

What is research impact and why does it matter?

MARCH 2023

What is research impact?

How to find your impact?

Where your research can be put into practice and benefit someone or something.

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graph TD; A[Where your research can be put into practice and benefit someone or something.] --> B[Who benefits?]; A --> C[How might they benefit?];
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Who benefits?

How might they benefit?

What is research impact?

REF definition:

‘the effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, **beyond academia.**’

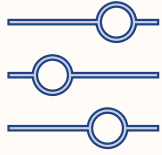
What is research impact?

Beyond academia is one of the key points.

Research impact is separate from academic impact (for example, publishing in high-impact journals). It tracks the change and benefits caused by your research outside of HE contexts.

When mapping and evaluating your impact, these changes must be **causally linked** to your research.

Types of impact



Impact can be achieved in many different settings.

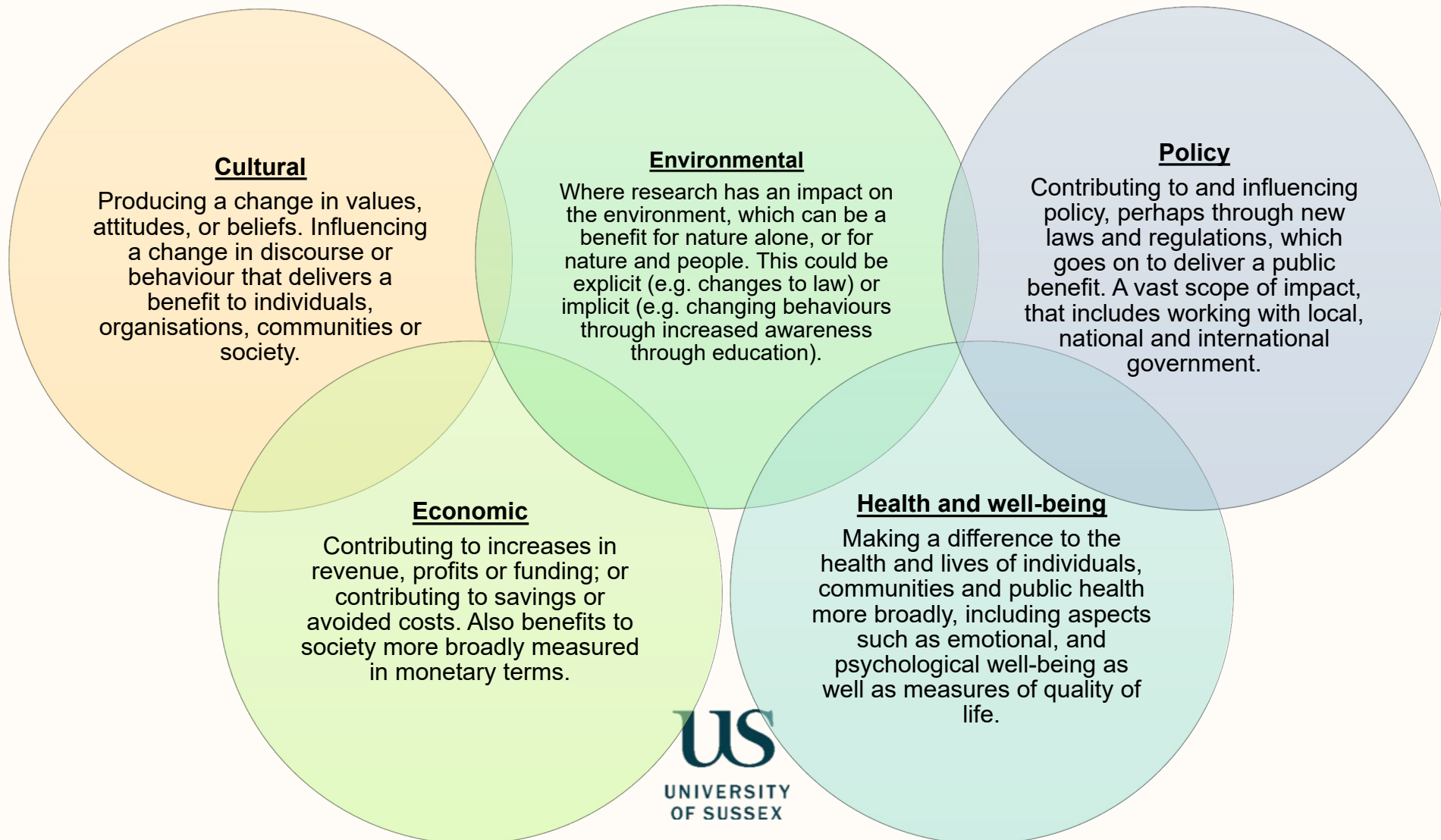


There may be some that you are more naturally inclined to due to the nature of your research, but you might be surprised where you can make an impact.



