



DEVELOPMENT SERIES

Making an Impact: an Introduction

PhD Workshop

February 2019

Department for Research and Impact

Outline...

- **Part 1:** Introduction to the **research impact agenda**:
 - *What* is research impact?
 - *Why*, and *to whom*, does impact matter?

- **Part 2:** Introduction to **impact planning**:
 - *How* might the PhD researcher start planning for impact?
 - Impact planning tips...



Part 1

Introduction to the
research impact
agenda...


Research impact agenda: HE context...

Key point: *funders increasingly expect researchers to **demonstrate impact potential or actual impact** as a condition of funding, for example...*

- the 4 UK higher education government funding bodies require universities to **evidence impact**, with outcomes determining future research grant funding
- the 7 UK research councils (ESRC, NERC, AHSS etc.) require grant applicants to **set out how they intend generating impact** under their proposed projects

So, what *is* research impact, then?

In *very* broad terms: impact is the **effect/benefit** that research has (i.e. the difference/change it makes) *beyond* academia



‘Impact is the **good** that researchers can do in the **[real] world**’, Mark Reed (Fast Track Impact)

What is research impact? Key funder definitions...

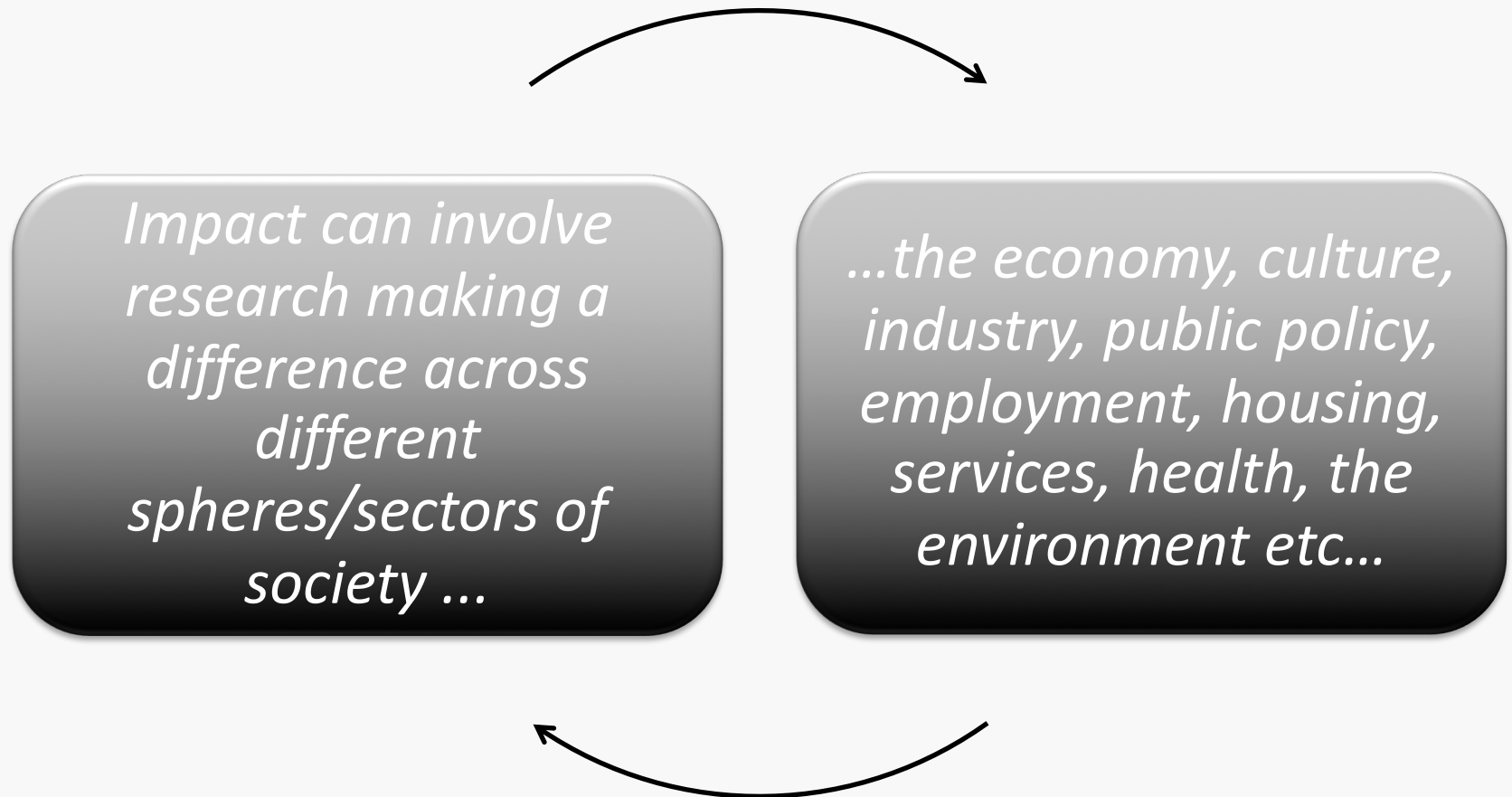
UK Research and Innovation (7 UK research councils) definition =

