

Achieving and Assessing Research Impact: past, present and future



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Research Impact

Guidance on Advancement,
Achievement and Assessment

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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- **What is research impact**
- **Research impact Past, Present, Future**
- **Why pursue research impact?**
- **Planning impact prior to starting a study.**
- **Integrating impact into research training.**
- **Pursuing impact by researchers**
- **Challenges in the pursuit of research impact.**

Impact Evolution of Universities:

The Classical University: The first generation primary focus was teaching, by transmitting knowledge through oral communication and manuscripts.

The Research University: The second generation emphasised the creation of new knowledge, making universities hubs of research and innovation.

The Entrepreneurial University: The third generation saw universities become economic players, commercialising research, forging closer ties with industry.

University 4.0: The fourth generation are focused on socio-economic impact. These universities are engines of innovation and transformation, linking academic expertise with diverse societal needs delivering real-world impact.

(Aleks Subic, 2025 Vice-Chancellor Aston University).

Research Impact: what it is, what it is not!

An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life.



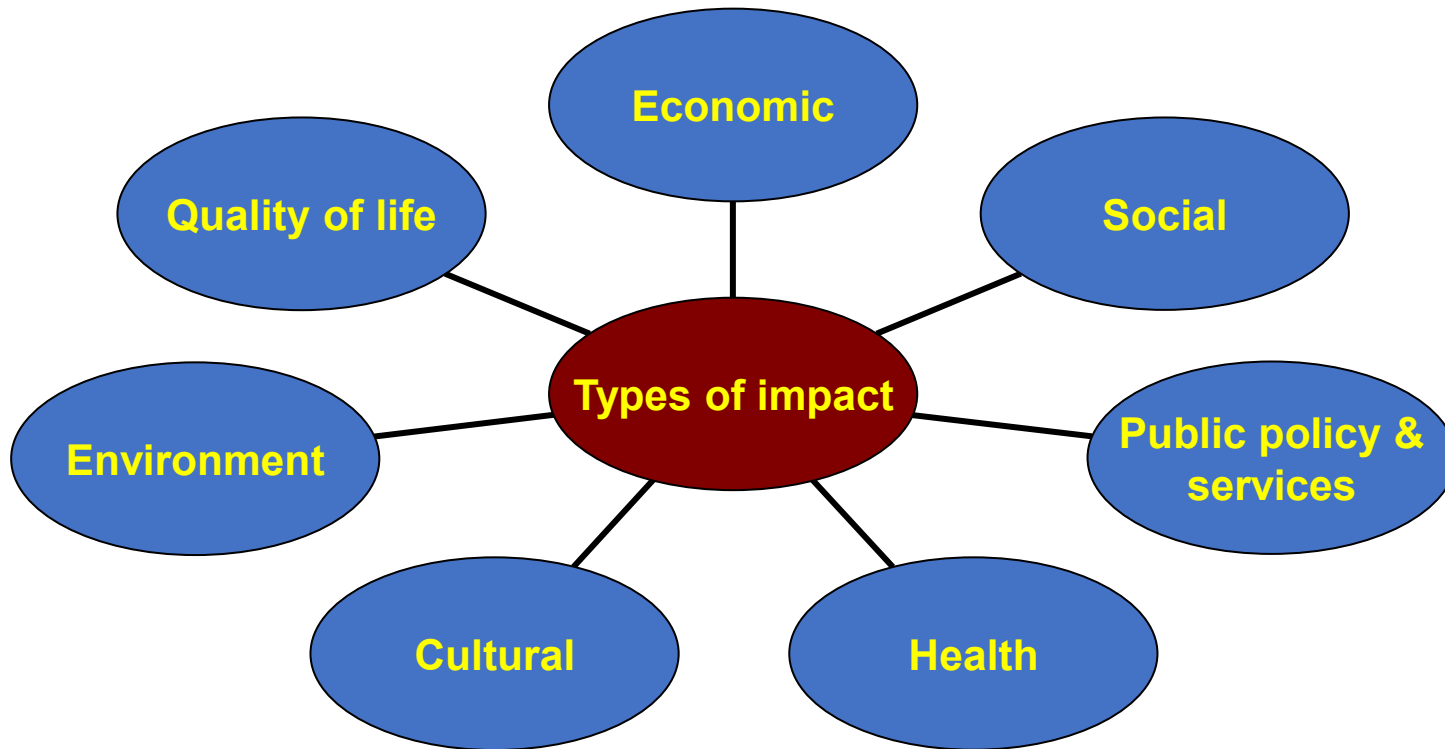
Impact **includes** an effect, change or benefit on:

- **Processes:** the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, policy, opportunity, performance, practice, or understanding;
- **People:** an audience, families, beneficiary, community, constituency, or individuals;
- **Places:** any organisation or geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.