Cross-disciplinary collaboration has been shown to produce some of the strongest research impact. Recent work by the NCACE has shown that 'arts and culture' impact was evidenced across all UOAs in REF2021, with 11% of Physics impact case studies relating to arts and culture.

Types of impact



Types of impact

Impact includes, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:

- the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding
- of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
- in any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

Impact includes the reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects.

From *REF 2021 Guidance on Submissions*, para 298

Difference between engagement and impact

Engagement can take many forms:

- Media (i.e. Research featured on a documentary; appearing in the news or on radio; debates; blog posts)
- Events (i.e. public engagement events, roundtables, workshops, non-academic conferences)
- Advisory (i.e. Contributions to parliamentary inquiries, reports, debates, boards, committees and groups etc.)
- Dissemination (i.e. policy or research briefs; reports; online resources)
- Collaborations with businesses (i.e. Industry secondments, consultancy, commissioned research, co-run trials)

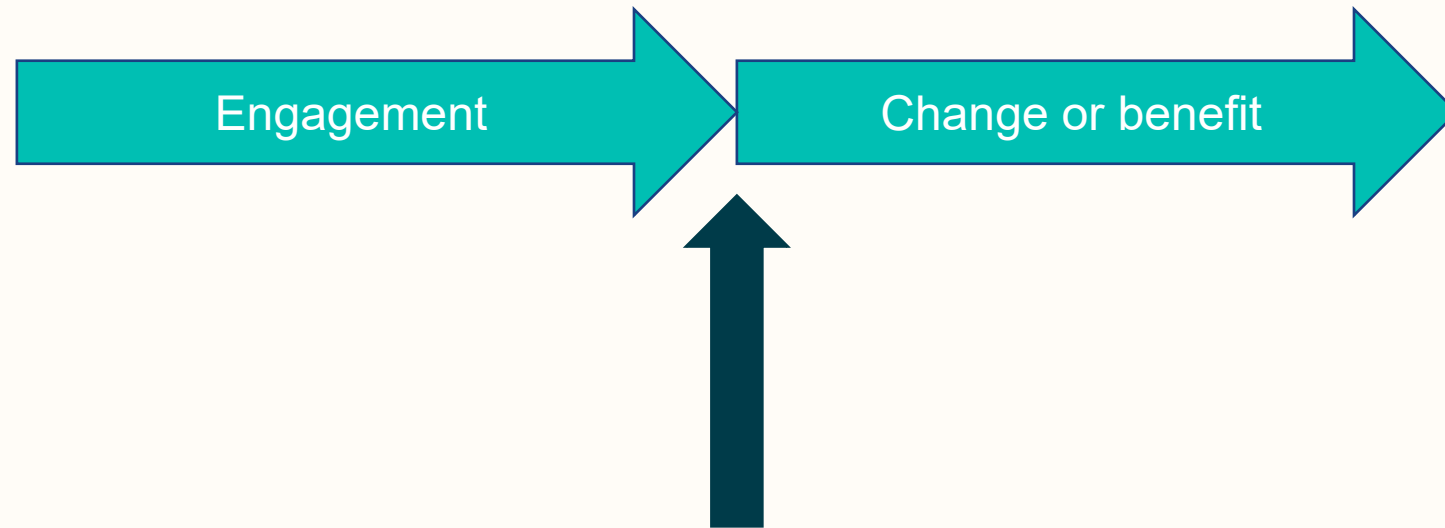
But these are not impact in themselves.

Impact is what happens next and the difference that these engagements have made.

We want to know who listened and understood something that they didn't before because of your research and engagement?

And how did that change in understanding affect and benefit others?

Difference between engagement and impact



The point of impact

Ongoing process

Long timeframes.

