


Research Impact: A View from the ESRC


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Issues

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- **What do we mean by impact?**
 - ESRC's new Strategic Plan 2009-2014
 - **How do we capture and assess impact?**
 - Need for better data and evidence
 - Assessment of applications i.e. potential for impact
 - Evaluation of completed work i.e. actual outcomes
 - New approaches and methods
 - **Impact & the REF – the ESRC's perspective**

ESRC Strategic Plan 2009-14

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‘The ESRC expects that all the research it funds will be high quality and of scholarly distinction, but we are also committed to increasing its non academic impact, and benefit to the UK in public policy, economic prosperity, culture, and quality of life... These include the close engagement with potential research users before, during and after the research process, and a flow of people between research and the worlds of policy and practice’.

Delivering Impact Through Social Science

- Impact through world class social science research – both fundamental and applied; both responsive and directed
- Impact through skilled people e.g. ‘people transfer’
- Impact through world class infrastructure e.g. longitudinal studies
- Impact through international leadership
- Impact through partnerships

Assessing Impact

- Better capture of what is already there – maximising opportunities and strengthening the case for social science by building an evidence base
- Assessment - not measurement. Quantitative evidence is appropriate in some circumstances but cannot be universally applied
- Changes to pre-award requirements re application forms and referee assessments
- Changes to post-award reporting to better capture both academic and non-academic outputs - from this autumn

Pre-Award Processes

Applications

- Revisions to all JeS forms and guidance (from Feb.)
- Impact Summary (was Communications and engagement plan)
- New attachment – “Impact Plan”

Assessment

- Peer review forms and guidance (from April)

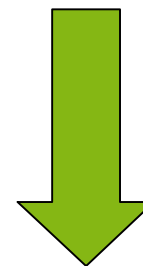
- Too early to judge what difference it has made

- Web based information
 - “ESRC’s expectations of research”
 - Examples of impacts
 - FAQs

What is the new final reporting process?

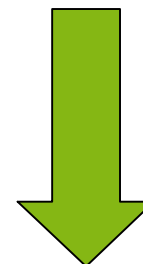
3 months after end of award:

- Grant holder submits (revised) **End of Award Report**
- ESRC makes final payment



12 months after end of award:

- Grant holder submits **Impact Report**
- Rapporteurs evaluate project
- Grade awarded



Any time during or after award:

- Grant holder submits **Impact Record**
- Grant holder submits **Outputs** (including full text)

The new project grading scale

The new grading scale allows ESRC researchers to achieve the highest evaluation grade through either outstanding academic or practical impact, or a combination of both:

- **1. Outstanding** – research of the highest international quality, with publications submitted to (or published in) leading journals or other academic outlets; and/or evidence of major impact on policy and practice.
- **2. Very Good** – research of strong international quality and impact within its sub-field and publications submitted to (or published in) leading journals or other academic outlets; and/or evidence of substantial impact on policy and practice.
- **3. Good** – research of international quality with publications submitted to (or published in) well-regarded journals or other academic outlets; and/or some evidence of impact on policy and practice
- **4. Satisfactory** – research of good national standard with publications submitted to (or published in) good research outlets; and/or likely future impact on policy and practice. This category would include problematic outcomes outside of the award-holder's control.
- **5. Weak** – research of sub-national standard with no publications submitted to (or published in) good research outlets; and no evidence of likely impact on policy and practice. Or work that has fails to address some of the objectives agreed with the ESRC. This category would include problematic outcomes resulting from poor project management.
- **6. Unacceptable** – research of poor standard and no publications submitted to (or published in) good research outlets; and no evidence of likely impact on policy and practice. Or work that has failed to address most of the objectives agreed with the ESRC.

Taking Stock

Work to Assess the Impact of ESRC Research on Policy and Practice – full report on *ESRC Society Today*

Summary

Impact now built into all final evaluations

Case Studies carried out of specific research investments and subject areas

Experimenting with different methodological approaches, employing qualitative and quantitative techniques – payback model, ‘track back’, financial valuations

Some Early Conclusions

Impacts are non-linear and medium to long term – may seem obvious but...

Added value from close collaboration with users through the research process

Impact not confined to strategic or managed research – significant examples of impact from responsive mode grants in Politics and Psychology

Impact and the Research Excellence Framework

- Broadly welcome HEFCE's latest proposals. RCUK working closely with HEFCE on development of REF
- Support use of combination of narrative, case studies and quantitative evidence to allow for subject/disciplinary differences
- Weighting of 20-30% appropriate provided that 'impact' is broadly defined and creates incentives for wider engagement with e.g. policy-makers and the general public
- Crucial to involve users in the assessment process – need to limit the workload and create incentives to participation