Research Impact: what it is, what it is not!

An identifiable benefit to, change or influence on:



P.E.S.T.L.E.

McKenna, H.P. (2015) Research assessment: The Impact of impact *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. **52** (1) pp. 1-3.

Research Impact – Criteria

Reach: the extent and/or breadth of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact.

Significance: is the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the products, services, performance, practices, policies or understanding of commerce, industry or other organisations, governments, communities or individuals.



RESEARCH IMPACT – SOME THOUGHTS

- Most research funds come from taxes or charitable giving - it is not unreasonable to ask researchers whose investigation is being undertaken at public expense to provide some evidence of its impact.
- Hivve's analysis of Hong Kong's research showed that it takes an average of 7-19 years to create impact.
- Research Impact is now a key part of research assessments in the UK, Italy, Poland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Norway & Australia.
- The Coalition for the Advancement of Research Assessment (**CoARA**) aims to maximise the impact of research and advocates for research assessment that recognizes diverse forms of impact.

Research Impact Culture



Human Resources
'Impact champions'



Black Tie team
celebrations'



Senior Management Buy-in



Training evolution

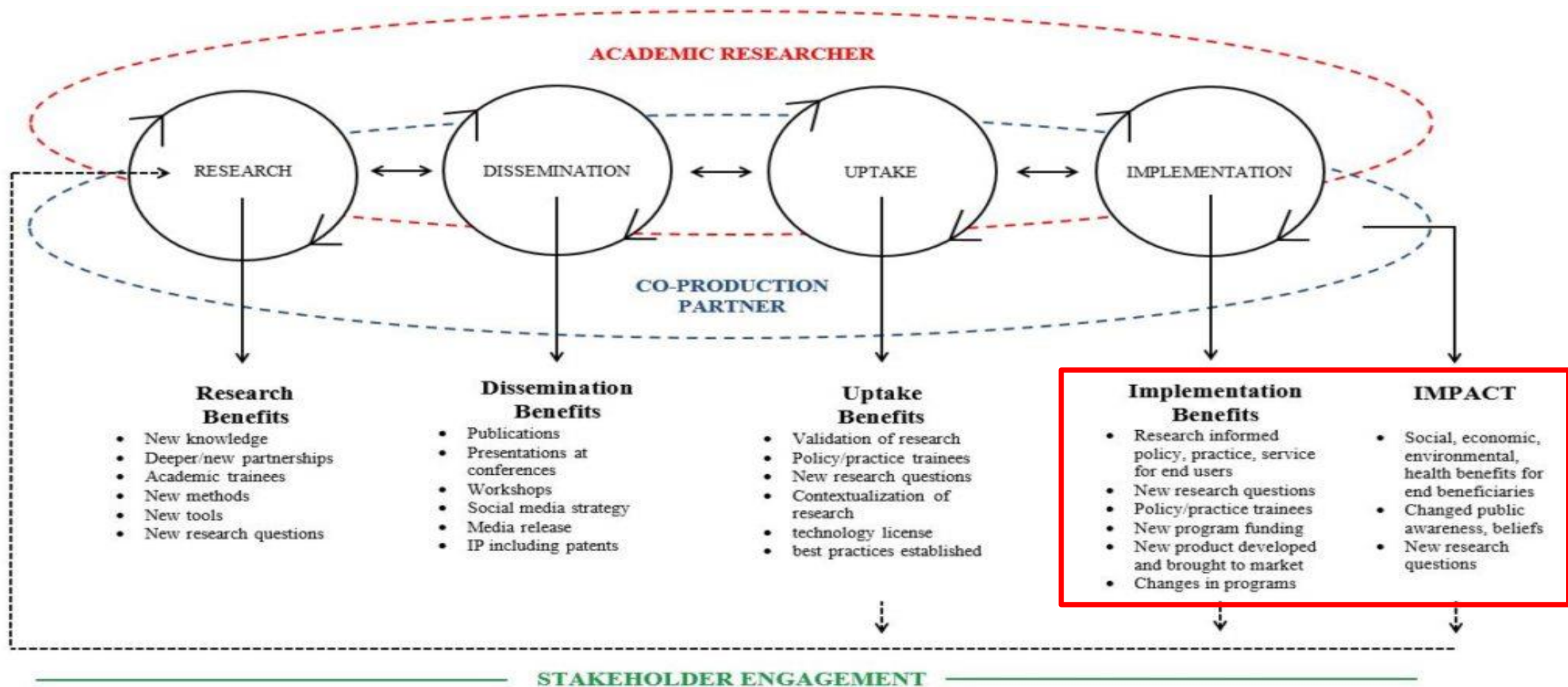


Impact data capture

Research Impact – An extension to the Research Pathway!



Research Impact – Where are you on the continuum?



Phipps, D.J., Cummings, J. Pepler, D., Craig, W. and Cardinal, S. (2016) The *Co-Produced Pathway to Impact* describes Knowledge Mobilization Processes. *J. Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 9(1): 31-40.

The Impact Trajectory- Logic Model

Logic Model for Impact:



Logic model was invented in the 1980s from the Kellogg's Foundation