No deadlines but
not something to
think about last
minute.

Work together with
various colleagues
(school-based impact
support, IBP,
Policy@Sussex,
SSRP) to think about
different ways you
might be able to
make an impact.

Be aware that impact
may not materialise
quickly, easily or ever
(it is largely out of our
control!)

Think about
impact at the start
of a project.

Planning is
crucial.

Keep track of
evidence as you go.

Questions and answers (1/2)



Why does research impact matter?

Why do research impact?



It is an increasing requirement in grant applications.



The chance to see how your research makes a difference.



Asset to career development, increasingly included in recruitment and promotion criteria.



Impact can feed back into your research, generate new collaborations and new ideas.



Impact has steadily been given a higher importance by REF. In REF2021, it was worth 25% of the total outcome.



It can foster relationships and collaborations both with academic colleagues and external partners.

Impact in UK Higher Education

There are increasing expectations from funders that researchers will demonstrate the impact of their work.



‘Research questions should generate knowledge that leads to a shift in understanding or delivers new insight into how human life and health work’



‘Proposals must clearly demonstrate throughout how the potential impacts of the research within and beyond academia will be realised [...] you should consider methods for communications, engagement and collaboration to increase the likelihood of achieving impacts’



‘We ask you to consider impact when you apply for ESRC funding. [...] The resources you apply for in your plan to enable impact are a vital component of your overall research project’



What is the REF?

- REF = Research Excellence Framework;
- UK's national exercise of research assessment, determining allocation of mainstream QR to HEIs and producing reputational indicators of research quality;
- All research-active UK HEIs make a submission;
- A peer-review exercise conducted by discipline-based panels, mostly made up of academics (plus some industry-based impact assessors);
- Most recent REF was REF2021 (results were published May 2022). Next REF expected c. 2027-8.

How is impact assessed?

Impact is assessed by impact case studies which articulate a narrative of the link between the impact and underpinning research.

It must be based on research conducted at the submitting institution. The research can be from a longer period than the eligibility period for outputs in REF, though the impact must have been achieved within the REF period, e.g. research since 2000 in REF2021, though impact must have been achieved between 2013 and 2020.

Still waiting for details on the next REF, but it is likely not going to change in terms of format.

The impact case study

Summary of impact

- This is a short but clear description of beneficiaries and the benefit of your impact.

Underpinning research

- This is a narrative of the research that underpins your impact.

A detailed description of the impact

- This is the main narrative where you will detail the reach and significance of the impact created.

Details of the evidence supporting the impact

- This might include outcomes data, testimonials, formal records, published documents, survey feedback, public acknowledgements, etc.

How is impact assessed?



The **significance** and **reach** of the impact is assessed in the REF.



REF should not be your (or our) end goal.



It should be about making a difference, however big or small.

Where to start?

Think about what problem or opportunity your research could address.

Think about who your research might benefit or who is interested in your research, and go talk to them!

Find out why they are interested and how they can help you understand the change that your research can achieve.

Find out what their needs or challenges are and find out together what benefits your research might bring about.

You'll also develop relationships with people who can be your future collaborators.

Think about what types of activities are best suited to engaging with these collaborators.

