



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Building a Culture of Impact: Understanding the Challenges and Embracing Change

Dr Jennifer Chubb

**Coimbra Group San Servolo
Research Policy Seminar
6-7 December 2018**



Overview

- The history of an impact agenda: the early years – present day and plan for future
- Effects, influences and incentives:
 - Macro level – funders
 - Meso level – institutions
 - Micro level – individuals
 - What role can each level play in supporting a culture of impact?



UK Impact Agenda

- Warry report (2006) economic impact
- 2007 - 'Impact plans'
- 2009 - 'Pathways to impact' (societal/cultural/economic)
- 2010 - RAE – impact assessment trial
- 2011 – Decision to include impact in 2014 REF
- 2014 – First UK assessment impact 20%
- 2015 - Nurse review and birth of UKRI
- 2016 - Stern Review
- 2021 – REF 25%



Impact: The Teenage Years

- We've had the birth of an impact agenda
- We've had teething problems...
- The sleepless nights
- and REF 2014 marked a turning point whereby our child impact got used to being structured and in some form of a routine...
- Now we are hitting our teens – where is impact going now?



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

“Our adolescence provides a lens
through which we can see
ourselves anew”
(Blakemore, 2018)



Empathy



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

“Our most direct and urgent message must be to the [researchers] themselves: learn to communicate with the public, be willing to do so and consider it your duty to do so”
(Bodmer Report, 1985)



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

“The duty of intellectuals in society is
to make a difference”

Sir Thomas More

(Shortly before his execution in 1535)



Traditional University Values

- What are universities for? – Humboldt's vision
 - The Haldane Principle
 - Mertonian norms
 - Notions of autonomy & freedom
- Impact perceived critically as a retrenchment from the traditional values of the 'university' and forming of 'new modes of scholarly distinction' (Watermeyer & Chubb, 2018)



A Need for Demonstrable Impact

- Political context: dwindling trust in expertise
 - Increased public awareness of research
 - Visibility
 - Trust in experts
- Accountability and epistemic responsibility
- Arguably affording new currency for applied and interdisciplinary 'modes' of research and knowledge production



In Light of Critical Discourse

- Universities and managers play a critical role in managing careful implementation of
 - impact policies, strategies and incentive structures supportive of impact
- Messages must be diffused to individuals sensitive of: beliefs, diversities, values and disciplinary norms



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Vision: An Impact Culture

The shared values, beliefs and norms of an academic community that support the production of (significant and far-reaching) non-academic impacts based on excellent research, which then define the collective identity of that community and distinguish the strengths and foci of one institution from another (Reed, 2018)



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

UNDERSTANDING DIFFERING PERSPECTIVES AND ALIGNING INCENTIVES



Macro Level: Strategic Funder Incentives

- Creation of UKRI
- Emergence of challenge-led funding, Industrial Strategy, expansion in HEIF/ IAA
- The research system is its own instrumentalised industry
- Toward a 'market logic' of HE



Meso level: The Institution

- Alignment of resource flows – what drives culture in institutional is the availability of resource – IAA/ HEIF/ Strategic management funds – QR funding
- These initiatives allow the creation of intermediary structures or 'policy shops' i.e. KCL policy institute, Policy at Manchester
- Training and peer review activities
- Tracking of engagement and impact – are we tracking the right things?



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

As a result of the impact agenda and changing culture HEIs are changing their practice



Setting out an
impact strategy



Fixed-term posts
become permanent



Implementing systems to
store evidence of impact



Capturing evidence of
impact on an ongoing basis



Building a plan for
impact into projects



Inclusion of impact as a
criterion for promotion

Source: RAND Europe (2015) Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation https://is.gd/hefce_RANDImpact1

