



EASA
ARTS MEET SCIENCES
COLLOQUIUM
WINTER SEMESTER 2025-2026

December 12, 2025/06.00p.m.

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Research Impact: Reflections of the Past and Visions of the Future

No researcher wants to see the results of their research languishing on library shelves or being unknown by their peers and those who would benefit from the findings. Rather, they want to see their research having impact on society, the economy, culture, health or quality of life.

Increasingly, governments are encouraging researchers to show the benefits of their investigations. They believe it is not unreasonable to ask those whose research is undertaken at public expense to account for and provide some evidence of its impact. As it becomes more important globally, the traditional metrics such as published papers and conference presentations are beginning to be regarded as only providing a partial picture of academic impact.

The research impact agenda is with us and is not going to go away. In fact, it will play a greater role in research grant applications. It encourages researchers to think more about maximising the benefits of their research, and no reasonable person would deny that that is a good thing. That is the reason why it has been embraced by most academics, universities and governments.

This presentation will highlight these issues and take delegates on a journey from defining what is and what is not research impact, to examining how research impact was assessed in the past and in the present and how it will permeate nursing research in the future. The reasons why nurse researchers should pursue research impact will be explored and why this has to be planned at the outset of the research project.

In particular, how PhD students and postdoctoral nurses view and value research impact will be highlighted. Finally, the challenges to achieving and assessing research impact will be analysed. The presentation will be based on the principle that research without impact is a waste of time, money and energy.

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