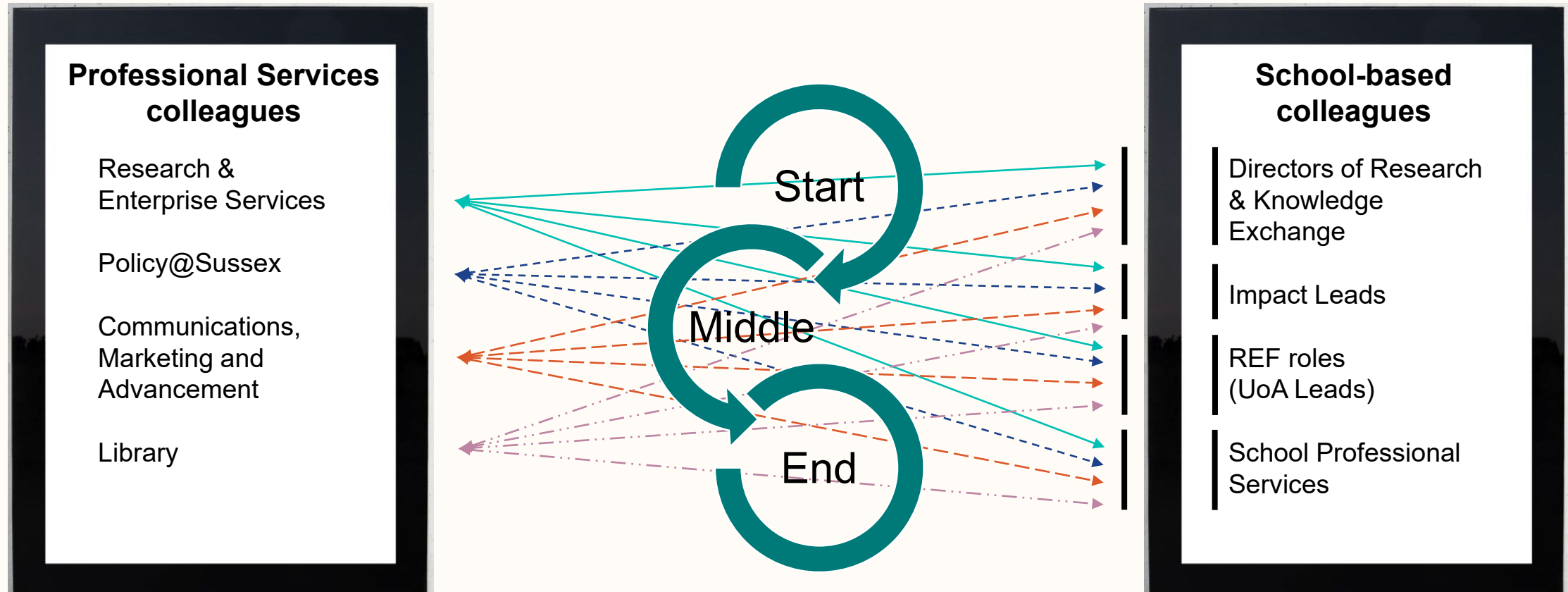
Build relationships with colleagues. Research presented by Research England has shown that some of the clearest and best impacts have come from interdisciplinary research.

Impact is a long-term process and there is no deadline, so start now!