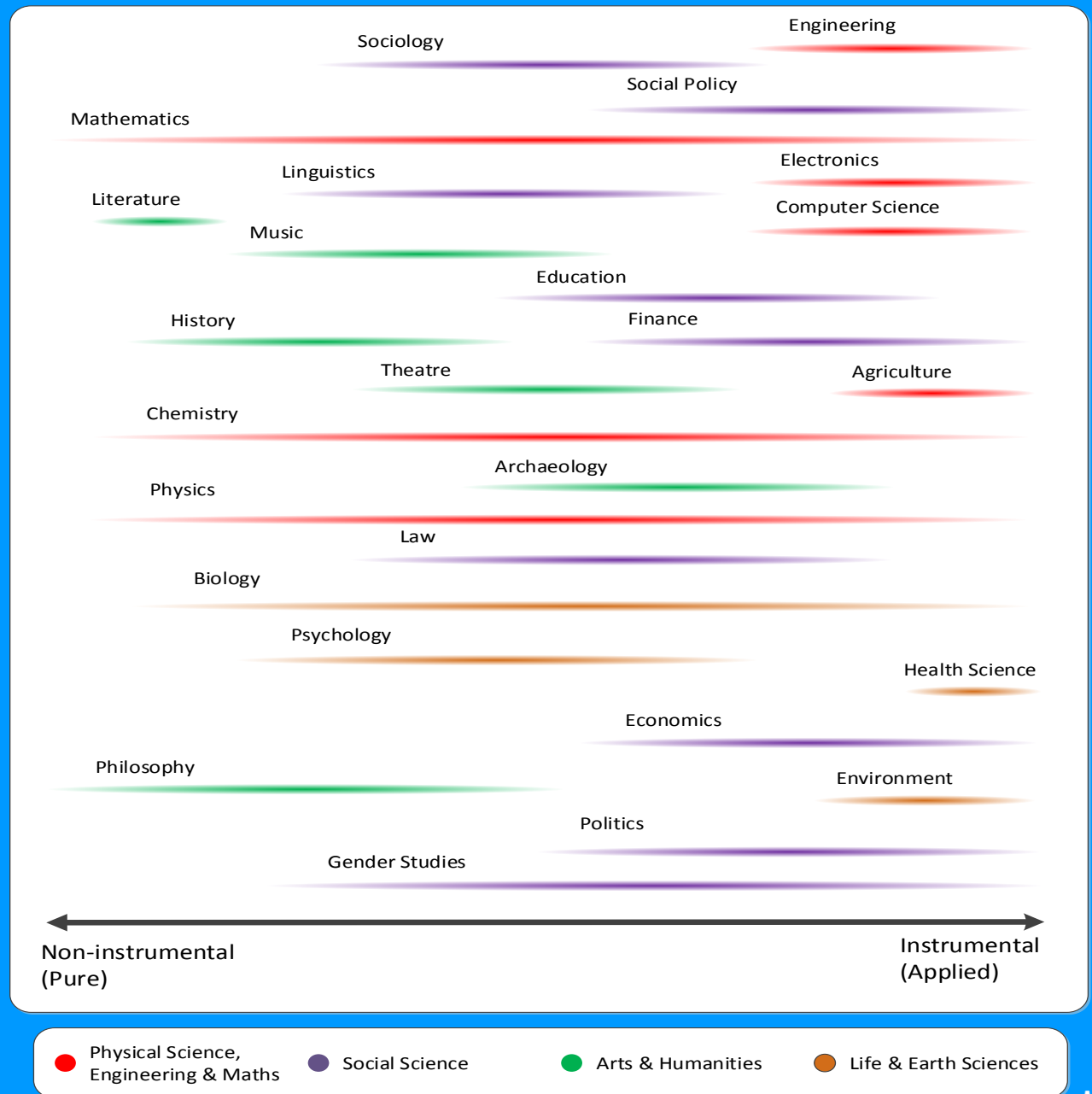


Micro Level: Individuals

- Disciplines (Instrumentalism vs non-instrumentalism)
- Career stage (Professor – ECR and PhD)
- Gender (Hard/Soft impact)
- Values, emotions, ideologies and motivations



The
University
Of
Sheffield.



Chubb, 2017



Intrinsic Motivations

- To make a difference
- To satisfy my curiosity
- To be creative
- Answers vs process - discovery
- Legacy, respect, to gain indicators of esteem



Extrinsic incentives

- Financial incentives
- Research funding
- To get promoted
- Workload allocation
- To be celebrated (e.g. win an internal impact competition)



Threats

- Fiscal rationalisation of HE
- “Academic capitalism” (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004)
- Blue skies research
- Differing forms of scholarship
- “Distorting what we did as a matter of course, anyway” (Chubb, 2017)



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

How do you motivate researchers to engage with impact?

Which motivational levers can and should you pull?