<https://www.nj.gov/state/assets/pdf/ofbi/kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide.pdf>

ATTRIBUTION

**Must be no
disjoint
between
impact and its
underpinning
research**



Why Researchers should Pursue Research Impact?



Why Pursue Research Impact?

Importance of
Engagement -Sir
Ron Dearing.

We grow no food
on campus.

Universities
perceived as
reservoirs of
knowledge.

Provide
accountability
for public
investment and
produce
evidence of the
benefits.



Encourage the
seamless transfer
of knowledge
from our research
to our teaching to
society.

The sole purpose of research is being of benefit to mankind (Francis Bacon, 1561-1626)

Planning a Pathway to Impact in Research

IMPACT



Pathway to Research Impact

PAST

- Research is complete.
- Findings disseminated.
- Findings may or may not be found and used by others to have impact.

PRESENT

- Research is complete
- Findings are disseminated.
- PhD graduates Identify potential impact partners who could help them develop impact.

FUTURE

- Researchers Involve stakeholders from Design to Dissemination to Development.
- Engage with them to map out the journey to impact.
- Research 'with', rather than 'about', 'for' or 'on'.

McKenna, H.P., Thompson D.R., (2025) Achieving research impact: the advice we would give to our younger selves. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. Vol 62. 105311

Future Pathway to Research Impact

Question 1

- What are the potential impacts if this research study is completed?

Question 2

- Who would be the possible beneficiaries of the research findings?

Question 3

- How can I best engage with these beneficiaries at the earliest possible time?



Moving Impact from being an effect of research to being a purposeful act planned for upstream.

Stanford University's 'Design Thinking' for Research Impact

Question 1

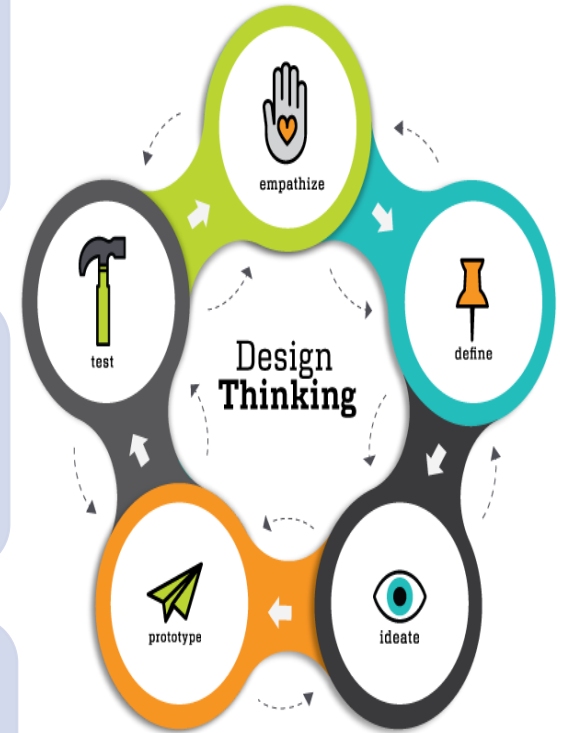
- Can I engage with the beneficiaries to define what their problem is?

