Engaging for Impact: An Exploration of Global Trends Affecting Academics’ Connections to Community

Wade Kelly
PhD Student
School of Information Studies
Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education (RIPPLE)
wadekelly.com
@wadekelly
research

engagement

impact
What is impact?

“It means an impact on the world outside of academia, as in, the world is changed as a result; .... And then the other completely different interpretation consistently with the idea of impact is academic progress.” – Robert, 47 year-old senior executive
Measures of Impact in Information Science

• Information science continues to use metrics to measure impact
  • Citation patterns (e.g., Hassan & Haddaway, 2013)
  • Scholarly networks (e.g., Liu, Zhang, & Guo, 2013)
  • Bibliometrics and webometrics (e.g., Thelwall, 2008)
  • Altmetrics (e.g., Bornmann, 2014; Sugimoto & Thelwall 2013; Urquhart & Dunn, 2013)
A definition of Societal Impact

The **demonstrable contribution** that research makes to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, **beyond contributions to academia**.

-- The Australian Research Council (2015)
Problem of Defining Societal Research Impact

- Few ideas generated about how best to measure societal impact
- Media reports, workshops, advisory meetings, etc. may be pathways to potential impact (or engagement activities), but do not provide evidence of impact
Major Societal Impact Initiatives

- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada “Storytellers”
- UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment of research including societal impact introduced 2014
- Pilot in Australia 2012
- Pilot in Australia 2017
- Engagement and Impact Assessment coupled with ERA 2018
The case studies provide a rich resource, demonstrating the breadth and depth of research impact – in a way that has not been revealed before. Universities claim changes and benefits to the economy, society culture, public policy and services, health, the environment and quality of life.

Jonathan Grant
We discovered the case studies contained more than 3,700 individual pathways to impact – thus presenting a real challenge to anyone interested in producing metrics on impact. Qualitative case studies capture the diverse connections between research and society and it’s difficult to reduce this diversity to numbers.

Jonathan Grant
The numerical evidence supporting claims for impact were also diverse and inconsistent, suggesting that the development of robust impact metrics is unlikely.

Jonathan Grant
Game-playing of the REF makes it an incomplete census

December 19, 2014 10.28pm AEDT

Author

Simon Marginson
Professor of International Higher Education, UCL

Disclosure statement

Simon Marginson does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.
At best, this gets everyone thinking about real connections with the users of research, which is one – though only one – of the starting points when producing the impact documentation. At worst, it leads to data that bears as much relation to reality as Soviet-era statements of output by Russian factories in response to government targets.

Simon Marginson

http://theconversation.com/game-playing-of-the-ref-makes-it-an-incomplete-census-35707
We are in danger of valuing most what can most easily be measured.

Anthony Kelly
It’s not just HASS, it’s pure math, experimental physics, etc.
The weighting for the impact assessment part of the REF was 20% of the total assessment – influencing the allocation of around £1.6 billion worth of public funding over the next five years.
On 7 December 2015 the Australian Government announced its *National Innovation and Science Agenda* (NISA). The new measures within NISA have been developed to assist in boosting the commercial returns of publicly-funded research.

The ARC will have an important role in delivering on some of these new measures, including the development and introduction of an impact and engagement assessment of Australian university research; and implementation of a continuous *Linkage Projects* scheme. ARC Chief Executive Officer, Professor Aidan Byrne has welcomed the new measures to be actioned by the ARC.

- [Research Engagement and Impact Assessment](#)
- [Continuous *Linkage Projects* scheme](#)

Any media statements issued relating to these two measures can be found in ‘Related Media’ below.

**Research Engagement and Impact Assessment**

The ARC has commenced consultation with the higher education and research sector, industry and other end-users of research to develop quantitative and qualitative measures of...
You should read it.
On 7 December 2015 the Australian Government announced its National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA). The new measures within NISA have been developed to assist in boosting the commercial returns of publicly-funded research.

