

# Research Excellence Framework

## Workshops on the impacts of research in the practice-based creative and performing arts, the humanities and social sciences

December 2010

### Summary of key points

#### Introduction

1. In summer 2010 the Research Excellence Framework (REF) team ran three workshops to supplement the work of the impact pilot exercise. This document provides a high-level summary by the REF team of the key points we have collated from the plenary sessions and break-out group discussions held at the workshops.
2. The impact pilot exercise was undertaken during 2010 to test and develop the proposals for assessing impact in the REF<sup>1</sup>. It covered five units of assessment across the disciplinary spectrum. To supplement this work, we ran three workshops to develop our understanding of the diversity of audiences, impacts and potential indicators more widely across the arts, humanities and social sciences.
3. The workshops focused in turn upon: the practice-based creative and performing arts; the humanities; and selected social sciences. There are further details on each of these in Annexes A, B and C respectively.
4. A mix of senior researchers from the disciplines covered and research users were invited to participate in each event. The academic participants were selected from nominations made by the key subject associations for each discipline. The research users represented a selection of organisations that were invited to participate.
5. The workshops were run between June and September. They consisted of both plenary and break-out sessions, and focused on:
  - audiences, users, and beneficiaries of research in these disciplines
  - the nature and range of benefits and impacts
  - evidence and indicators of impact
  - other challenges in defining and assessing impact.
6. The subject associations involved co-ordinated the submission of abbreviated example case studies for use at the workshops. Each case study gave a brief description of: the research that underpinned the impact; the nature of the impact arising, the main beneficiaries and the way they benefitted; and an indication of the types of evidence that could be provided to support this. Representative selections of the case studies were circulated to participants in advance of the workshops, to inform the discussions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Further information on the pilot, including the report 'Research Excellence Framework impact pilot exercise: Findings of the expert panels', is available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs).

## Key points

7. **The case study approach seems workable.** The workshops used the abbreviated case studies to inform and stimulate discussion. Although these were not the full case studies that would be required for submission to the REF, participants were able to broadly evaluate how effectively research impact could be assessed using this format. A number of issues regarding the case study approach were identified (and are discussed at paragraphs 13-19 below), but discussions broadly acknowledged that this narrative-based approach provided a workable way to assess impact for the range of disciplines covered.
8. **Guidance will be crucial.** In the course of discussing some of the challenges surrounding the presentation of impact within the case study format, it was consistently emphasised that guidance would be central to an effective submission and assessment process. In taking the proposals forward into the real REF, therefore, it would be crucial to ensure the guidance was both clear and comprehensive on this new element in particular.
9. **There will be behavioural consequences.** There was a general perception that the inclusion of impact will influence researcher behaviour. This was seen positively in that it may encourage improved tracking of research beyond academia and improved records maintenance. It was also thought that it may allow a broader recognition of all types of excellent research, some of which were seen as being discouraged by traditional, academically-focused peer review processes. However, there was also a perception that the introduction of impact in the REF may encourage researchers to focus more on popular topics or applied research that could potentially achieve a 'quick impact'. The REF will need to avoid creating a disincentive for longer-term, basic and curiosity-driven research – which have more profound long-term impacts.

### Audiences, users, and beneficiaries

10. Participants explored the types of audiences and beneficiaries of research in the disciplines covered at the workshops through considering the examples presented in the abbreviated case studies and through discussing their own experiences of impact in clustered groups. The wider public, conceived of broadly from regional to international, were generally identified as the core beneficiaries, although a range of 'intermediary' groups were also identified.
11. It emerged that the wider benefits arising from research in the creative and performing arts are created through close, iterative relationships with practitioners and industry. The integration with the professional community was felt to be very close in performance research. In this respect, 'creative partnerships' was seen as a useful term for the intertwined relationships between university researchers and 'intermediaries', so avoiding a forced distinction between 'researchers' and 'users'.
12. At the social sciences workshop, it was recognised that the benefits of policy research, particularly that which is critical of government policy, often benefitted the public in terms of informing public debate, as well as contributing to evidence-based policy-making.

### The nature and range of benefits and impacts

13. It was evident from the presentations, discussions and abbreviated case studies used at the workshops that research from across the disciplines covered contributes to a wide range of benefits to society. Of this range, it was clear that cultural, policy and quality of life impacts are

the key, broad types of benefit, often achieved by engaging the public and stimulating public debate.

