Research support:

How it all works.

Maximising Impact

sheffield.ac.uk/rs
Impact from research is an effect on, change to or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond academia.

For the first time in living memory, we are now in a position of substantial increases in UK research funding. The core research budget has been protected in the period between 2015-2021, and we have new R&D funding in terms of both the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) and the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), providing a boost of £4.7 billion by 2020-2021. These new funds are challenge-led, intended to support the development of research that addresses societal problems in both the UK and overseas. That these new funds have been made available is a reflection of the successful demonstration of the societal, economic and cultural impact of diverse and excellent research by academics across all disciplines. Impact is important, and there is no doubt that it is here to stay.

We expect that in the coming years we will see further investments in impact-orientated research through the GCRF and ISCF. This is where we as academics can really make a difference. We still need blue-skies research, and we will work hard to protect funding of this type of activity, but it has to fit with the challenge based research that government and society demands. The trick will be to balance the two; our aim is to sustain a university that enables this.

I am often asked for the key messages that I would give an early career researcher starting out in the current impact-driven academic world. I have two key points that I like to make. First, try to view impact as an integral part of your research, and not as being separate to your mainstream research activity, or as a bolt-on to it. Ideally you should consider impact as you are formulating your research. There is evidence that impact conceived in this way can improve research quality, and you will be able to draw on a range of human, financial and other resources to support your activity. Second, we need to recognise that aspects of impact cannot be planned, and that serendipity plays an important role. The key is to be flexible to whatever opportunities come your way, and to grasp them when appropriate.

I continue to welcome the growing importance of impact, which has increased both the profile of research and the support that we receive to undertake it. Impact presents a wonderful opportunity to the research community, even though it is not for everyone. Our aim is to make the University of Sheffield a world-leading location for undertaking research with impact, and I am looking forward to working with you to enable this.

Definition of impact by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE)
Setting the scene: the impact agenda

The University of Sheffield values impact in all its forms. Every demonstrable impact enhances the reputation and standing of our University and its staff, and gives us the stature to play an active role in shaping the future of our local, national and international community.

Knowledge exchange is a key priority for the University and is tightly woven into our strategic plan. It is the rationale behind the creation of flagship centres such as the Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre with Boeing and drives our involvement in the Science and Innovation Audit, the City Vibrancy campaign, the Industrial Strategy and much more.

Funders are keen to develop research impact and we are currently in receipt of impact-focused funding streams like HEFCE’s Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) and Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs) from the UK Research Councils. The IAAs provide us with £750k a year to fund academics building relationships with external partners for the successful application of new knowledge to real challenges.

All RCUK grant applications require a robust and convincing Pathways to Impact statement – and other funders are beginning to build impact into the award process. Major funding streams like Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges, or Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF, worth £1.5bn) have impact explicitly written into their remit. In addition, impact (and impact case studies) are a key component of the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

However, the REF is not the be-all and end-all of our impact activities, and the decisions you make in impact terms should not be dictated by ‘REFability’. Our outstanding case studies from the last REF began long before impact was thought of in these narrow terms. The life-changing impacts they describe came about because passionate, expert researchers committed their time and energy to working with key stakeholders to make a difference.

Our aim is to equip you with the knowledge, support and resources you need to confidently pursue the impacts inherent in the work you do, following the pathway that best suits your individual strengths and priorities.

I hope this guide will tell you everything you need to know to get started.

Professor John Derrick
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sheffield.ac.uk/rs/impact
I went through quite a rollercoaster of emotions while figuring out an appropriate way to discuss the disparate moments in my life that led to my becoming a researcher and writing about this topic. Sharing this material with the public through story really forced me to look on my own personal relationship to my research topics in many different lights.

Helen Gubbins
PhD Candidate, Department of Music

The goal of the faculty is to help your research make the biggest difference to the world. This difference is realised through impact. Whilst impact is sometimes tarred with the brush of administrative burden, nothing could be further from the truth. In reality impact is so integrated into our everyday research lives we often undertake impact activities without even realising it.

Impact engagement results in a win-win situation for all. From enthusiastic PhD students sharing their passion for research with the public, to industry benefitting from a group’s shared expertise, raising the profile of your research is precisely what the faculty wants to help you with. Contributing towards the whole, we want to use your impact to build a narrative of our research excellence, by showcasing it to funders and the government, developing our strong institutional reputation as a research-led university.

