

RCUK Impact Requirements

Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently asked questions about Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact (formally known as Impact Plans). Please see page 8 for an [index](#) of the enclosed frequently asked questions.

Why do RCUK consider demonstrating and maximising the impact of research to be significant?

Each year the Research Councils UK invest around £3 billion in research and research training in UK covering the full spectrum of academic disciplines, which has a huge impact on the wellbeing and economy of the UK.

Working together with our wider communities and other partners, we want to encourage researchers to be actively involved in thinking about how they will achieve excellence with impact and to explore the pathways for realising impacts. One way of doing this is through the implementation of the Academic Beneficiaries, Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact (formally known as Impact Plan) within the Research Council application and assessment process.

At the application stage we do not expect applicants or peer reviewers to be able to predict the economic or societal impacts that research will achieve. However, we want to encourage applicants to consider and explore, in ways that are appropriate given the nature of the research they are proposing to conduct, potential pathways to impact, for example through engagement or collaboration with partners.

The following principles define, in broad terms, the approach and expectations of the Research Councils:

- Excellent research with impact is central to Research Council activities,
- The onus rests with research applicants to consider and demonstrate how they would achieve excellence with impact,
- Research Council guidance and assessment procedures aim to:
 - maximise both excellence and impact, and
 - ensure user perspectives are strongly represented

What is meant by ‘impact’?

Research Councils UK (RCUK) describe impact in the following ways:

Academic impact

The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory and application.

When applying for Research Council funding via Je-S, pathways towards academic impact are expected to be outlined in the Academic Beneficiaries section.

Economic and societal impacts

The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. Economic and societal impacts embraces all the extremely diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:

- Fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the United Kingdom
- Increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy
- Enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.

When applying for Research Council funding via Je-S, pathways towards economic and societal impacts are expected to be outlined in the Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact. The [RCUK Statement of Expectation on Economic and Societal Impacts](#) outlines considerations that we expect every funding recipient to undertake.

Does this focus on impacts and benefits imply a shift away from blue-skies to applied research?

No, the aim is not to change the type of research you undertake, but to encourage you to think about the potential impacts of your research from the outset and the resources required to carry out the knowledge exchange/impact activities from the outset. The Research Councils Royal Charter have, since 1994, included a requirement for knowledge transfer and value for money – this is not a recent change of mission.

The Research Councils recognise that blue-skies research is essential in underpinning future academic advancements and they will continue to fund high quality blue-skies research. Research excellence remains the primary criterion for making decisions on funding.

What are the expectations on my institution, department or research organisation in relation to impact?

We expect organisations to develop a greater understanding of the importance of impact and help disseminate this to their staff, for instance, through guidance to researchers in preparation of their applications.

The Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact focus on potential impacts. How will the Research Councils enable researchers to identify changes or new impacts which emerge during the funded research?

We recognise that research impacts can become manifest at any stage in the research life cycle and beyond, and can often stem from unexpected or unintended outcomes. Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact are designed to encourage researchers to start thinking about potential beneficiaries and pathways to impact whilst planning their projects. Hopefully, this will encourage researchers to make new connections and partnerships with relevant businesses and organisations, and to put in place resources and activities which then allow them to take opportunities when they arise.

How will the Research Councils monitor progress against the activities proposed in the Pathway to Impact?

Research Councils' interim and final reporting processes allow researchers to record emerging impacts, and to update progress on the pathways to potential impacts identified in their applications. We also hope that researchers will continue to share the impacts of their research with us after the completion of their projects.

How do Pathways to Impact relate to the Research Outcomes project?

The Research Outcomes project is a cross-Council initiative to capture quantitative and qualitative outputs and outcomes from the research we fund. This is a complementary project but will not be a system used to monitor and report against Pathways to Impact. The project is expected to be fully operational by the end of 2011. Further information is outlined within the [RCUK Research Outcomes Project](#) web-pages.

Application Process

What do I need to write within my application?

Within the Je-S application process, there are several areas where applicants have the opportunity to add to their Case for Support by detailing the potential impacts of their work and pathways towards realising those.

Impact Summary (4000 characters): should cover potential economic and societal impacts and pathways towards realising that by addressing the following questions:

- o Who might benefit from this research?
- o How might they benefit from this research?

Examples of economic and societal impacts are described in (reference typology).

In making your case, you should consider and explore any potential impacts of the research on society and the economy. Examples of types of economic and societal impacts are described in the [Typology of Impacts](#).

Note: The Impact Summary may be published to demonstrate potential impacts of Research Council funded research. Please ensure confidential information is not included in this section.

Pathways to Impact (Up to 2 sides of A4 attachment): is primarily for detailing the activities which will help develop potential economic and societal impacts. It should continue for the two questions addressed within your Impact Summary by addressing the following question:

- o What will be done to ensure that potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to engage with this research?

Plans for engaging with academic audiences may be included but only where these form part of the critical pathway towards economic and societal impact. This pathway must be clearly articulated.