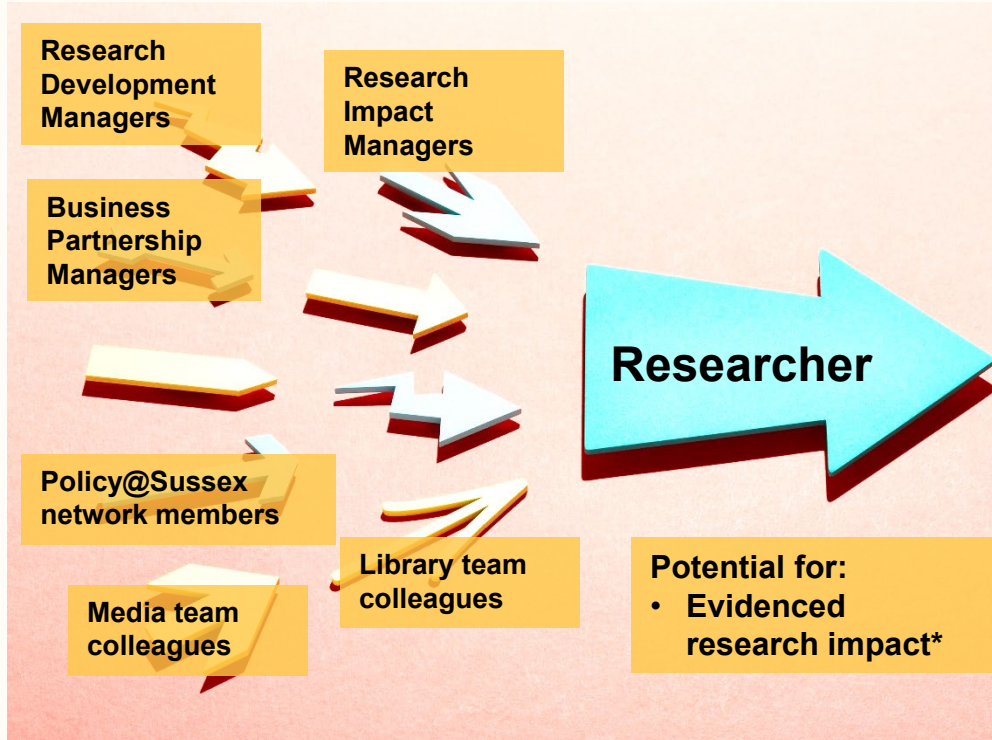


Working together and
support for research impact

Getting research impact support right

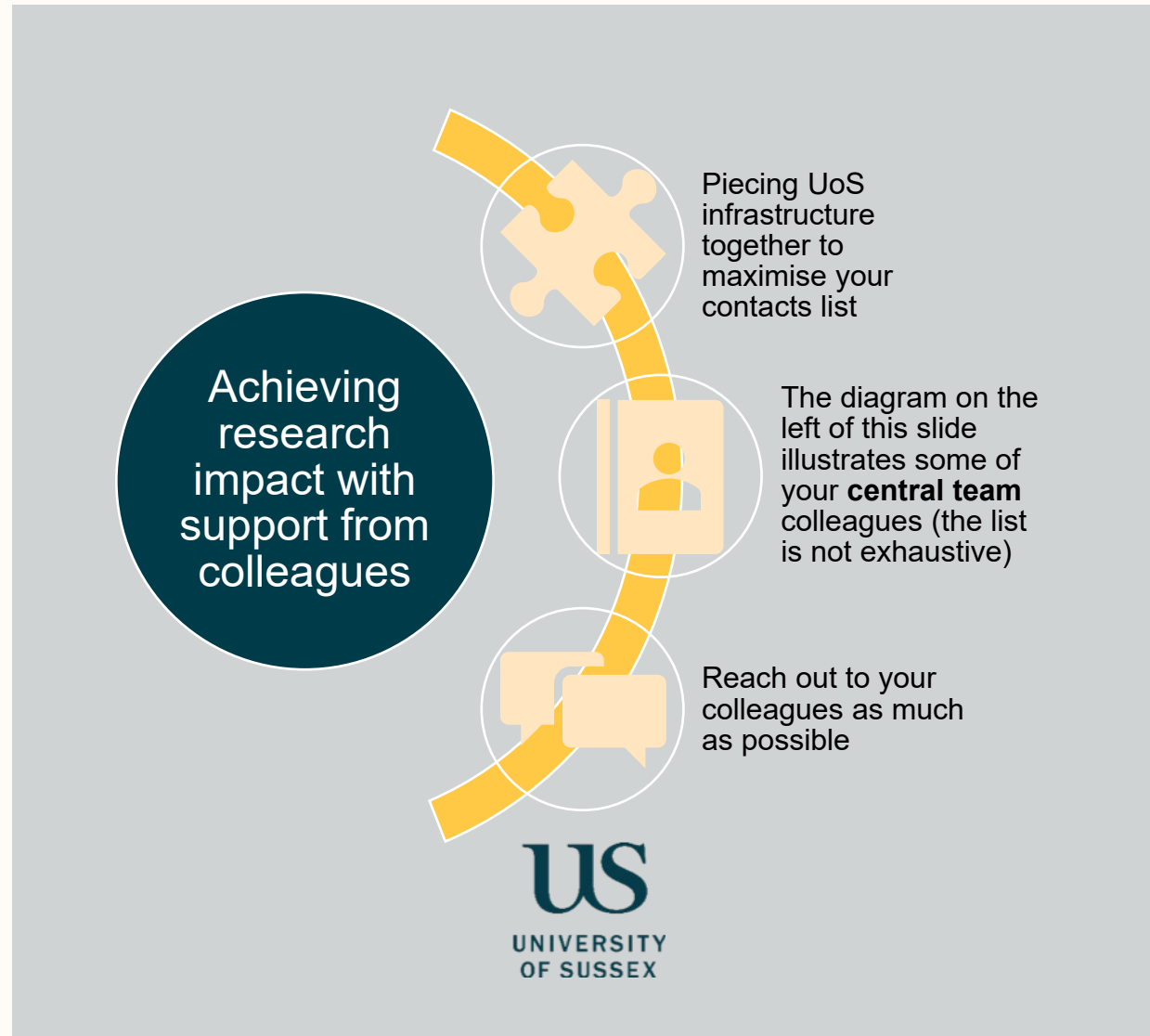


You and your central team contacts



*Potential also for:

