

ESRC symposium 12th 13th May 2005: Assessing non-academic research impacts

Main Findings

1. Different types of research lead to different types of *knowledge*, for example:
 - Rich descriptions, including analysis of public discourse
 - Evaluative knowledge (identifying 'what works')
 - New theory and explanations (understanding how things work and why things happen)
2. The *non-academic impacts* of such research-based knowledge can include:
 - Better informed public policy and decision making
 - Improved professional practice and organisational decision making
 - Different ways of thinking about the nature of social and economic problems and therefore the potential for innovative solutions
 - Improved public understanding and more informed public discourse
3. Research can have non-academic impacts *via* various *mechanisms*, for example, through:
 - Knowledge translation, knowledge mediation, knowledge interaction
 - Intermediary bodies and broker individuals/organisations
 - Different social networks and communities of practice
 - Evidence-based practitioners utilising research outputs
 - Research outputs becoming embedded in organisational processes
 - Local engagement in cycles of continuous improvement/research use
4. *Context* plays an important role in facilitating or inhibiting research impact, for example:
 - Support for initiatives to increase research uptake
 - Receptivity of research users to research findings
 - A research environment that encourages researchers to engage in impact-related activities
5. The *assessment* of non-academic research impacts can be facilitated by:
 - Considering carefully the sorts of impacts that are realistic
 - Clarifying logic models of how impacts are likely to be made
 - Developing measurable outcomes for some organisational objectives
 - Mapping networks of potential users of research, and identifying their interactions with research and researchers
 - Developing 'impact files' and testimonies of the impacts of research
 - Creating national or international panels of experts to assess the impact of research
6. *Multidimensional* measures of impact will be needed (simple bibliometrics are inadequate). Also needed are detailed *qualitative case studies*.
7. The Research Assessment Exercise is a *major barrier* to non-academic research impact activities; it is unclear how full economic costing of research will affect these activities.