- '[impact is] the **demonstrable contribution** that excellent research makes to **society and the economy**'

4 UK HE funding bodies' definition =

- '[impact is] an **effect on, change or benefit** to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, **beyond academia**'

So, impact: change to *what*?



So, impact: change to *what/where*?

Impact can involve
change to ...

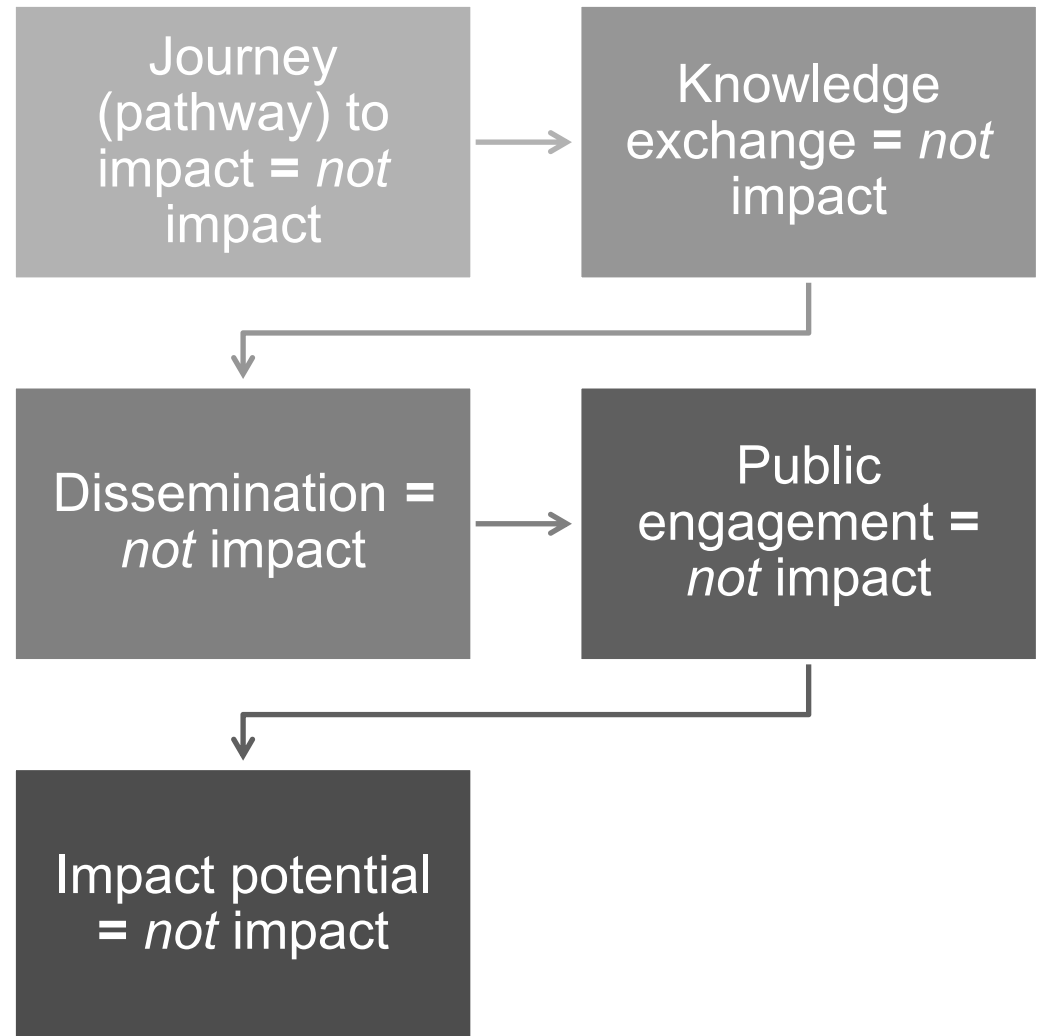
... activity,
attitudes,
awareness,
behaviour,
practice, capacity,
policy, standards,
opportunity,
performance,
process,
understanding ...