- More funding opportunities
- New collaborations
- Influencing policy and monitoring your influence
- Further internal and external communications
- Further library service support

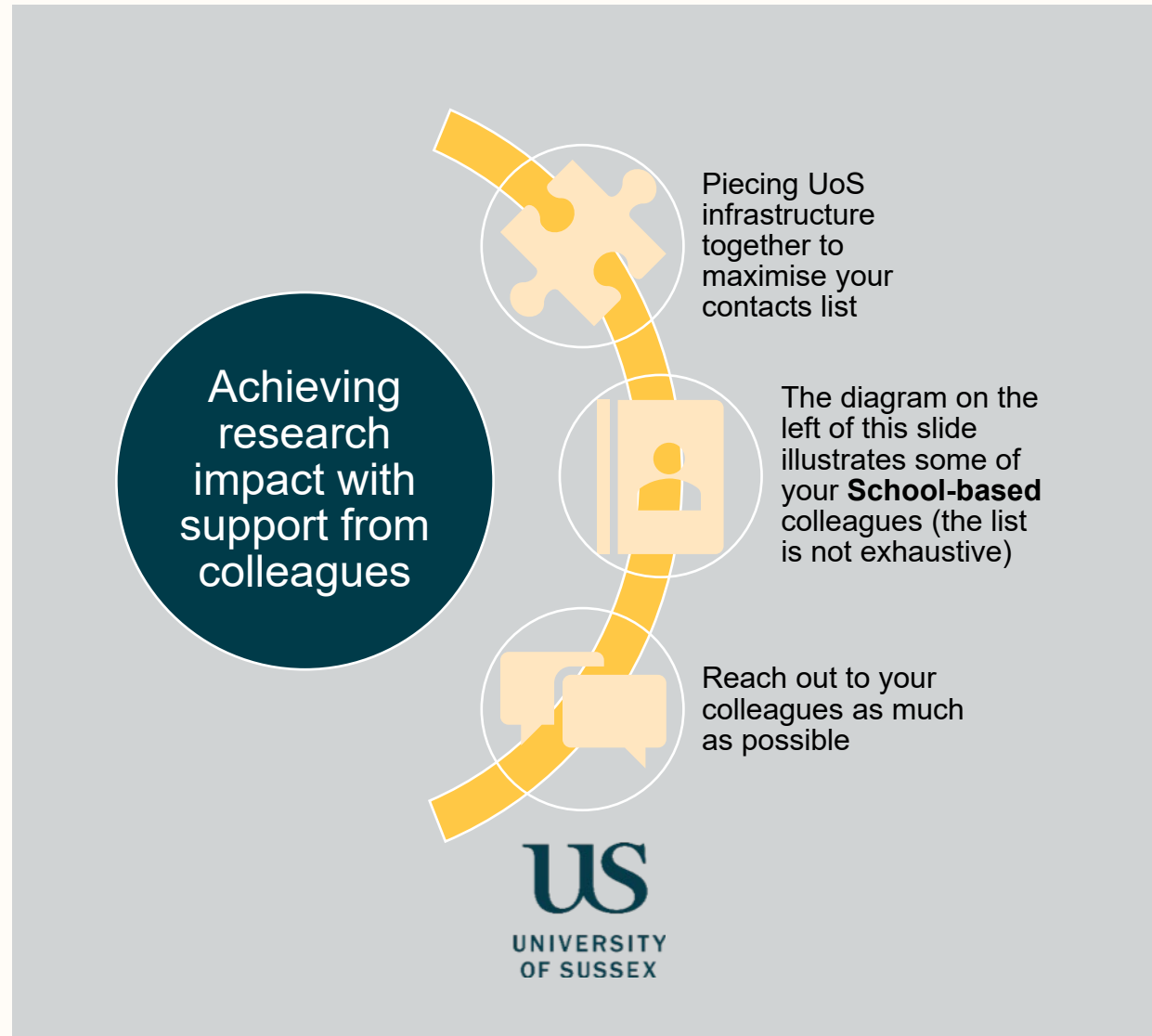


You and your School-based contacts



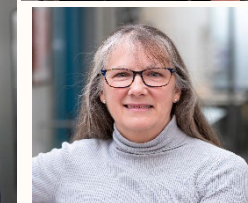
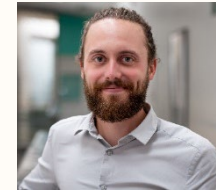