But it isn’t all one way. Engaging the virtuous cycle of impact benefits all individuals involved. Across the faculty we have had instances where engaging with external audiences has provided access to material, data sets/facilities and real-world insights. Over the years Engineering has also made real impact in domestic and foreign government policy and the benefits from engaging with industry in the current climate speak for themselves. Therefore, impact is continuous throughout the research journey and thought should be given to it at every stage from design to knowledge exchange, engagement and translation, and the next research application.

How can the faculty help you? For starters each department has an academic impact champion, responsible for peer to peer support and signposting. They are the first port of call to discuss impact from research. From there you will find comprehensive specialist support from your Department, Faculty team and Research Services to help articulate and develop an impact at every stage. Don’t miss out on these opportunities for support to articulate your research, and if in doubt, just ask!

A wide range of faculty support is available to researchers across the University. One example is Tales from the ivory Tower a Faculty of Arts and Humanities initiative to enhance early career researchers communication skills through storytelling.
Impact can occur by many routes and at different timescales, finding the right pathways starts with considering what benefits could arise from your research. These benefits could arise through coproduction or early engagement with stakeholders or collaboration with researchers outside your discipline. The best place to start is to identify everyone who could be interested in your work and from there you can plan how to engage with them.

Funders & Impact

Funders know impact cannot be guaranteed but want to improve the likelihood of impact by building it into the research from the beginning. RCUK has introduced the Pathways to Impact (P2I) document to encourage researchers to plan activities that will move the research closer to impact. You should describe all current and planned engagement with stakeholders or beneficiaries, in particular where that engagement helped in the design of the research project. P2I can also be used to describe how you are going to raise awareness and engage new stakeholders with the research. The strongest P2I focus on what activities work best for you and your research, giving you the flexibility to respond to new opportunities.

This guide and online resources (see below links) should help you get started in raising awareness, engaging interested groups and capturing the impact of your research.

Detailed guidance is available on writing Pathways to Impact for your RCUK grant applications (see below links).

The likelihood and scale of beneficial impact is increased if external partners are involved in the research.

RCUK

sheffield.ac.uk/rs/impact
sheffield.ac.uk/rs/impact/pathways

9.9.

Where to start & funding considerations

Section 02.

Where to start

02

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Where to start
There are many different routes to impact, but one common thread relevant for any pathway to impact is that research needs to be shared **effectively** – to both academic and non-academic audiences. This not only means sharing research outputs, but translating research to engage with different audiences.

Achieving impact through research and engaging with external audiences can be a complex process to navigate. However, there are many small steps that can be taken to help develop strategies to engage new partners or reach target audiences.

Within the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Communications and SSPIKE (Social Sciences Partnerships, Impact and Knowledge Exchange) teams hosted a ‘Northern Exposure’ event, entitled *From Clicks to Cites? Social Media for Social Scientists*, with the aim of helping colleagues think about how to share their research effectively.

Following on from this event, the Communications and SSPIKE teams agreed that there was much more to learn, and developed a **Top Ten Tips** for sharing research and boosting its impact. Working alongside the Library, we sought to distil down all the available advice into a short guide for any researcher who wants to share their research.

Starting with simple steps that ensure research is more easily found online, the guide moves onto advice about raising your profile through social networks, and sharing your research in different formats. These principles of accessibility, profile-raising and effective communication are at the heart of sharing research, and hopefully, creating impact.

Copies of the **Top Ten Tips** guide can be downloaded via the below link.

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Elizabeth Garcha
Knowledge Exchange and Impact Manager
SSPIKE

deepfield.ac.uk/rs/impact/top-tips
How can communications enhance impact?

Producing a press release, writing a comment piece, taking part in an interview or engaging on social media platforms isn’t impact in itself because we can’t demonstrate that anything has changed. However, utilising this wide variety of communication tools can often provide a significant and successful pathway to impact – something which Corporate Communications can help with through their specialist Media Team and Digital Engagement Team.

Over the past 12 months, media coverage has opened doors to enable our researchers to change health guidelines, influence government policy and change commercial standards. Similarly, engaging with social media has enabled academics to build networks and facilitate public debate.

Support, guidance and training is on hand to help you maximise media opportunities and get to grips with the ever changing social media landscape in order to raise awareness of your groundbreaking work; whether that’s with future collaborators, the public or potential funders and influencers.

Tracking awareness from your online engagement

The attention around your online activity isn’t automatically impact, however there are indicators that you can measure to help demonstrate how the engagement with your research contributed to impact. There are tools which automatically track many of these indicators such as Altmetrics or Google and Twitter analytics.

Detailed guidance is available online for monitoring and tracking your social media interactions.

Using social media, particularly Twitter, to promote our research has allowed me to reach a much wider audience than would have been possible through traditional academic publishing routes. Not only has my professional network expanded beyond my own discipline but I’ve also developed links with patient and medical advocacy groups.