The ARC will have an important role in delivering on some of these new measures, including the development and introduction of an impact and engagement assessment of Australian university research; and implementation of a continuous Linkage Projects scheme. ARC Chief Executive Officer, Professor Aidan Byrne has welcomed the new measures to be actioned by the ARC.

New! Consultation Paper released: Engagement and Impact Consultation Paper
- Word format (660KB) – PDF format (978KB)

- Research Engagement and Impact Assessment
- Continuous Linkage Projects scheme

Any media statements issued relating to these two measures can be found in ‘Related Media’ below.

Research Engagement and Impact Assessment

The ARC has commenced consultation with the higher education and research sector, industry and other end-users of research to develop quantitative and qualitative measures of...
Australian Research Council

Site under maintenance

Important notice: ARC website temporarily unavailable

Thank you for visiting the ARC website.

The ARC website is currently undergoing improvements and is unavailable at this moment. The ARC is working on restoring all services as quickly as possible. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.

The following services are still active and are not affected by this outage:

RMS Login
SEER Login
RMS Funding Announcements
ARC Grants Search

Should you require any information during this outage, please do not hesitate to contact the ARC Stakeholder Relations section who will be happy to help you—please email communications[@]arc.gov.au or 02 6287 6711.

General Contact Information

Phone: + 61 2 6287 6600
Fax: + 61 2 6287 6601
Email: info[@]arc.gov.au
ARC Engagement and Impact Consultation Paper

“A national engagement and impact assessment which will examine how universities are translating their research into economic, social and other benefits and incentivise greater collaboration between universities, industry and other end-users of research… run as a companion to Australia’s national evaluation of university research quality—Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA).”
“assessment and reporting of a university’s performance in both research engagement and impact will lead to greater collaboration between universities and research end-users and incentivise improved performance in the translation and commercialisation of research”
4.1 Parameters

The engagement and impact assessment will be developed within the following parameters:

- a retrospective (not prospective) assessment of research performance
- include 42 universities
- all research disciplines involved
- accounts for different disciplinary practices and does not advantage one discipline over another seeks to minimise the data collection burden on participating institutions
- is cost effective and makes use of the existing ARC systems to the greatest possible extent.
4.2 Model of assessment and guiding principles

The general model for the assessment that is being developed is for a:

- comprehensive engagement assessment of university research and
- impact assessment that exposes performance at institution and discipline level and the steps taken to achieve impact.
The assessment will...

1. Robust and objective
2. Internationally recognised
3. Comparability across disciplines
4. Not disincentivise interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research
5. Research relevant
6. Repeatable and verifiable
7. Time-bound
8. Transparent
9. Behavioural impact
10. Adaptable
Timeline

- 2016, consultations
- 2017, pilot
- 2018, full data collection and assessment in conjunction with ERA
Definitions and scope questions

• What definition of ‘engagement’ should be used for the purpose of assessment?
• What definition of ‘impact’ should be used for the purpose of assessment?
• How should the scope of the assessment be defined?
• Would a selective approach using case studies or exemplars to assess impact provide benefits and incentives to universities?
• If case studies or exemplars are used, should they focus on the outcomes of research or the steps taken by the institution to facilitate the outcomes?
• What data is available to universities that could contribute to the engagement and impact assessment?
  • Should the destination of Higher Degree Research students be included in the scope of the assessment?
  • Should other types of students be included or excluded from the scope of assessment (e.g. professional Masters level programmes, undergraduate students)?
How can the assessment balance the need to minimise reporting burden with robust requirements for data collection and verification?

What approaches or measures can be used to manage the disciplinary differences in research engagement and impact?

What measures or approaches to evaluation used for the assessment can appropriately account for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary engagement and impact?
Fun Facts!

- Of the 8418 words in the report, only one of them is qualitative, quantitative doesn’t appear
- 224 research
- 139 impact
- 88 assessment
- 85 engagement
- 59 universities
- 42 indicators
What are our options?

