Impact through university business collaboration

*New challenges for researchers*

Dr Catriona Manville
Eurolics workshop on University Business collaboration
26 November 2015
Outline

• The value of impact of academic research
• 2 examples
RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit public policy research institute helping to improve policy and decisionmaking through research and analysis.
RAND Europe have a track record in research evaluation.
What is impact?

“an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia”

- REACH
- SIGNIFICANCE
Why is impact important?

- **Advocacy**: To demonstrate the benefits of research to government and society.
- **Allocation**: To support the development of effective investment strategies.
- **Analysis**: To answer questions about ‘what works’ and make improvements based on data.
- **Accountability**: To promote responsible management of research funds.
Evaluation of the impact element of the Research Excellence Framework 2014

Role of research users
The UK uses a dual funding system to fund research conducted in universities.
The Research Excellence Framework 2014

- £1.7bn funding allocated across the UK
- 154 universities assessed
- 1,911 submissions produced
The Research Excellence Framework 2014

Outputs
Research environment
Research impact
The assessment of impact

- Bibliometrics
- Surveys
- Economic analysis
- Case studies
Overall objectives of the evaluation

- Review the challenges and perceived benefits of the methodology being implemented
- Determine whether it is fit for purpose in meeting the aim for assessing impact
- To inform the development of future REF exercises
What is a research user?

• I am defining them as the ‘beneficiaries of research’

• These can be divided into:

  - Public
  - Private
  - 3rd Sector
Role of research users throughout the process

• Research process
  – Collaborating with
  – Providing an outlet for the uptake of academic knowledge

• Submission process
  – Providing evidence of impact for case studies
  – Providing testimonials

• Assessing impact
  – Reviewing and scoring impact case studies and strategies
Role of the research user in preparing the impact case studies
The benefits to research users of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual interviewees</th>
<th>Organisation interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Direct benefits</td>
<td>Indirect benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Relationship building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishment of a new collaboration</td>
<td>Demonstrate the value of the HEI’s research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interesting to be part of the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having case studies to explicitly refer to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefit of reviewing and affirming relationships was also highlighted by the academic community.
HEIs perceived that the submission process had put an undue burden on research users.

[Academics] ‘worried that pestering people they collaborate with could jeopardise their relationship’. (HEI perspective)

‘it was a manageable task’… Requests were not overly onerous’ (Research user)

Academics felt that this exercise has changed the dynamics of relationships. There are divided views on the effect of this; ranging from that it has been productive to damaging.
HEIs perceived that the submission process had put an undue burden on research users although this was not their experience.

[Academics] ‘worried that pestering people they collaborate with could jeopardise their relationship’. (HEI perspective)

‘it was a manageable task’… Requests were not overly onerous’ (Research user)

Academics felt that this exercise has changed the dynamics of relationships. There are divided views on the effect of this; ranging from that it has been productive to damaging.

Research users commented on the positive benefits of strengthening and reaffirming relationships.

Users estimated it took 2 hours to provide a testimonial, and up to 4 hours, where additional data was required.
Challenges of engaging research users in preparing impact case studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual interviewees</th>
<th>Organisational interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant challenges</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Problem of contribution/attribution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fact it was a new exercise</td>
<td>Lack of institutional memory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Ability to identify the right person in the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data retrospectively</td>
<td>Being asked for commercially sensitive information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investing the right amount of time and energy</td>
<td>The time and effort required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting sales data</td>
<td>Ensuring consistency in all evidence provided across the organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimating the monetary value of research and the magnitude of impact</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Consequences of the process

• The impact case studies (REF3b) submitted may not be representative of the actual impact of research in the sector.

Sufficiency of evidence

- Movement of individuals in HEIs/research user organisations
- Commercially sensitive or classified evidence
- Certain types of impact indicating ‘softer’ change
Role of the research user in assessing the impact case studies
27% of individuals who reviewed the impact element were research users

At least 1 academic and 1 research user reviewed each case study
The combination of perspectives was important

Research users were particularly important in qualifying the value of some impact statements
Bringing together different perspectives of academics and research users was seen to be successful and valuable.

‘It was a stroke of genius to get people together to get that consensus generated.’
Research users found benefits in building networks and raising awareness of research taking place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact assessors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking/collaboration (44/74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic research (37/74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process of assessment (27/74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breadth of impact (10/74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEI impact/engagement strategies (9/74)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The burden of involvement was a significant challenge to engaging research users

11 days (median)
7 – 15 days (inter-quartile range)
Characteristics of high-performing research units

Work done by RAND Europe in collaboration with the Policy Institute at King’s
We identified five key themes associated with high performing research units...

People
We identified five key themes associated with high performing research units...

Leadership, culture and values
We identified five key themes associated with high performing research units…

Strategy and funding
We identified five key themes associated with high performing research units...

Collaboration and networks
We identified five key themes associated with high performing research units…

Institutional and departmental practice
…Which we organised into a conceptual model…
And made the following observations

**Box H:** Observations about characteristics of units with high research performance

A. In high-performing research units more of the staff have PhDs, professorial positions, international experience and externally funded salaries

B. High-performing research units prioritise recruiting the best and retaining them

C. High-performing research units provide training and mentorship programmes to develop staff, while offering rewards for strong performance

D. The leaders of high-performing research units have earned ‘accountable autonomy’ within their higher education institution

E. Staff within high-performing research units display a distinct ethos of social and ethical values

F. High-performing research units have strategies that are real, living and owned, and more than merely a written document

G. High-performing research units receive more income per researcher than the average research unit

H. High-performing research units enable and encourage researchers to initiate collaborations organically as opposed to using a top down approach
Collaboration and networks
High-performing research units enable and encourage researchers to initiate collaborations organically as opposed to using a top-down approach.

- Role of the individual in facilitating the collaboration
- Importance of partnering with high performers, rather than on geography
- Collaboration was thought to support impact
- Importance of discipline specificity
Strategy and funding
High-performing research units have strategies that are real, living and owned, and more than merely a written document

• Strategies can create alignment
  – Process is as important as the output

• Role of strategic themes groups
  – These are often themed across ‘grand challenges’
  – Aim to cross discipline and facilitate interdisciplinary responses to key global challenges
High-performing research units receive more income per researcher than the average research unit

‘All of these systems and processes, and even just making sure that you’re employing the very best staff, etc can only happen if you are assured of funding through research routes, through QR, HEIF, impact acceleration etc. The continuity of these funding routes are absolutely crucial to supporting impact, enterprise, bid writing and support for new grants etc’.
In high-performing research units more of the staff with international experience and externally funded salaries.