14. A common way of describing public engagement activity in the case studies was to detail the dissemination of the research. Examples of this included details of public conferences, performances or screenings, as well as numbers of visitors to museum exhibitions or to a website, or audience figures. These details were viewed as important contextual information for the impact described. However, they were not seen as sufficient evidence of impact as they did not in themselves demonstrate what benefit or change resulted from the dissemination activity.

15. Participants considered the assessment criteria 'reach' (how widely the impact was felt) and 'significance' (how transformative it was). In relation to reach, it was felt that information such as audience sizes and viewing figures did not always provide sufficient information on the reach of the impact. It was also noted that reach should not be simply equated with geography. It was felt that international dissemination did not necessarily reflect an international impact, and that highly significant impacts could be achieved within small areas. To this end, it was suggested that broader criteria may be needed to recognise significant benefit in a small field.

16. The workshops discussed case studies based on research with varying breadth. This ranged from the benefits arising from the general research focus of department, to the collaborative partnerships between academia and industry or cultural institutions, to the impact of an individual scholar's research. In all cases, it was thought necessary that the case study outlines both a distinct research contribution and clearly described impact(s). Examples describing the 'routine' engagement activities of the department or research centre were not thought to demonstrate a high quality of impact and should be discouraged.

17. It was recognised that a number of examples of impact discussed at the workshops centred upon research that was commissioned for a particular purpose, or upon research that achieved impact due to its topicality or incidental public interest.

18. Demonstrating both the excellence of the underpinning research and the link between the research and the benefit described was identified as a key necessity for case studies.

19. With regard to the vocabulary used to conceive of research impact, it was felt that a range of terms could be usefully employed. 'Benefit' was seen as a meaningful way to discuss the contribution of research to wider society, particularly at the humanities workshop, and more generally where the impact was achieved through public engagement.

### **Evidence and indicators**

20. The narrative approach was seen as a suitable means to demonstrate impact across the range of benefits to which research contributes in these disciplines. The abbreviated case studies allowed participants to broadly evaluate the effectiveness of the types of evidence provided and to explore certain issues in more depth.

21. One central point for discussion concerned evidencing cultural change or benefit. Although it was recognised that figures could be given to indicate the extent of dissemination, it was more challenging to demonstrate the resulting impact or benefit (for example, improved cultural appreciation or improved public understanding). The case studies used at the workshops included the following types of evidence of change or benefit:

- visitor/audience feedback

- critical acclaim (such as reviews by critics, prizes and awards)
- testimony from collaborators or intermediaries (for example museum curators)
- sustained audiences over an extended period of time.

22. Another central point concerned evidencing the contribution of research to policy-making and public debate. It was recognised that it could be difficult to corroborate this, because policy documents and indicators of public debate (for example media coverage) often do not cite research. Where corroboration may rely on user testimony, a further challenge was recognised in cases where the key policy-makers have moved on.

23. Further points raised on the issue of evidencing impacts included: concern about the need to collect supporting data retrospectively, such as visitor numbers from museums; a recognition that quantitative data would need to be properly contextualised to understand its significance; and an emphasis that the guidance should encourage the submission of relevant evidence only, to avoid the over-submission of evidence for which the assessment panels would have no use.

### **Other challenges**

24. It was noted that the case study approach may not be able to adequately capture the longer-term impacts of cumulative research, or where research makes an ongoing contribution to a wider body of impacts.

25. There was some concern expressed about the effect of introducing the impact element upon small departments, and the implications for lone researchers and early career researchers were queried.

26. It was recognised that it would be important to find ways of evidencing the impact of research that was critical of public policy.

27. Issues of attribution were identified in collaborative research. It was felt that it would be important to ensure collaborative and interdisciplinary research is not disadvantaged by the assessment of impact.

## **Annex A – Exploring the impact of research in the practice-based creative and performing arts**

1. The workshop for the impact of research in the practice-based creative and performing arts was held on 1 June 2010 at the British Academy. It covered practice-based research in: art; design; music; drama, dance and performing arts; media and communication studies; and creative writing.

2. Nominations were sought for senior academics to participate in the event with suitable experience and expertise in their subject fields. The following organisations were invited to nominate, and to co-ordinate the submission of abbreviated example case studies for use at the workshop:

- Council for Higher Education in Art and Design
- Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association
- National Association for Music in Higher Education
- Standing Conference of University Drama Departments
- Design Research Society
- Society for Dance Research
- Standing Conference on Dance in Higher Education
- Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities
- Council for College and University English
- Conservatoires UK.

3. Additional suggestions were invited from former Research Assessment Exercise panel chairs and a number of research user organisations were invited to nominate representatives to attend.

### **Format**

4. Plenary presentations were given by academics, research users and the chair of the English impact pilot panel. Two break-out sessions were held for participants to explore issues raised in more detail.