... and can be local,
regional, national
or international ...

Types of impact...

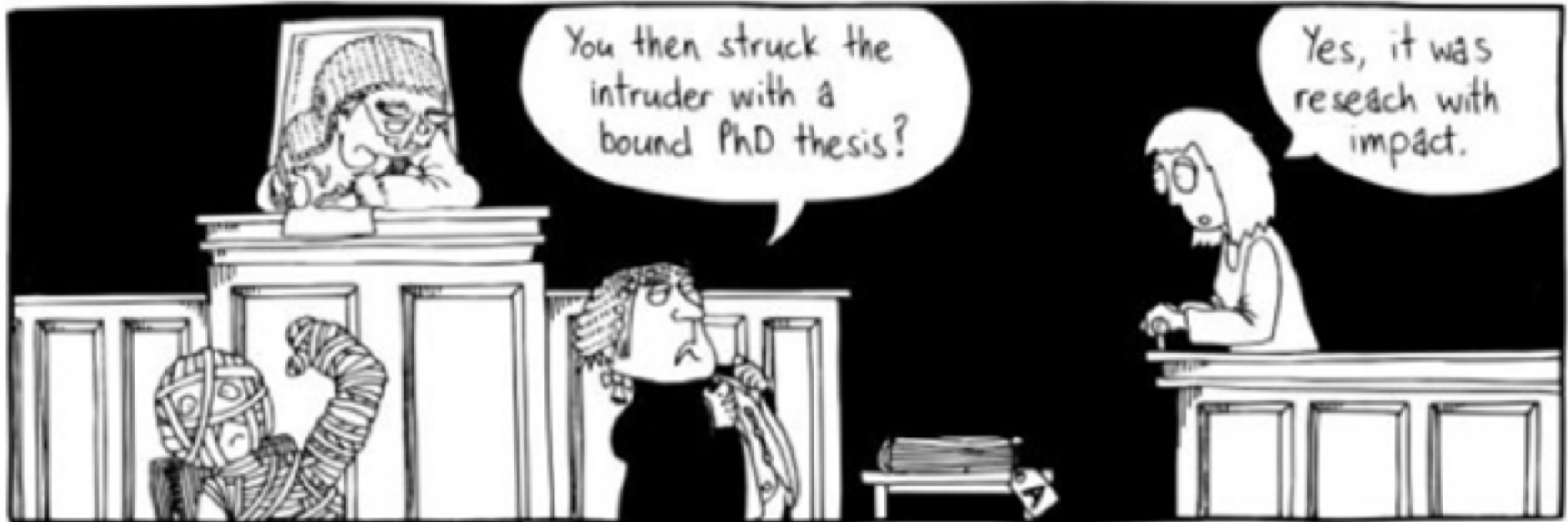
- **Instrumental:** where research influences policy, practice or behaviour:
 - ❖ *for example:* change in **environmental practice and policy** affected by geographical research evidence...
- **Conceptual:** where research informs understanding and debate:
 - ❖ *for example:* change in **political debate/attitudes** shaped by social policy research evidence...
- **Capacity-building:** where research affects technical expertise and skill development:
 - ❖ *for example:* change in **health professional standards, guidelines, training or tools** influenced by nursing research evidence...

**What is
research
impact?
*What it's
not...***



Why, and to whom or what, does impact matter, then?

- **Societal progress/public ‘good’** (matters to: wider society; myriad beneficiaries: policymakers, NGOs, industry, communities etc.)
- **Accountability** for public funding of research, demonstrating benefits to society (matters to: taxpayer, HEIs, funders)
- **Allocation of research funds**, reputation and sustainability (matters to: HEIs, funders, researchers)



But, *why* might impact matter to the PhD researcher?

