The Impact Journey

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Committed to **excellence with impact**: this means continuing to invest in the best research, people and infrastructure, whilst aiming to enhance the impact of that funding on society.

Recognise that the research we fund has both **academic** and **economic and societal** impacts, i.e.

The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy by:

- Fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the UK
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output
Impact Evaluation Programme: Aims

- To identify and analyse evidence of research impact on policy and practice
- To understand how impact is generated, and help the ESRC to improve its performance in this area
- To develop impact evaluation methods
Impact Evaluation - Common Issues

What are the problems?
- Timing – how long to wait?
- Attribution – what role has research played in change?
- Complexity - what routes have led to change?
- Additionality – what is ESRC’s contribution?
- Measurement- quantification and qualification
Impact Evaluation Model

Social science research impact lies on a broad continuum:
▶ instrumental (for example, influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour)
▶ conceptual (for example, contributing to the understanding of these and related issues, reframing debates).
▶ capacity building (for example, through technical/personal skill development)

(Nutley et al, 2007)

The ESRC impact evaluation model:
▶ Identifies and analyses key impact processes and contexts.
▶ Uses tracking forward and tracking back assessments, largely qualitative approach
Using the results – designing for impact (I)

Key impact determinants:

▪ Established networks & relationships with research users
▪ Awareness of the policy & practice context
▪ Users involved at the outset and throughout (Co-Production)
▪ Early and well-planned user engagement and knowledge exchange strategy
▪ Accessible findings  (language, format)
Using the results – designing for impact (2)

Key impact determinants:

- Credibility - portfolios of research activity that build reputations with research users
- Good infrastructure and management support
- Role for intermediaries & brokers as translators, amplifiers, network providers
Overview of ESRC Impact Evaluation Programme
Current and Future Activity

- Economic Impact Evaluation of Research Data Infrastructure
- Policy and Practice Impact Evaluation of the ESRC’s Energy Research Groups
- Policy and Practice Impact Evaluation of cross-Council RELU Programme
- Impact on Private Sector/Business
Further Information

- Taking Stock a Summary of ESRC’s Work to Evaluate the Impact of Research on Policy & Practice (February 2009)
- Branching Out: New Directions in Impact Evaluation from the ESRC’s Evaluation Committee (February 2011)
- Getting Social Science Research into the Evidence base in Government
Thank You
Comments and questions welcome

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Conceptual Shifts our understanding of policy/practice
Reframing debates

Instrumental
Influencing the development of policy / practice
Shaping behaviour
Altering legislation

Impacts range from instrumental to more subtle
Pathways to impact vary

Capacity-building
Technical / professional skills development

Conceptual
Shifts our understanding of policy/practice
Reframing debates

Cultural change
• Increased willingness to engage in knowledge exchange activities
• Changed mindsets

Enduring connectivity
• Establishment of enduring relationships – indicator future impacts
Benefits of knowledge exchange

**Academic Perspective:**
- Gain an understanding of the needs and priorities of potential research users
- Inform academic research
- Increase the prospects of academic research being applied and generating a wider impact
- Apply evidence-based knowledge and expertise to important policies

**Research User Perspective:**
- Research-informed evidence to develop and review policy and practice
- Access to innovative ideas and expertise
- Add value and enhance organisational creativity, performance and productivity through collaborations and partnerships
- Gain access to collaborative funding
The role of KE in ESRC

▶ Knowledge Broker:
  – Connecting users with past/current portfolio
  – Link to the external world – government, civil society and business
  – Source of “intelligence” for the organisation
  – Enabling others to achieve impact

▶ Advice and Support:
  – Impact Toolkit
  – Encourage and support good practice and share this widely
Simpler but more coherent set of opportunities

- **Centres and Large Grants**: (early career researchers involved through grant linked studentships etc rather than as Principal Investigator)
- **Research Grants**: Open Research Area International Bi-laterals
- **Future Research Leaders**
- **PhD (through DTCs)**
- **Secondary Data Analysis Initiative**
- **Knowledge Exchange & Follow-on Funding Seminars & International Networking**
- **Datasets and Data Services**
- **Professorial Fellowships**
Partnerships

- Collaboration critical to delivering quality, impact and independence
- Our partnerships include
  - our academic community, HEIs and learned societies
  - research users in public, private and third sector
  - other research councils, funding councils and the Technology Strategy Board (TSB)
  - international collaboration with researchers and funders
  - promotion of our research to the public
Impact through Partnerships: Government and Civil Society

- Broad range of well-developed partnership working with Whitehall Government Departments, Devolved Administrations and Local Government
- Engagement and partnership with Civil Society Organisations, for example through NCVO, Institute for Volunteering
- People exchange and seminars are effective and popular forms of engagement
- Well-represented in our portfolio of Ventures and KE Opportunities
Impact through Partnership: Business

- Public and civil society sector will continue to be important partners
- But business/private sector a priority for increased engagement - aim to increase business co-funding to 5% of external income by 2015
- Key areas: financial services, retail, ‘green economy’
- Working through key intermediaries, e.g. TSB, ISBE, Knowledge Navigator
- Piloting new ways of working
KE Funding Opportunities

Aimed at social science researchers at all stages of their career in partnership with organisations in the business, public and civil society sectors

- Knowledge Exchange Opportunities, including people exchange, follow-on opportunities, seminars, workshops
- Broadened to include new, applied, user-led or collaborative research, where applicants are engaging directly with users in shaping the research agenda and in applying social science to current issues relating to policy, strategy or practice
- 50% co-funding contribution – can be cash or in-kind
- Current call now open; closes 4 pm, 7 June 2012

- Also support KTPs: criteria enables partnerships with private sector and social enterprises
To summarise

- Impact and Knowledge Exchange remain priorities for ESRC
- Impact throughout the lifecycle is key
  - Academic excellence is paramount
  - Impact agenda is not new, but has risen in prominence
  - Impact has become threaded throughout ESRC’s activities – from governance and decision-making structures, to the work that we fund, and the processes and methods we use for tracking impact
- Embedding “impact” is important
  - Incentives are important
  - Having the right infrastructure and toolkit helps!

- ESRC has many opportunities for Knowledge Exchange, but are they fit for purpose, especially given changing agenda and differing needs of stakeholders?
Thank You
Comments and questions welcome

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