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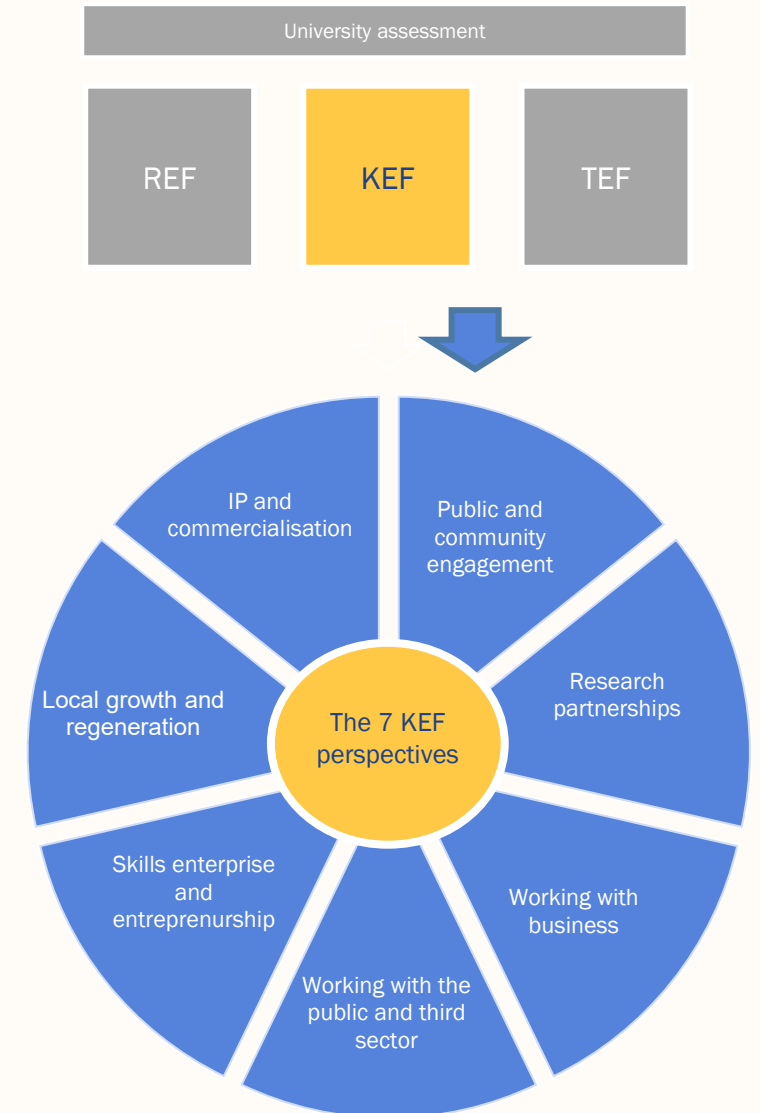
Innovation and Business Partnerships Team

- Business Partnerships
- IP and commercialisation
- Consultancy Services Manager for personal consultancy, facilities, equipment hire and off the shelf services
- Knowledge Transfer Partnerships
- Special projects e.g. Net Zero / ERDF RISE / Sussex Innovation
- KEF reporting & HEIF