Why might impact matter to the PhD researcher?

☐ Career prospects:

- ✓ demonstration of impact experience/potential can increasingly matter for **academic recruitment** and career advancement...

- ✓ *‘Whilst getting good papers from your PhD is a great start, it is often not enough to secure an academic post. **Being able to demonstrate impact from your papers can set you apart and add real value to a prospective [academic] employer***’ (J. Chubb and M. Reed, Fast Track Impact)

Why might impact matter to the PhD researcher?

❑ Career prospects:

- additionally, as Vitae research affirms, demonstration of impact experience may also matter in **non-academic careers**, in showing the kind of transferrable communication skills most valued by non-academic employers of PhD graduates (Chubb and Reed, 2017)

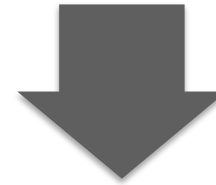


***Why* might impact matter to the PhD researcher?**

- **Funding prospects:** demonstrating impact experience/potential can enhance researcher funding prospects...
- **Personal fulfilment:** researchers can be motivated to generate impact by altruistic reasons (the desire 'make a difference' to the public 'good') - *what motivates you?*

Part 1: Summary

Introduced **broad definitions of impact** as benefit of research beyond academia



Explored **importance of impact**

Part 2

Introduction to **impact** planning...



Part 2 Outline

- Impact planning: ***where to start?***
- *How* might the PhD researcher plan for impact?
 - ❖ **Tips**: planning for impact activities...

Impact planning: *where to start?*



IMPACT!

- Because impact is the difference research makes *beyond* academia ... **generating impact can ultimately require researchers to reach out and engage (i.e. build relationships) with non-academic stakeholders**, making their research accessible, relevant and useful to them...
- As a result, **planning for effective and meaningful stakeholder engagement is key** to planning for impact...

How might the PhD researcher start planning for impact?

- Start, then, by asking some **fundamental questions to help spark interest** in your research beyond academia...



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The key questions to ask...

- **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 for them?
- **How** might you show (track and evidence) progress made in working towards your intended benefit?

*How might
the PhD
researcher
plan for
impact?*

✓ *In providing answers to these basic questions you will, in effect, have started the **process of impact strategising!***



Tip: use of an **impact planner ‘tool’** can help enhance impact strategising...





Planning for impact activities: tips...

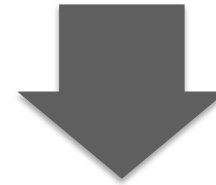
- Draw up an **impact activities plan** = how you intend to actively engage stakeholders (non-expert audiences) with your research in building impact relationships...
- Engagement activity choices can depend on the nature of your research topic, the type of impact you aim to achieve and the type of target stakeholder...
- *But typically*, impact activities will involve **dissemination and more direct engagement**, such as targeted online activity and meetings... **know your non-expert audience and tailor your approach/format accordingly to ensure accessibility, relevance and usefulness** (infographics, blogs, briefings etc.)...

Planning for impact activities: tips...

- Be **clear/specific** about what you hope to achieve from the outset! Is it realistic/achievable: SMART?
- **Network, network, network!** Locally, nationally and beyond:
 - try to identify existing contacts (internal/external) to make stakeholder 'introductions'
 - engage in targeted **social media networking** to make new stakeholder contacts
- Build/maintain your **public profile**, including social media profile
- Keep a **record** of impact activities/progress (note what worked/what didn't)
- Think **two-way process**: is there any opportunity to collaborate with stakeholders?

Part 2: Summary

Explored basic
components of **impact
planning**



Considered **impact
realisation** as a strategic
phenomenon centred
around **relationship building**

Closing thought...

- *If you take just one thing away with you...*
- Impact is the **benefit** that research has **beyond academia** and is important to different spheres of society ... **effective impact planning and relationship-building can hold the key** to generating impact... and, while integrating impact into the start of a project might be best practice... ***it's never too late*** to start thinking about impact in the research cycle!

Resources

- Ulster University research impact resources: ulster.ac.uk/internal/research/researchimpact
- Research impact guides and planning templates available here: fasttrackimpact.com
- UK Research and Innovation and the Je-S handbook provide further advice on the research councils and impact
- On public engagement and impact, see National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement



***Any
questions?***