Building An Impact Culture

- Making impact generation attractive
 - Appeal to researchers' intrinsic motivations
 - Be aware how impact is perceived in different faculties: in the DNA or just to get funding?
 - Open channels of empathy with influencers (consider creating impact champions or directors)



Build Impact Potential

- Focus on efficiency to overcome time barriers without instrumentalising impact
- Generate tools to plan strategically & track
- Deliver training at scale: beyond impact literacy to a relational approach
- Increase impact potential: formulate networks



Alignment of Incentives

- The challenge: lack of aligned rewards and incentives
- Need to align incentives at macro, meso and micro level
- Each level may not pull in the same direction -
E.g. career structures – tendency to fall back on traditional promotion and hiring criteria



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Need to expand notions of research leadership & the criteria we use in hiring, promotion & assessment

Annex I: Core leadership characteristics derived from existing research base

Leadership	Meaning
Disciplinary leadership	Provide foresight, vision and direction to advance and transform knowledge and methods within research disciplines, through both individual and collective efforts.
Inter-disciplinary leadership	Engage across disciplinary boundaries with both confidence and humility to develop new ways of thinking and working, often to address major societal challenges.
Complex project leadership	Manage large, complex projects, programmes and research infrastructures effectively, including some element of financial management and oversight.
Leading generational change	Provide inspiration and guidance to the next generation of social scientists.
Leadership in impact generation	Spur innovation in the delivery of impact from social science research, including building close relationships with senior figures among potential research users. High-profile advocacy and promotion of the social sciences.
Leadership in public engagement	Engage the wider public in understanding and appreciating the value of social science to their lives and communities. High-profile advocacy and promotion of the social sciences.
International leadership	Work internationally to raise the profile of UK social science and strengthen international collaborations.



Rationalising Incentives

- Specialisation still exists and is important, but are we still operating under a homogenized vision of what it means to be an academic?
 - E.g. be a teacher, be a researcher, be an impact orientated researcher
 - This can create perverse incentives (e.g. metrics)