Question 2

- Can we work together to create new solutions to solve the problem?

Question 3

- Can we partner to jointly research these new solutions to create impact?



5 steps to Research Impact

- **1. Start with the “why”**
Don't wait until a funding application to think about impact. Ask yourself why your research matters – to whom and how?
- **2. Know your stakeholder space**
Understand who your research could influence, benefit or challenge. Build relationships early and often and maintain those relationships for mutual benefit. Impact is relational, not transactional.
- **3. Co-create, don't just disseminate**
Share ownership of the research process. Engage beneficiaries as collaborators, not just recipients. See the value from both sides.
- **4. Document continuously**
Capture benefits and testimonies as you go. Good impact stories aren't written from memory – they're built over time. Leaving it to the last minute might mean that contacts have moved on.
- **5. Value impact as scholarship**
Challenge the narrative that “real” research is only what's published in journals. Impactful research *is* good research – it's research that matters.

Pursuing Research Impact





Why Researchers Pursue Research Impact

My government and my family have committed money and support to my research career. So it must have benefit to society beyond publications

Having impact from my research allowed me to show prospective employers and co-researchers that my research on dementia diagnosis delivered benefits for patients and families”

Impactful researchers pass on some of their knowledge to those they work with, boosting their creativity and productivity.

Having research impact not only brings a better salary and greater personal benefit but generates benefits to wider society.

Researcher's Impact 'Elevator Pitch'

My research findings, showed that_____

(New evidence)

This Help(s)_____

(Patients, Carers, Policymakers)

Who want to_____

(Get Better, Achieve Something)

By_____

Verb (Reducing, Avoiding) a problem

And_____

Verb (Increasing , enabling) a solution

Unlike_____

(What happens now)

Challenges for the Pursuit of Research Impact.



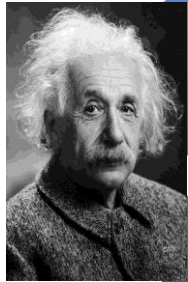
Challenges to Pursuing Research Impact



**Research
Impact Training**

A distraction
from research.
Imposter
syndrome

**Non reproducibility
of studies that have
claimed impact (e.g.
MMR-Autism)**



**Research and
Impact Time Lag**



**Disciplinary
issues and
research impact**



**Research Impact-
not always good
(Grimpect)**



**Attribution
Theory**



**Basic Vs
Applied
Research**



**Conflicting
Research Advice
and Impacts**

Is this Research Impact?



Relevant Publications

- **McKenna, H.P. (2025).** Achieving research impact: the advice we would give to our younger selves. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. 62. 105311.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2020) Research Impact:** attainment achievement and assessment. Springer Nature, London.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2019) Research Impact** and Mental Health Nursing. In *Mental Health Research*. In Brooker C & White E (eds.) *Mental Health Nursing: from the outside, looking in*. Cheshire: White Winstanley, pp. 121-124.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2015)** Research assessment: The **Impact** of impact *International Journal of Nursing Studies*. **52** (1) pp. 1-3.
- Finnegan, A. **McKenna, HP**, Lauder, W. (2016) The Challenges and Psychological **Impact** of Delivering Nursing Care within a War Zone. *Nursing Outlook*.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2015)** Patient and Public involvement and **research impact**: a reciprocal relationship. *Journal of Research in Nursing*. 20 (8), 723-728.
- Hasson, F., **McKenna, H.P.** and Keeney, S. (2012). A qualitative study exploring the **impact** of student nurses working part time as a health care assistant. *Nurse Education Today*, 33, 873-879. DOI: 10.1016/j.nedt.2012.09.014
- Ryan A.A., McCann S. & **McKenna H.P.**. (2009) **Impact** of community care in enabling older people with complex needs to remain at home. *International Journal of Older People Nursing* 4, 22–32
- **McKenna, H.P.**, Keeney, S., Hasson, F., (2009) Health care managers perspectives on new nursing and midwifery roles: perceived **impact** on patient care and cost effectiveness. *Journal of Nursing Management*. Vol 17(5), 627–635.