Guidance for Researchers writing Impact Statements

Since April 2009 all Research Councils, with the exception of the MRC, have required the inclusion of an ‘Impact Summary’ and ‘Impact Plan’ with every application for research funding to demonstrate that applicants have considered the benefits of their research to the wider community. RCUK are implementing these plans because they need to provide evidence to the Treasury of the impact of research they fund, to secure continued and increased funding from central government.

Support for Researchers writing Impact Plans
This document will provide support in addition to the guidelines available on the Je-S website, and the advice available from your departmental Business Development Manager. We would remind researchers that the level of support available from the Business Development Managers will depend on the amount of time available for them to advise before the grant submission deadline.

Both the Impact Summary and Impact Plan should be written by the applicant and should focus on the research described within the application. The Research Councils have indicated that they will not accept generic proposals from institutions. Therefore, we cannot provide a generic pro forma to include in submissions, however, we have included a suggested template for Impact Plans as an appendix to this document and we hope that you will find it useful.

Whilst Impact Plans and Summaries are still relatively in their infancy, we have put together a ‘do’s and don’ts’ guide of common errors or good practice we are already coming across. Therefore we strongly urge you to read this before writing both your plan and summary. List is at Appendix 2.

It is important to note that the Research Councils will consider impact as a secondary criterion, quality always being the primary. Should the quality of applications to a call be exceptionally high, peer reviewers will move to consider secondary criterion such as impact. It is therefore in your best interests to write your Impact plan to the highest standard possible to distinguish your application from those of a similar quality rating.

A Summary of Guidelines from RCUK

What should I include in an Impact Plan?
The Impact Plan is your opportunity to describe how the potential impacts of this research will be realised. The Research Councils require up to 2 sides of A4 that should be attached to the grant submission.

The onus is on the applicant to consider and address the following, if appropriate;
1. methods for communications and engagement,
2. collaboration
3. exploitation in the most effective and appropriate manner
4. a projected timeline for impact to be felt in areas highlighted
5. illustrate how you intend to monitor and record impact for reporting purposes

Types of impacts could include:
- Quality of life - such as improved environment, social cohesion, health, education and cultural advances.
- Policy - the impact that research could have on the creation and application of government policy.
• **Business and commercial** - what impact could this research have on specified market places, potential financial and efficiency savings, new business and job creation.

• **Knowledge Transfer / Exchange** - two or multi-way process bringing together academics, users of research (e.g. businesses/charities, practitioners, policy makers) and wider groups and communities, to exchange ideas, evidence and expertise. This can be done through specific KT projects, CPD, consultancy, seminars and workshops.

• **Communications and engagement** - an explanation of how the research and its impacts will be communicated. This needs to be specific about which (non-academic) journals and conferences would be appropriate to reach the potential beneficiaries and why. Rather then general statements about the usual types of journals that would be used.

More information on Impact Plans can be found at the RCUK Je-S website.

**What should I include in an Impact Summary?**
The Impact Summary (4000 characters max) should address the following three questions:

- Who – outside the academic community - will benefit from this research?
- How will they benefit from this research?
- What will be done to ensure that they have the opportunity to benefit from this research?

The Impact Summary is intended to summarise the contents of your Impact plan and not reiterate them. It should be viewed as an opportunity to give a 'high level' summary (or overview) of your intended impact activities with the detail given in the Impact Plan attachment.

**Financial Support for Impact**
If there are any resource implications arising from the proposed impact activities, funding for those resources should be requested. The costs associated with those resources need to be included in the financial summary, in the Justification of Resources and in the Impact Plan itself.

Example costs could include:

- Staff costs connected to impact activity (note, staff could be recruited specifically to carry out impact, subject to justification)
- Printed or visual materials
- Website creation and maintenance
- Venue hire

Theoretically there is no maximum amount that can be applied for, as long as it is fully justifiable and standard fEC rules applied. Partner contributions to achieve Impact are welcomed and should be highlighted where applicable in the JeS form, in the Impact Plan and in an appended letter of support from the partner themselves.

**Individual Research Council Guidelines on Impact Requirements**
Below is a list of resources specific to individual Research Councils.

- **AHRC** Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines
- AHRC have also produced a document answering FAQ on Impact.
- **BBSRC** Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines
- The BBSRC now have a helpful section on the BBSRC website detailing all of their schemes that support impact and outlining social, economic and scientific impact case-studies.
- **EPSRC** Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines
EPSRC have also produced a Guidance document and further advice can be found in an article in EPSRC’s Connect Magazine and on the EPSRC website [insert hyperlink].