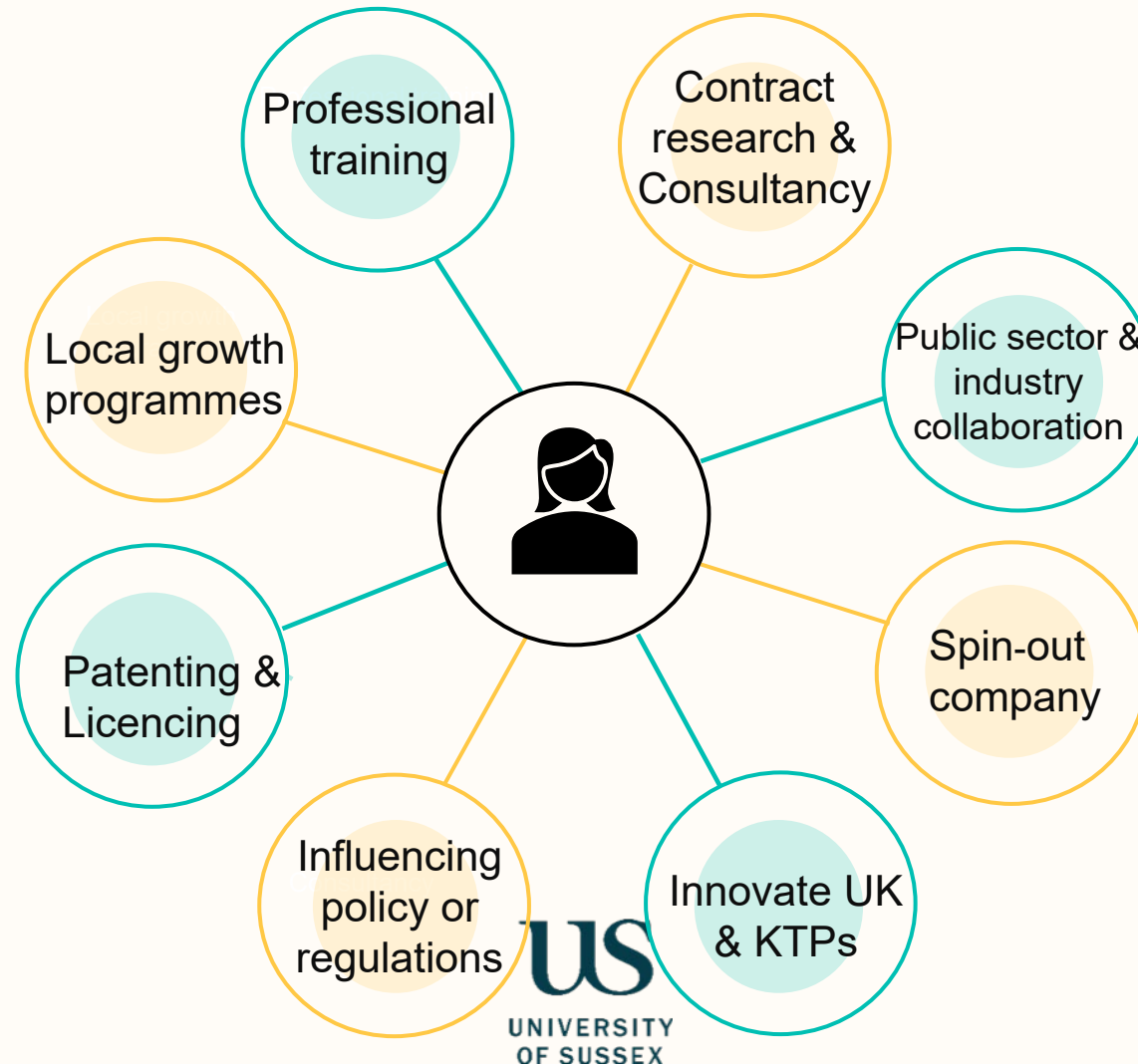


The Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF)

- Research England measures 7 perspectives of KE via the KEF (some aspects of KE will be assessed in REF, e.g., through Impact Case Studies)
- The KEF is the third 'pillar' alongside the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), through which UK University performance is assessed
- HE-BCI-S data feeds into our KEF performance assessment on 6 perspectives and determines how much Higher Education Innovation Fund (HEIF) we receive (our current allocation is £4.32M)
- Public and Community Engagement is assessed solely via a self-assessment narrative
- **PVC R&E, DPVC (KE) and IBP submit information required for KEF and HEIF annually. Working with DRaKEs across all schools.**



What sort of activities count for KE?



Putting research at the centre of policymaking

- A network of Professional Services staff from across the University
- Supporting academics to use their research to influence public policy – identifying stakeholders, finding opportunities, developing engagement plans, communicating with policymakers and influencers
- Core team of three – Alex Waddington, Alice Tofts and Tessa Russell
- Wider network of staff within the schools and central teams
- Contact policyteam@sussex.ac.uk for information and to sign up to newsletter of policy engagement opportunities

Questions and answers (2/2)

Feedback and resources

Feedback form will be coming soon alongside a link to our internal resources on the RIQI webpage!