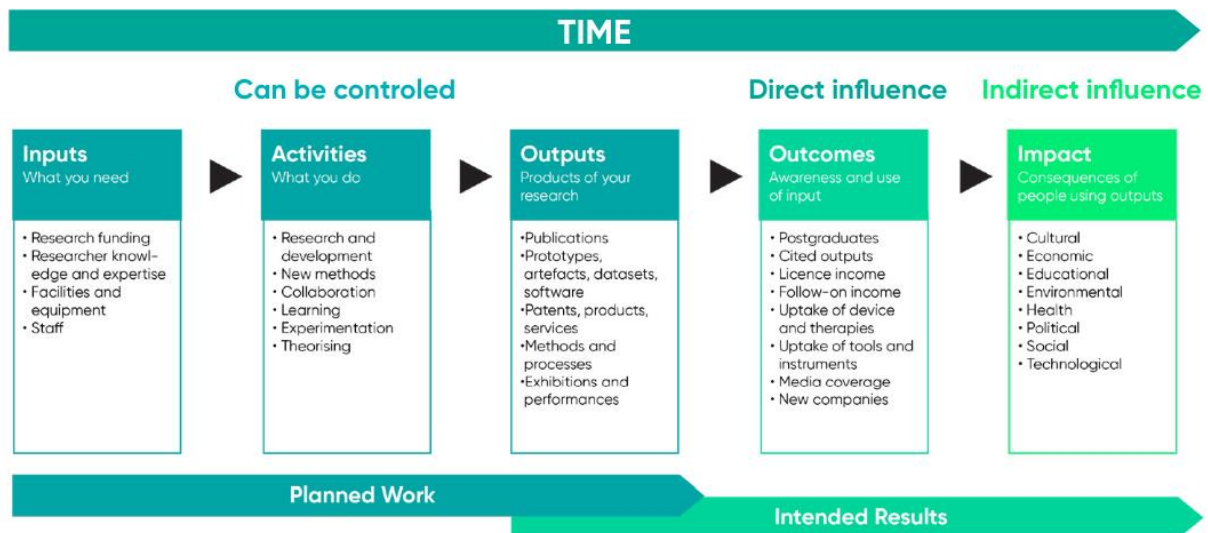
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Impact Journey

TIME

Can be controled | Direct influence | Indirect influence

Inputs What you need	Activities What you do	Outputs Products of your research	Outcomes Awareness and use of input	Impact Consequences of people using outputs
• Research funding • Researcher knowl-edge and expertise • Facilities and equipment • Staff	• Research and development • New methods • Collaboration • Learning • Experimentation • Theorising	•Publications •Prototypes, artefacts, datasets, software •Patents, products, services •Methods and processes •Exhibitions and performances	• Postgraduates • Cited outputs • Licence income • Follow-on income • Uptake of device and therapies • Uptake of tools and instruments • Media coverage • New companies	• Cultural • Economic • Educational • Environmental • Health • Political • Social • Technological

Planned Work | **Intended Results**

Figure 2: The Impact journey (adapted from 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)".

In 2023 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, a simple explanation of what research impact means was provided, based on the REF definition, versions of which are widely used around the world. The session referenced the Horizon Europe definition of impact and provided examples from the UK REF database to illustrate the meaning. Rebecca Blease delivered 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*
The second webinar explained why a narrative is a useful tool for demonstrating impact. It covered best practices, drawing on examples from the UK (referencing the examples from the first webinar in more detail), and relating it to the competition template to align with the assigned task. Saskia Walcott delivered this session.

Saskia Walcott, Founder, WCL
Saskia founded WCL in 2010 but has been involved with helping to define and apply research impact

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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 were recorded. Upon request by email to nova.research@unl.pt, we will give access to the recorded webinars, to those researchers with an affiliation to NOVA University Lisbon.

In 2024, for the second edition of the challenge, NOVA prepared one webinar to help you understand the importance of research impact.

14 May 2024 (online) "Research impact: Why it matters to you" *- an hour in duration*
Funders have become increasingly interested in the impact of research over the past decade. This marks a shift from an 'entitlement' model of research funding, where academic researchers followed their own curiosity, to one that is more mission driven with an expectation that research addresses key societal challenges. To a degree this reflects a strengthening of the social contract between wider society and researchers and for that reason should be welcomed. However, because of these changes, academic researchers need to acquire new skills to ensure their research is successfully translated into societal impact and institutions need to adapt their incentive structures to ensure that such activities are recognised and rewarded. This online seminar will explore the history of research impact, look at how impact is assessed, draw lessons from such assessments and provide valuable tips on how to write a research impact narrative, as well as offering practical advice on securing research impact.

Jonathan Grant
Jonathan is founding Director of Different Angles Ltd, a consultancy that focuses on the social impact of universities and research. His main interests are in biomedical and health R&D policy, research impact assessment, the use of research and evidence in policy and decision-taking, and the social purpose of universities in the 21st century. Jonathan has significant international experience, having helped formulate and implement R&D and other strategies in, for example, the UK, Greece, Norway, Qatar, Oman, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, Australia, Canada, and the USA.

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