Please see the [Je-S Impact Requirements help-text](#) and Research Council specific guidance for further information.

Are there any standard expectations of the types of beneficiaries and activities that should be contained within the Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact?

No. The Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact should be tailored, relevant and appropriate, given the specific nature and focus of the proposed research. The Research Councils recognise that impacts from research can be generated through a range of diverse pathways, can take many forms, can become manifest at different stages in the research process and beyond and can be promoted through many different mechanisms. Innovative and creative approaches to engaging beneficiaries and fostering impact are strongly encouraged.

The Research Councils UK [Typology of Research Impacts](#) provides an indication of the potential range of impacts that can be generated from research. The [checklist for completing Pathways to Impact](#) provides an indication of potential beneficiaries of research and activities/pathways to impact.

My impacts are achieved through sharing outcomes with other academics – does this count?

We expect all the research we fund to make a significant contribution to relevant research fields and to include effective plans for communication with, and dissemination to, academic audiences.

The Academic Beneficiaries and Case for Support sections of the application form will enable applicants to elaborate on how their research will contribute to advancing relevant research fields, how they will engage with other researchers in the field and how the research outcomes will be disseminated to interested research communities.

The Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact are to outline wider beneficiaries of the research, for example the public sector, commercial private sector, third sector or the wider public in general. Plans for engaging

with academic audiences may be included but only where these form part of the critical pathway towards economic and societal impact. This pathway must be clearly articulated.

I publish papers and go to conferences: is this sufficient for my Pathways to Impact?

The dissemination of results is a pathway towards ensuring your research has an impact, but unless your research is of a very novel nature, then such activity is not sufficient. You will need to consider the wider potential of your research in relation to industry, the public sector, government policy, the third sector, the general public and the wider user base.

How specific do I need to be in identifying beneficiaries for my research? Can I identify groups/sectors e.g. charities/third sector, or would I have to identify a specific named organisation as a beneficiary?

You can identify groups/sectors as potential beneficiaries for your work. If you are able to identify a specific named organisation, this would be helpful. However, we appreciate that in some cases it may be too early for this to happen.

Can I fulfil the requirement for considering potential impacts if my research is expected to be of interest to people outside the UK?

Yes, many impacts, like the underlying research, are international in nature. There is no requirement that impacts should be UK oriented.

Does this mean everyone has to work in partnership with beneficiaries and stakeholders?

Collaboration and partnerships have to be at the appropriate level to reflect the nature of the research being proposed. For instance, proposing collaborations that have little connection with the research project may weaken the case. However, where there is a clear link to the research, there is an expectation that the researcher(s) establish a relationship with the key stakeholder(s), as a means to enhance the potential impacts of the research.

I have an idea of what the impact of my research will be: is it sufficient to explore just this in my Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact?

No, you will need to explore how the impacts are going to be achieved as well as what the potential impacts are going to be. This includes how you are going to engage with beneficiaries and you should consider discussing this aspect with any beneficiaries already involved in your project.

What will happen if I don't complete the Impact Summary and don't submit the Pathways to Impact attachment? What if my research has no potential economic/societal impacts?

You must complete the Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact in order to complete and submit your application. Je-S will not allow you to submit your proposal until these sections have been completed.

It is expected that having reviewed the guidance and the list of types of impacts, applicants will be able to outline their Pathways to Impact. Please note, the maximum length is two pages but it is not expected that all applications will require this level of detail.

If you feel that you have considered all of the above and that exploring activities aimed at enhancing impact is not applicable to your research, then you must use the Pathways to Impact attachment to explain your reasoning. Please reflect the same argument within your Impact Summary. This will be reviewed with the rest of the proposal.

Note: The Impact Summary may be published to demonstrate potential impacts of Research Council funded research. Please ensure confidential information is not included in this section.

What if my research is far removed from potential beneficiaries in society, but could have economic/societal impacts if taken forward by other academics?

Plans for engaging with academic audiences may be included but only where these form part of the critical pathway towards economic and societal impact. This pathway must be clearly articulated.

Can public engagement activities be regarded as pathways to potential economic and societal impacts?

Yes, provided that you clearly articulate and explain the specific contribution from these activities to the pathways to economic and societal impact.

It is recognised that engaging the public in your research can improve the quality of research and its impact, raise your profile, allow the public to act as informed citizens, inspire the next generation of researchers and develop your skills. Therefore, project-specific public engagement activities which are carried out by the personnel involved in the project and are tailored, relevant and appropriate given the specific nature and focus of the proposed research are valid to help create potential impact.

Public engagement activities should involve two way aspects of listening and interaction with the public and can happen throughout the life course of a research grant. Public engagement might take place before your research begins to help shape your research question, during the research grant as part of the research process or at the end of the grant to feedback on the findings and potentially influence the future research portfolio. Types of public engagement activities may include science festivals, debates, discussion, and consultation with public audiences appropriate to your research project such as patient groups or civil society organisations.