- a. In the first break-out session, participants were invited to explore:
  - the audiences, beneficiaries and users of practice-based research
  - the definition and range of impacts arising from practice-based research
  - the relationships between research and its impact.
- b. In the second break-out session, participants were then invited to explore:
  - the criteria for assessing the impact of practice-based research
  - the kinds of evidence and indicators that can be provided to support the impacts described
  - key methodological issues.

## Case studies

5. Eight short case studies were submitted for use at the workshop, broadly described as follows:

- a. A new documentary practice that culturally benefited an international audience and influenced professional practice.
- b. Film research in Columbia that informed US aid policy and provided cultural benefits.
- c. Commercial and cultural benefits from a partnership between performance academics and a digital arts company.
- d. Improved visitor and audience experiences from the use of music research at a museum exhibition.
- e. Cultural heritage benefits through the revival of the northern triplepipe.
- f. Compositions for the symphonic wind orchestra that delivered cultural and social benefits for audiences and economic benefits for the wind music industry.
- g. Creative development of opera that engaged new audiences and influenced artistic practice.
- h. A sculpture exhibition that engaged young audiences and delivered social benefits to the local community [hypothetical example].

## Participants

Professor	Geoffrey	Crossick (Chair)	University of London
Professor	John	Adams	University of Bristol
Professor	Michael	Alcorn	Queen's University Belfast
Dr	Paul	Archbold	Kingston University
Professor	Chris	Bailey	Leeds Metropolitan University
	Mark	Ball	Lift Festival
Professor	Naren	Barfield	Glasgow School of Art
	Hasan	Bhakshi	National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts
	Anne	Boddington	University of Brighton
Professor	Bruce	Brown	University of Brighton
Professor	John	Butt	University of Glasgow
	Conny	Carter	Arts and Humanities Research Council
	Hannah	Chaplin	HEFCE
Professor	Rachel	Cooper	Lancaster University

	Lucy	Crompton-Reid	Apples and Snakes
Professor	David	Crow	Manchester Metropolitan University
	Jocelyn	Cunningham	Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA)
	Ursula	Davies	Design Council
Professor	Maria	Delgado	Queen Mary, University of London
Professor	Steve	Dixon	Brunel University
Professor	Jon	Dovey	University of the West of England
Professor	John	Ellis	Royal Holloway, University of London
Dr	Helena	Gaunt	Guildhall School of Music and Drama
Professor	Paul	Gough	University of the West of England
	Kim	Hackett	HEFCE
	Stella	Hall	culture10
	Paul	Hubbard	HEFCE
	Emma	Hunt	University of Huddersfield
Professor	Simon	Jones	University of Bristol
Professor	Stephanie	Jordan	Roehampton University
Professor	Andy	Lavender	Central School of Speech and Drama
Professor	Colin	Lawson	Royal College of Music
Dr	Jason	Lee	University of Derby
Professor	Janet	McDonnell	University of the Arts, London
Dr	Vida	Midgelow	University of Northampton
Professor	Ian	Montgomery	University of Ulster
Professor	Andrew	Patrizio	Edinburgh College of Arts
Dr	Andrea	Phillips	Goldsmiths, University of London
Professor	David Ian	Rabey	Aberystwyth University
	Graeme	Rosenberg	HEFCE
Professor	Judy	Simons	De Montfort University
	Patrick	Spottiswoode	Shakespeare's Globe
	Jayne	Stevens	De Montfort University

	David	Sweeney	HEFCE
Professor	Calvin	Taylor	University of Leeds
	Val	Taylor	University of East Anglia
	Sally	Taylor	London Centre for Arts and Cultural Exchange
	Chris	Taylor	HEFCE
Dr	Joram	ten Brink	University of Westminster



## **Annex B – Exploring the impact of research in the humanities**

1. The workshop for the impact of research in the humanities was held on 30 June 2010 at the British Academy. It covered research in: history; history of art; philosophy; languages and area studies (including Celtic studies); classical studies; and theology and religious studies.

2. Nominations were sought for senior academics to participate in the event with suitable experience and expertise in their subject fields. The following organisations were invited to nominate and co-ordinate the submission of abbreviated example case studies for use at the workshop:

- Royal Historical Society
- UK Council for Area Studies Associations
- University Council for Modern Languages
- Council of University Classical Departments
- Association of Art Historians
- Association of University Departments for Theology and Religious Studies
- History UK (HE)
- Association for the Study of Welsh Language and Literature
- History Research Wales
- Board of Celtic Studies Scotland
- Scottish History Society
- Scots Philosophical Association
- British Philosophical Association
- British Academy
- Council of University Deans of Arts and Humanities.