Dr Robert Fagan, Molecular Biology and Biotechnology

Amy Pullan
Media Relations Officer, Corporate Communications
mediateam@sheffield.ac.uk
95% of our REF 2014 impact case studies scored 3★ or 4★

£210,122,209
Quality Related (QR) funding awarded by HEFCE in 2015/16 from impact assessment

Altmetrics provides another way to assess the attention received by research outputs

£3M
fund created by TUOS to develop commercial opportunities (IPDaC Fund)

Number of Pathways to Impact submitted by our researchers since 2012 is 2578

£6M
Impact, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (IIKE) funds have been invested in supporting impact since 2011
Engaging partners and users

The likelihood of impact from your research is improved when stakeholders and end users are engaged throughout the process.

Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange (KE): Partnerships with people and organisations beyond our walls are key to engagement with our research; these partnerships are not one-way, and the insights that we gain from our partners stimulate and enrich the research we do, fuelling innovation and keeping our researchers in touch with the real questions and challenges faced by modern society. This engagement can take many forms and we support an integrated KE ecosystem in which there is ‘no wrong door’ for researchers who want to engage with potential partners.

Faculty Knowledge Exchange (KE) teams: Provide support for researchers who wish to engage with external partners; they underpin and facilitate knowledge exchange between the University and external partners.

Regional Engagement and Partnerships team: Support the implementation of the Impact, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange (IIKE) strategy and provide guidance and support to academics, researchers and the faculty KE teams.

Further information on the support available and the IIKE strategy is online.

TOP TIP

To track external partner uptake
If you are working with a partner organisation, discuss demonstrating impact at an early stage, and establish what evidence they would be happy to share with you.

Chris Baker
Innovation and Knowledge Exchange Co-ordinator, Regional Engagement and Partnerships
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sheffield.ac.uk/rep/collaborate
Public engagement enhances research so that it contributes positively to society and contributes to city vibrancy, culture, health, economy and education. Communicating with the public about our research enables our work to have impact at a local, national and international level. Public engagement activity can take a number of different forms: from festivals, cultural celebrations, workshops and exhibitions to open events, lectures, volunteering, activities in schools and flexible courses. Engaging the public can improve the quality of research, by widening research horizons. This is achieved through involving, listening to and interacting with the public.

The Public Engagement team provides support for researchers to share their work effectively with the public. The team also provides faculty facing support for writing grant applications where there is a public engagement element and support on REF case studies.

TOP TIP

To track engagement with the public
Plan to collect quantitative information e.g. what attendees feel they have learned, as well as attendance data, including post codes.

End users from the start

In medical research, patients and the public have become increasingly involved in managing their health conditions, developing services and helping to shape development.

Patient Public Involvement (PPI) is where members of the public are actively involved in research projects and in research organisations; helping medical researchers understand what outcomes matter most to patients and raising the profile of particular diseases or symptoms.

Examples of public involvement are:

- contributing to the design of research projects or clinical trials
- involvement in identifying research priorities
- as members of a project advisory or steering group
- commenting in and developing patient information leaflets or other research materials
- undertaking interviews with research participants
- user and/or carer researchers carrying out the research

For more information or to involve patients and the public in your research, contact the Sheffield Clinical Research Office (link below).

For me, as a researcher in the field of chronic disease management and rehabilitation, providing scientifically robust evidence that can have an impact at a societal, population or individual patient and carer level is fundamentally the reason why I do applied health services research. Driving an impact focused agenda ensures that academics always think about stakeholder engagement and co design right at the start of their quest for new knowledge, these principles make the potential for changes in health and wellbeing so much greater.

Professor Sue Mawson, School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR)

Undertaking impact work is immensely rewarding; getting your ideas and findings across to people is challenging but the feedback on your work and how this can shape it in the future makes it all worthwhile.

Professor Stephen Farrall, School of Law
When your collaborations and partnerships are successful, they enhance your research and improve the likelihood of achieving impact. To ensure that our partnerships are beneficial and sustainable, our behaviour towards people who are involved in and/or affected by our research activity must meet the highest standards. Fundamentally, we need to fully consider our responsibilities towards the wider public and society.

The direction of research funding is heading towards greater collaboration with non-academic stakeholders, particularly with the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF) and the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF). Before you enter into a collaboration, here are some top-tips for working with external partners to ensure that high standards of research practice are upheld:

1. **Manage expectations** – Successful collaborations depend on trust, clear regular communications and clear expectations and accountabilities from the start.