Costs may be sought for these activities providing that the activities are specific to the project and you can demonstrate the value of public engagement to the project. Please refer to the requesting resources FAQ for further information.

Further information including “What’s in it for me?: The Benefits of Public Engagement to Researchers” is available at www.rcuk.ac.uk/per

Can I request resources to fund the activities detailed in my Pathways to Impact?

Research Councils provide resources to enable impact generating activities in ways that are appropriate to each research project.

Applicants should request and justify the **project-specific** resources needed to achieve their Pathways to Impact. However the STFC runs separate funding schemes to support impact activities: applicants to STFC (a) should specify how they plan to obtain resources (*e.g.* STFC schemes) and (b) should note that they may spend 1% of total grant value on public engagement if savings can be found. Therefore, applicants should not request funding for impact activities in their grant application.

Type of resources requested:

You can request anything that is eligible under fEC, so long as it is **specific to that particular project and is justified**. General activities that are arranged at the level of the department, school or university (for instance, industry open days) would not be eligible. The quality of the justification and the relevance of the resources will be assessed by peer review.

Patent costs and other IP costs:

These costs are NOT eligible because universities receive funding to support their commercialisation efforts through the dual support system. IPR tends to be covered by someone's contract of employment, and Research Councils delegate both the responsibility and the benefits to the individual and their employer. As well as patents, also applies to licensing agreements, and establishment of spin-outs.

Specialist knowledge transfer staff:

Our view is that knowledge transfer, public engagement or tech transfer office staff are NOT the equivalent of research staff and should NOT therefore attract estates and indirect costs, these staff should be treated in the same way as computing staff and so on, in that, as long as they are NOT included in the calculation of the indirect costs, they can be a direct charge to the grant. If they are included in the indirect costs, they cannot be a direct charge, as this would be double funding. The key point is that they should be available as a project-specific resource used at the discretion and direction of the Principal Investigator. They could be involved in such things like completing an exploitation agreement between the collaborating partners or arranging public consultations. In the case of the STFC, funding through separate schemes is available, allowing staff to be recruited to work specifically on impact activities.

Public engagement activities:

Societal impact is one of the key areas covered under the `Impact` umbrella and so it is legitimate for researchers to request resources to undertake PE activities. We certainly wouldn't expect every research grant to contain a large scale PE project but they could include, for example:

- training in public engagement or communications
- communicating the research to the public
- consulting and working with a particular user group where there might be a tangible relevant output
- for areas with potential societal or ethical impact, researchers might want to find out a bit more about current public attitudes and hopes/concerns for this area

Peer Review Process

The excellence of the research remains the primary criterion for funding. Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact are one of a number of other criteria taken into account during the peer review process and by panels in prioritising applications.

How do Pathways to Impact affect funding decisions within the peer review process?

The primary criterion within the peer review process across the Research Councils is excellent research. This has always been the case and remains unchanged. As such, problematic research with excellent Pathways to Impact will not be funded. There are a number of other criteria that are assessed within research proposals, and Pathways to Impact is now one of those (along with e.g. management of the research, academic beneficiaries).

Reviewers are not asked to use an algorithm to give a particular weighting to this element. However, Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact provide additional information to reviewers when considering projects and are therefore taken into account when ranking proposals.

The peer review process considers the totality of evidence and allows judgements appropriate to the research call. This means when you have two equally excellent proposals a good Pathways to Impact could make a difference within the funding decision/funding process. There are circumstances where Pathways to Impact are more likely to affect funding decisions, for example:

- when engagement with research users and beneficiaries is an integral and essential part of the research, and
- where there are clear pathways to impact but these have not been addressed appropriately by the applicant.

The Research Councils UK reserve the right to withhold the award of grant until Pathways to Impact are of a standard appropriate for the project.

Who will assess my Impact Summary and Pathway to Impact? Will my Impact Summary and Pathway to Impact be assessed by academic reviewers?

Your Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact will be looked at by peer reviewers as part of your application. This process may include involvement of users and potential beneficiaries as well as academics. In looking at the Impact Summary and Pathways to Impact, reviewers will be asked to consider whether they are appropriate and justified in terms of the nature of the proposed research project and whether sufficient attention has been given to who the beneficiaries might be and appropriate ways to engage with them throughout the project.

What if my research is assessed as excellent but my Pathways to Impact is deemed not suitable?

Research Councils UK reserve the right to withhold the award of a grant until Pathways to Impact are of a standard appropriate for the project.

My research is very risky, but is innovative and could have massive impacts. How will this be handled?

The introduction of Impact Summaries and Pathways to Impact will not disadvantage risky or speculative research applications and is not intended to discourage research creativity. When thinking about the potential impacts of their work at the planning stage, applicants should consider what is reasonable and expected for research of this nature. A statement that demonstrates this has been considered and explores how this will continue to be considered during the course of the research will be expected.

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