• “UK REF is a possible solution”
• “focussed examination of the university processes that promote research impact”
• “patents, research commercialisation income, and external funding” – econometric assessment
• “research reports for an external body”
• “National Survey of Research Commercialisation and ABS research data collections”
• “participation in events or audience numbers at performances, which are particularly relevant to the HASS disciplines”
• “metrics of internet downloads, blogs, Wikipedia entries, Twitter and other social media”
If we can somehow prove that research had an impact...

How do you decide who gets attribution for engagement and impact if;

• there are 10 researchers
• there are several groups involved
• the researcher moves institutions
• What **timeframes** should be considered for the engagement activities under assessment?
• What **timeframes** should be considered for the impact activities under assessment?
Challenges in Measuring Societal Research Impact

“Unless you are being cognisant of gathering the evidence of the impact whilst you are doing the work, then it’s very difficult to retrospectively gain the evidence of impact.” –Terry, 60-year-old dean
“seek the views of stakeholders on the framework for developing the national assessment of the engagement and impact of university research”

feedback is due 24 June 2016
Implications for

- how we train researchers to conduct research
- how we train researchers to engage with various “stakeholders”
- how we support researchers in order to conduct engagement and impact activities
- the very nature of the university, the work we do, and how we do it
Potential to radically affect:

- What research you do
- How you construct your research projects
- How and where you disseminate research
- How you track research uptake (now built into research plan)

What else?
Conclusions

• The concepts of engagement and impact are murky but, ready or not, they’re coming to Australia

• Academics will need supports to demonstrate impact to governments and funding agencies

• Information science is well positioned to identify and develop new supports
Questions?
Thank you

wadekelly.com
@wadekelly

PhD Candidate | Research Assistant
School of Information Studies
Research Institute for Professional Practice,
Learning and Education (RIPPLE)
References


References


References


Changing Nature of Academic Work

• Societal impact activities situated in “service” portfolio – i.e., receives less recognition

• Service is poorly defined and multifaceted (Macfarlane, 2005); few graduate students have sufficient understanding or receive adequate training (Austin, 2002)

• As service expectations increasingly focus on societal impact, professional development and PhD training will also need to evolve
Challenges in Measuring Societal Research Impact

• Challenge to explore how best to document or measure evidence of societal impact

“But we just don’t really have a handle on impact. What are the components of impact? What are the metrics? … We’re not quite there yet, but I think we’re moving in that direction.”

–Randall, 54 year-old research centre director
Academic Library Supports for Societal Impact

• Support for societal impact activities can be a natural area for extension of academic library services

“You can call up the librarian and they will determine your h-index for you. And they’ll do your citation factors. The research office…itself doesn’t really get so involved. But the library, for [the Excellence in Research Australia exercise], did quite a bit of analysis around citations.” –Samantha, 33 year-old research fellow
Changing Nature of Scholarly Communication

- Scholarly communication seeks to make research publicly available not communicate with the public (Drake, 2007)
  - Refers to academic publishing and directed toward promotion and tenure reviews (Harley, 2010)

- Worldwide, institutions have not yet developed strategies for systematically tracking and rewarding societal engagement and/or impact.
Academic Library Supports for Societal Impact

- Desire to connect with library staff to extend access to other academic impact metrics

“I’d love to have my metrics for downloads of my papers that I’ve… and these are fairly standard kind of metrics in some way. I don’t think I can get them and I’m now thinking I should talk to my research librarian and see if we can disseminate those, and so I hope they collect them.” – Jay, 47 year-old engineering professor
Discussion

As expectations increase that research must demonstrate societal impact, IS researchers and academic librarians must position themselves as leaders in the study and design of impact measures and in identifying needed supports for scholars engaging in this work.
Researchers, worldwide, are being asked increasingly to demonstrate societal impact.

(e.g. Grant et al., 2009; Guena & Martin, 2003; Morgan Jones et al. 2013)
Academic Supports for Research Impact

- Academic libraries typically provide supports for reporting academic research impact (Corrall et al., 2013; Tenopir et al., 2013)

- Research funding tied to performance indicators (e.g., Bladek, 2014, p. 331; MacColl, 2010, p. 155)