



DEVELOPMENT SERIES

# The Early Career Researcher and the Research Impact Agenda: a Brief Introduction

Department for Research and Impact

# Outline

- *What* is research impact?
- *Why* is impact important for the early career researcher (ECR)?
- *How* might the ECR start planning for impact?

# *What* is research impact?

- In very broad terms, impact is **the effect/benefit that research has *beyond* academia** (i.e. the attributable difference or change it makes)
- Put differently, ‘impact is the **good** that researchers can do in the [real] world’ (Fast Track Impact)
- **Impact typology:** there are many different kinds of impact, for example, economic, cultural, social, public policy, health and environmental variants
- **NB:** dissemination, knowledge exchange and public engagement = not impact

# Why is impact important for the ECR?

**Context:** *funders increasingly expect researchers to demonstrate impact potential as a condition of funding and, under the Research Excellence Framework (REF), UK HEIs are required by government funders to evidence impact, while REF impact assessment outcomes can affect HEIs' future funding*

As a result...

- **Career prospects:** demonstration of impact experience/potential can increasingly matter for academic researcher recruitment and career advancement
- **Funding prospects:** demonstration of impact experience/potential can significantly correlate to researcher funding prospects
- **Personal fulfilment:** researchers can be motivated to generate impact by altruism (i.e. the desire to have their research 'make a difference' to the public 'good') - *what motivates you?*

# How might the ECR start planning for impact?

- *Generating impact can ultimately require researchers to engage with (i.e. build meaningful relationships) with non-academic stakeholders, making their research accessible, relevant and useful to them...*
- **As such, start by asking 4 fundamental questions:**
  - ***Who** (beyond academia) might benefit from, and be most interested in, using your research (i.e. **who** are the potential stakeholders)?*
  - ***How** might they benefit (i.e. **what's** in it for them, **what** would this benefit look like)?*
  - ***How/where/when** might you reach out to these potential beneficiaries and engage them in making your research accessible, relevant and useful to them?*
  - ***How** might you show (track, evidence, measure, document) progress made in working towards your intended benefit?*

# Closing thought...

- Impact is the **benefit** that research has *beyond* academia and can be **important to different spheres of society**... effective impact **planning** and stakeholder relationship-building can **hold the key** to the ECR generating impact... and, while integrating impact into the start of the research cycle might be **best practice**... *it's never too late* to start thinking about impact in the research cycle...