2. **Mutual needs** – Start a discussion about both academic and collaborator ‘cultures’, what is the most important outcome for you and your partner? Consider whether their ‘values’ complement or collide with your own.

3. **Build trust** – Communicate regularly in an agreed method - misunderstandings caused by rushed or unclear communications cause problems and undermine trust. Agree to openly declare real or potential conflicts of interest at appropriate points through the project.

4. **Appreciation of what each party brings** – Take real care to acknowledge/refernece the work of others and courteously consult all interested parties. There should be open discussion, and documented agreement, about an inclusive, fair, transparent, reflexive process to apportion and recognise credit, as well as on the use, management, sharing and ownership of intellectual property resulting from the project.

And, finally, clearly document the roles and responsibilities of each collaborating partner.

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Evidencing impact is about showing that your research has helped bring about some sort of change. There are no simple or universal answers to the question of how to do this. What an individual or group of researchers will need to gather to demonstrate the effects of their work outside their own field will depend on the precise nature of the research and its actual or potential impact.

When demonstrating that research has had impact, there are two elements to consider:

- **Significance**: What is the context for the impact? How transformative is it?
- **Reach**: How widespread is the impact geographically and in terms of beneficiary numbers? Who has been affected?

Just showing significance can make it seem that the impact is very narrow, small or vague. Demonstrating reach can show the breadth, however this information alone can look like dissemination or engagement, rather than impact. Whilst some impacts can be demonstrated through a single piece of information, more often a credible series of qualitative and quantitative indicators need to be brought together to build a convincing picture.

When should I collect evidence?

It’s not just at the end of an activity that you should look back and collect evidence. Considering what might be required at an earlier stage can help with preparations. Impact can take some time to occur, so it’s useful to periodically revisit activities you have participated in or organisations you have worked with to see if anything has changed.

You can now record impact within myPublications!

The module is simple and straightforward to use, and offers a one-stop-shop for storing impact evidence in the form of documents, web links, screen grabs or contact details of partners or other stakeholders who can confirm how our research has made a difference. You can also record details and dates of key events and impact activities to create a coherent narrative, linking impacts to grants, publications and professional activities.

To start recording your impact, log onto myPublications via MUSE and choose Records of Impact from the Menu.
What is REF Impact?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a means by which the quality of the research undertaken by UK universities and institutes is assessed. It is also the process which is used to distribute Quality Related (QR) or ‘block grant’ funding to universities in England. The REF2014 assessment introduced Impact as a new area for assessment, to assess the wider benefits of research, in addition to Outputs and Environment.

Wider impact is defined as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’ and is assessed using Impact Case Studies.

Impact Case Studies describe the impact, through the criteria of the reach and significance of the change, benefit or effect outside academia that occurred during the census period from internationally recognised research. Case studies are used as it is agreed that many of the significant benefits that come from research would be missed if researchers could only rely on metrics to describe them.

The definition of Impact from REF may seem very broad but there are a number of limitations to what can be assessed. REF Impact excludes academic impact and impact that benefits the submitting university, so benefits from our research-led teaching cannot be submitted. Also the research which led to the impact must have been conducted by a member of staff at the university.

Researchers should not only consider their impact as a result of REF, their research and engagement with individuals, communities, policymakers and businesses should be a natural part of their research journey towards making a difference and we want to ensure that our funders, stakeholders and the public get to see this contribution.
Where to go for support

Key contacts across the University

Every department has a Departmental Impact Lead who should be the first port of call for enquiries.

They will then be able to advise you on what further support is available/appropriate from the below faculty and institutional contacts.

Key Faculty KE Contacts:

**Amy Ryall**  
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**Elinor Noble**  
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T: 0114 222 9735

**Sue Smith**  
Medicine Dentistry and Health  
(Sheffield Healthcare Gateway)  
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**KE team**  
Science  
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T: 0114 222 9777

**Sarah Howson**  
Social Science  
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Key Institutional Support Contacts:

**G lionsa Boyle**  
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**Sarah Geere**  
Impact Consultant  
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**Dave Jones**  
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**Chris Baker**  
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Across business, policy and society, the impacts of research are felt in diverse – and often unpredictable – ways. Governments and funders increasingly reward impact and universities and researchers are now more sophisticated in the way that they support and track their impact. But there’s still a long way to go. As a community, we need to get sharper at articulating and demonstrating our impacts; we need to do more to link production of evidence and expertise to the priorities of wider society; we need to extend and deepen our interdisciplinary collaboration; and we need to bring the users of research in as equal partners from the design stage of projects and programmes.