**ESRC Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines**
More information can be found on the ESRC’s website.

**NERC Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines**
NERC has some excellent guidelines, examples and templates for researchers which can be found on the NERC website. If these examples are proposing different elements to what the Research Council you are applying to, go with your Council’s guidelines.

**STFC Impact Plan and Summary Guidelines**
More information can be found on the STFC website.

**MRC** plan to make their research more accessible to the public and policy makers. Whilst research, medical and societal impacts are a key component for assessment of MRC applications, their application process has yet to introduce comprehensive amendments in response to the RCUK impact agenda. The MRC Strategic Plan 2009-2014 describes steps it will take in the future to make the MRC’s work more accessible to the public and policymakers, demonstrating the value of our research and highlighting our achievements both nationally and internationally.

If you have any questions or enquiries, please email your Business Development Manager.

**APPENDIX 1**

**Impact Plan – Suggested Elements of the Impact Plan**

**Proposal Title**

**Who are potential users to whom this work might be of interest?**

Try to involve research users/stakeholders early in your research, ideally from the outset in identifying the research questions and engage with them throughout the project. State the most obvious users or beneficiaries. Consider how the results of the research will be communicated to the scientific community and other stakeholders such as industry, government and public bodies. Include other groups or individuals within the University where possible.

**How will they benefit from the research?**

Provide details of how this group will utilise or benefit from this research. Which policy might be influenced by the research findings? How timely is the research? Which processes and practices could change as a result of the research findings?

**What will you do to engage or collaborate with this group?**

Describe your activities which will be used to interact with this group in the most effective manner. Some examples of activities are: secondments of researchers to stakeholders; workshops to provide communication training; and publications summarising the main outcomes and the creation of Knowledge Transfer Partnerships. Which relevant contacts networks are you already involved with which will help you achieve impact?

**What is the wider user interest?**

Consider users who may have interest in the project, but who need not be incorporated in to the research process. For example, the general public may be very interested in the outcomes and future applications of the research.

**How would you disseminate information to this group?**

Planning how you will disseminate information to wider users is a key part of the impact plan. For example, you might want to receive training to investigate how you could improve the communication of your results to the public and media. You can include methods of dissemination that you use routinely, for example public lectures or workshops with school children. Remember that dissemination alone is not regarded as impact in its own right. Therefore any dissemination activity needs to include a way of gathering feedback from the users: e.g. counting visits to a website, questionnaire feedback from a workshop and follow-up a few months after to establish if the workshop has resulted in change of practice.
How could you provide Measures and Timescales of the activities which will achieve impact?
Include ways you might measure and evaluate the success of your activities. How would you establish what change has been effected by your project; e.g. how would you find out about policy changes, changes in practice? You may also mention plans for commercialisation activities towards the end of the grant. Consider when the most appropriate times are to focus on impact activities during the project.

**Summary of Resources**
Provide only a brief summary of the resources required: full details should be included in the Financial Resources and Justification of Resources sections of the main JeS pro forma.

**APPENDIX 2**

**Dos and Don’ts**

DON’T have an identical summary and impact plan. RC’s can spot cut and paste jobs!
DO ask for additional financial resource to achieve impact if required
DON’T claim impact in an area where there isn’t one e.g. if no wealth will be generated, feel free to say so, just illustrate as to why
DO write the impact plan first and then the summary after – it will make the summary section much easier to complete
DON’T make generic statements but focus on what you will do to achieve maximum impact the impact plan should be about action
DO make use of University or Research Council training to help achieve impact eg for public engagement or working with the media
DON’T cite journal publications as a method of achieving impact – that should be in the Academic Beneficiaries section
DO use the web to disseminate your work if appropriate but make clear how you will direct your stakeholders (public, policy holders etc) to its existence (e.g. publications in popular magazines) – don’t assume that if you build it, they will come!
DON’T cite relationships with individuals or organisations you have no intention of making contact with but you think it will ‘look good’ to the Research Council
DO view impact as an opportunity!! See it as a way to inspire and show off all the hard work you are doing!
DO involve research users/stakeholders from the outset of defining your research questions and all through the life of the project, if appropriate.

Please find a useful diagram overleaf concerning Impact.
(Source: [http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/apply/impact/achieving-impact.aspx](http://www.bbsrc.ac.uk/funding/apply/impact/achieving-impact.aspx))