3. Additional suggestions were invited from former Research Assessment Exercise panel chairs and a number of research user organisations were invited to nominate representatives to attend.

### **Format**

4. Plenary presentations were given by academics and the chair of the English panel in the impact pilot. A break-out session was held for participants to examine issues raised in more detail. In this, participants were invited first to consider example case studies in some detail, looking at: the type of impact described; the users, audiences and beneficiaries who could be identified; and the quality of the types of evidence suggested. They were then invited to discuss more widely the range of benefits that humanities research makes to society, and some effective ways that these can be demonstrated for assessment purposes.

### **Case studies**

5. Nine case studies were selected for use at the workshop, broadly described as follows:

- a. Public engagement with 19th-century historical research.
- b. Public engagement with research on medieval and Renaissance Italian culture.
- c. Improving cultural understanding and informing legal practice with early Gaelic literature research.
- d. Public and commercial engagement with the transnational history of Italian coffee.
- e. Educational benefits through a programme for accessing databases of classical texts.
- f. Cultural and commercial benefits through the contribution of English research to new museum exhibitions.
- g. The work of a Welsh language policy centre that informed the development of national language policy.
- h. Research on political violence and the history of modern Ireland that improved public understanding and informed security policy.
- i. A collaborative research project with a gallery on women and surrealism that improved public understanding and cultural appreciation.

### **Participant list**

Professor	Edward	Acton (Chair)	University of East Anglia
Professor	Caroline	Arcscott	Courtauld Institute of Art
Professor	Alexander	Bird	University of Bristol
	Chris	Beward	Victoria and Albert Museum
Professor	Bruce	Brown	University of Brighton
Professor	Justin	Champion	Royal Holloway, University of London
Professor	Malcolm	Chase	University of Leeds
Professor	Paul	Crawford	University of Nottingham
Professor	Sioned	Davies	Cardiff University
	Matthew	Dodd	BBC
Dr	Claire	Donovan	Australian National University
Professor	Dick	Ellis	University of Birmingham
Dr	Ellen	Forsch	Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand
Professor	Ron	Geaves	Liverpool Hope University
Dr	Barbara	Graziosi	University of Durham
	Gary	Grubb	Arts and Humanities Research Council
	Kim	Hackett	HEFCE

Dr	Susan	Hodgett	University of Ulster
	Paul	Hubbard	HEFCE
Professor	Ann	Hughes	Keele University
	Gwilym	Hughes	Cadw, Welsh Assembly Government
Professor	David	Johnston	Queen's University Belfast
Revd Canon Dr	Susan	Jones	Bangor Cathedral
Professor	Roger	Kain	University of Exeter
Professor	Dudley	Knowles	University of Glasgow
Professor	Judith	Lieu	University of Cambridge
Professor	Peter	Ling	University of Nottingham
	Nigel	Llewellyn	Tate
	Davina	Madden	HEFCE
Professor	Tim	Niblock	University of Exeter
Professor	Robin	Osborne	University of Cambridge
Professor	David	Peters Corbett	University of York
Dr	Alastair	Reid	University of Cambridge
	Graeme	Rosenberg	HEFCE
Professor	Judy	Simons	De Montfort University
	David	Sweeney	HEFCE
	Chris	Taylor	HEFCE
Professor	Megan	Vaughan	University of Cambridge
Professor	Nigel	Vincent	University of Manchester
Professor	Shearer	West	Arts and Humanities Research Council
Professor	Michael	Whitby	University of Warwick
Professor	Chris	Wickham	University of Oxford
Professor	Alison	Yarrington	University of Glasgow

## **Annex C – Exploring the impact of research in the social sciences**

1. The workshop for the impact of research in the social sciences was held on 23 September 2010 at One Great George Street, London. It covered research in: sociology; anthropology; education; politics and international studies; social science-based area studies; development studies; law; economics; and business and management.

2. Nominations were sought for senior academics to participate in the event with suitable experience and expertise in their subject fields. The following organisations were invited to nominate, and to co-ordinate the submission of abbreviated example case studies for use at the workshop:

- British Sociological Association
- Association of Social Anthropologists
- British Educational Research Association
- Political Studies Association
- British International Studies Association
- UK Council for Area Studies Associations
- Development Studies Association
- Royal Economic Society
- Conference of Heads of University Departments of Economics
- Society of Legal Scholars
- Socio-Legal Association
- British Academy of Management
- Association of Business Schools
- British Academy
- Academy of Social Sciences.