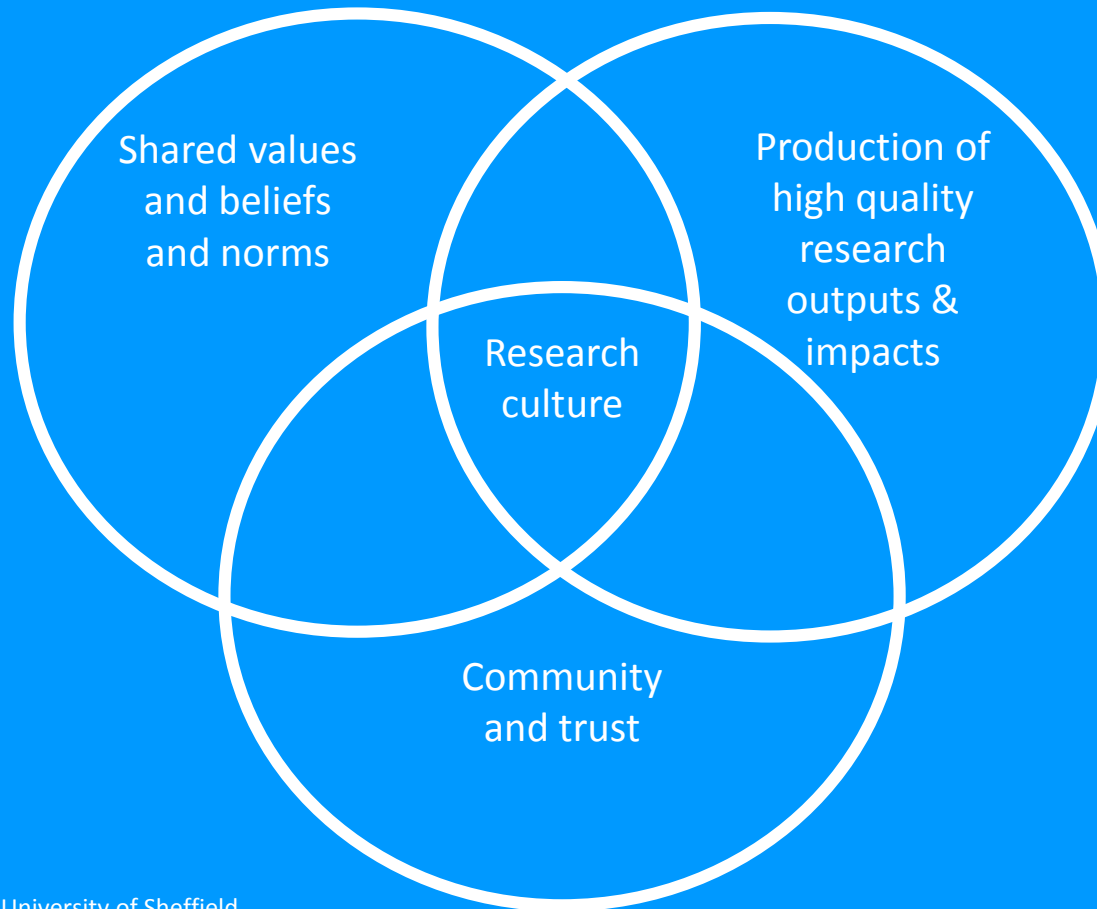


A Reality

- Individuals who take seriously the impact agenda can find themselves a little unrewarded for their efforts despite institutional attempts
- Academics are left fearing that they do not do 'what counts'
 - what counts is not always just, what can be counted.



Values, Norms and Beliefs that Support or Inhibit an Impact Culture





Your Impact Culture

- What shared values, beliefs and norms underpin impact e.g. humility versus dissemination?
- Is there a sense of community and trust around impact? Where and when do we talk about impact (e.g. part of our DNA or only in context of funding applications, sense of coercion / instrumentalised approach from managers or funder priorities)?
- Are we producing impact based on excellent research? Lots of impact with limited research versus a research culture that rarely considers impact



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Finally, think ahead...

- it is 2030 what makes your institution proud of its impact culture?



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Thank you for listening.

J.chubb@sheffield.ac.uk

Why we need a Real-Time REF Review to plan for 2027

COMMENT
/ 12th Apr 2018

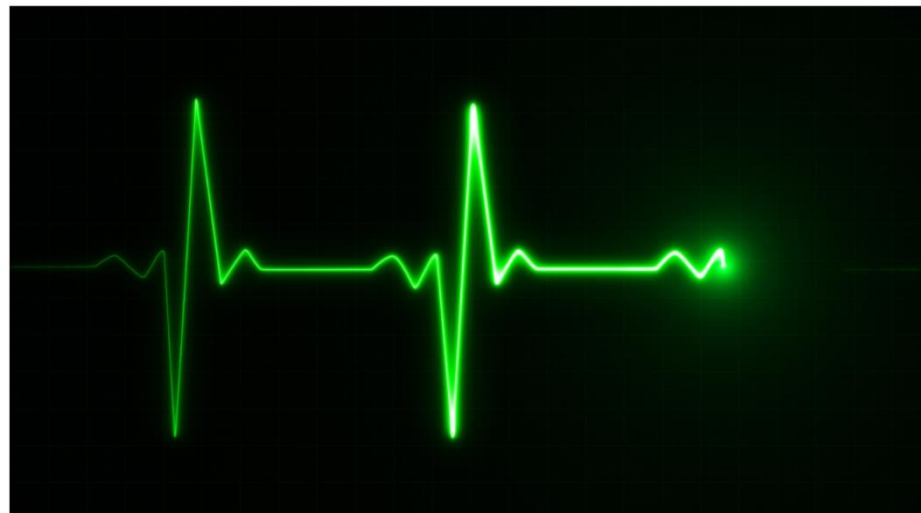


Image: Shutterstock

Authors



James Wilsdon

James Wilsdon is professor of research policy and director of research and innovation for the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Sheffield.



Netta Weinstein

Netta Weinstein is a senior lecturer in the School of Psychology at

An important paper out this week in the journal “PLOS Biology” distils into a set of six principles much of what we have learnt in recent years about how to assess researchers and their work.

As the authors remind us: “How we evaluate scientists reflects what we value most – and don’t – in the scientific enterprise, and powerfully influences scientists’ behaviour.”

In the UK, the way we think, talk and argue about research assessment is intimately bound up with the Research Excellence Framework (REF). While still owned by the four UK funding bodies, management of the REF transferred on 1 April to its new home in Research England, part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This brings the two strands of the dual-support funding system under one roof for the first time.

How RSE/RAE/REF has changed

Latest articles



Thinking big: 35 ideas for widening access to higher education



Re-finding and re-defining the community of scholars to enhance leadership in universities



Three steps to increase research impact



How do Scotland's students manage their money?



Fictional crime on campus