What is impact and why is it important?

Claire Battye
Impact Officer, Social Sciences
What is Impact?

REF:
‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.’

ESRC:
‘Economic and societal impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent social and economic research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and nations.’
Examples of impact

- Public debate has been stimulated or informed by research
- A charity’s campaign has been informed by research
- A new service or product is provided as a result of research findings
- Professional standards or guidelines have been influenced by research
- Policy decisions have been influenced by research
Why does impact matter?

- Grant applications, e.g. Research Councils pathways to impact – outline the potential non-academic users of the research, how they could benefit, and what you will do to engage them in the research.
- Raise individual profile and subject profile
- Increasing emphasis on impact for career progression
- Benefit your own research design through stakeholder engagement and feedback
Why does impact matter?

Research Excellence Framework (REF)

- The REF assesses the quality of academic research – informs league tables and determines HEFCE ‘quality related’ funding for 6 years
- Impact worth 20% of total funding in REF 2014
- Assessed by impact case studies and an impact template
- Each Unit of Assessment needed to submit a minimum of 2 case studies, plus an extra 1 per 10 FTE researchers
- Stern report on how best to assess impact due Summer 2016
- Impact weighting expected to increase in next REF (2020/2021)
Elements of REF impact case study

Underpinning research
+
Engagement with non-academic audience
+
Demonstrable change on audience/partners

= IMPACT!
Engagement vs impact

REF impact case study should:

1. Describe how your research led to the impact (i.e. your engagement activities) - ‘the process or means through which the research led to, underpinned or made a contribution to the impact (for example, how it was disseminated, how it came to influence users or beneficiaries, or how it came to be exploited, taken up or applied)’ – plus information to explain extent of engagement and nature of audience, e.g. web hits/event attendance

Description of engagement important to demonstrate link between research and impact, but not impact in itself...

2. Describe and evidence the change (impact) that occurred as a result of your engagement
Demonstrating a change - examples of impact evidence

- Citation in policy document
- Citation in charity campaign or think tank recommendation
- Qualitative feedback from stakeholder explaining how your findings have influenced their work – worth identifying in advance who could provide testimonials
- Feedback from event participants or online comments showing change in understanding
- Quantitative data, e.g. improved financial gains/productivity
Scoring case studies

- Rated 1*- 4*
- Judged on their ‘reach’ and ‘significance’:
  - **Reach**: the extent and/or diversity of the organisations, communities and/or individuals who have benefitted
  - **Significance**: the degree to which the impact enriched, influenced, informed or changed the policies, practices, understanding and awareness of organisations, communities and/or individuals
How to plan for impact

- Identify potential audiences/beneficiaries of your research
- Identify how you can engage with them and at which stages – earlier often better
  - Events
  - Policy engagement
  - Media
  - Web/digital media
  - Collaboration with external organisation
- Often helps to have a clear message/set of recommendations – make it clear what they should do with the research
- Be proactive (organising engagement activities) as well as reactive (e.g. responding to select committee calls/contributing to media discussion)
- Collect evidence of your impact
Support available for impact

► Funding
  – ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA)
  – Secondment opportunities through Whitehall & Industry Group
  – Impact Apprenticeships – available to PhD students
  – Impact Networks
  – Institute of Advanced Study – ‘Delivering Results’ fund
  – European strategy team

► Impact Officers
  – Pathways to impact and funding applications
  – Supporting development of case studies
  – Planning impact strategies and engagement activities
  – REF guidelines
Thank you!

- C.Battye@warwick.ac.uk