3. Additional suggestions were invited from former Research Assessment Exercise panel chairs and a number of research user organisations were invited to select representatives to attend.

### **Format**

4. Plenary presentations were given by an academic researcher and former Research Assessment Exercise panel chair, and the chair of the social work and social policy panel in the REF impact pilot. A break-out session was held for participants to explore issues raised in more detail. In this, participants were invited first to consider example case studies in some detail, looking at: the type of impact described; the users, audiences and beneficiaries who could be identified; and the quality of the types evidence suggested. They were then invited to discuss more widely the range of benefits that social science research makes to society, and some effective ways that these can be demonstrated for assessment purposes.

## Case studies

5. Seventeen case studies were selected for use at the workshop. These were split into three sets of five to six case studies. Each of the three break-out groups was then asked to focus upon one set, broadly described as follows:

- a. Set one – sociology, education, anthropology and development studies:
  - i. Improved public understanding through a web-site providing accessible sociological research on health experiences.
  - ii. Contribution to health policy and practice through research on conceptions of diet, weight and health.
  - iii. Research on the deployment and impact of classroom support staff that informed education policy and benefited pupils.
  - iv. A study on the use of talk to scaffold learning that informed policy-making and professional practice.
  - v. Informing legal practice through research on the role of anthropologists as expert witnesses.
  - vi. Advancing the understanding of cultural heritage through a collaboration between anthropologists, museums and a first-nation community.
- b. Set two – politics and international studies, law and area studies:
  - i. Research on a contemporary British military campaign that informed policy, assisted military learning and improved civil-military operations.
  - ii. A report on the multilateral trade regime that informed global trade policy.
  - iii. Research that informed environmental regulatory renewal in Northern Ireland.
  - iv. Informing policy, debate and professional awareness through research on victims and policy-making.
  - v. Research that contributed to articles on the responsibility of states for internationally wrongful acts.
  - vi. Research that raised awareness of opportunities for UK businesses in China's regional cities.
- c. Set three – business and management, and economics:
  - i. Informing public policy and debate through estimating publicly funded employment in the UK.
  - ii. International business history research that informed public understanding and promoted the value of corporate archives.
  - iii. Improving the understanding of the environmental impacts of food supply for labelling of food products.
  - iv. Research on the effect of alcohol pricing policies on health and economic outcomes that contributed to better-informed policy-making.

- v. Influencing policy through research on public expenditure and economic growth in developing countries.

### **Participant list**

Professor Dame	Janet Finch (Chair)	University of Manchester
Professor	John Beath	University of St Andrews
Professor	John Brewer	University of Aberdeen
Professor	Margaret Brown	King's College London
Professor	Sarah Brown	University of Sheffield
Professor	Ian Clarke	University of Newcastle
	Vicki Crossley	Economic & Social Research Council
Professor	Hastings Donnan	Queen's University Belfast
	Angela Evans	Welsh Assembly
	Kim Hackett	HEFCE
Professor	Irene Hardill	Academy of Social Sciences
Dr	Susan Hodgett	University of Ulster
Professor	Deborah James	London School of Economics and Political Science
Professor	Mary James	University of Cambridge
Professor	Mark Jenkins	Cranfield University
	Sandy Jones	HEFCE
Professor	Caroline Kennedy-Pipe	University of Hull
	Davina Madden	HEFCE
	Lavan Mahadeva	Bank of England
Professor	Colin McInnes	Aberystwyth University
Professor	Tariq Modood	University of Bristol
Professor	Denise Osborn	University of Manchester
Professor	Andrew Pollard	Institute of Education
	Ceridwen Roberts	Academy of Social Sciences
	Graeme Rosenberg	HEFCE
Professor	Stephen Saxby	University of Southampton
Professor	Kunal Sen	University of Manchester

Professor	Jo	Shaw	University of Edinburgh
	Emma	Stone	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
	David	Sweeney	HEFCE
Professor	Mark	Taylor	Warwick Business School
Professor	Peter	Taylor-Gooby	University of Kent
Dr	Siân	Thomas	Food Standards Agency
Professor	Richard	Topf	London Metropolitan University
Professor	Helen	Wallace	British Academy
Professor	Sally	Wheeler	Queen's University Belfast
Professor	Paul	Wiles	Chair of the Social Work and Social Policy REF impact pilot panel
	Diana	Wilkinson	The Scottish Government
Drs	Astrid	Wissenburg	Economic & Social Research Council
Dr	Sharon	Witherspoon	Nuffield Foundation