

The Policy and Practice Impacts of the ESRC's 'Responsive Mode' Research Grants in Politics and International Studies

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The study team

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About LSE Public Policy Group (PPG)

PPG undertakes pure and applied research, policy evaluation and consultancy for government bodies, international organizations and major corporations active in the fields of policy evaluation, public management, budgeting and audit, and e-government, survey or focus group research, public opinion, and the design of election systems.

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Appendices to Main Report are a separate document.

Overview of Impacts

This short overview of impacts found is based on survey returns and/or interview with twenty-two projects. Although researchers were often reluctant to make specific claims about the policy or practice impact of their work, we identified a wide range of impact-relevant activity. We estimate that between 1 in 4 and 1 in 5 projects could reasonably claim direct and specific impact either on policy, public service delivery or wider public debate in the UK or internationally.

<i>Research had an impact on...</i>	<i>Directly influenced a change</i>	<i>Contributed to a broader change</i>	<i>Formed part the contextual or background for a change</i>
Policy thinking	6	Around half	Almost all
Wider public debates	5	Around four fifths	Almost all
Public service delivery	3 or 4	Around one quarter	Around half
Note: This Figure is based on 22 responses to question 9 in our survey. On completion of all interviews and survey responses, our research team held two in-depth discussion sessions to work through each project and identify to what extent each one fulfilled criteria for different categories above. The data presented is at best impressionistic and is based on the views of the research team working from transcripts of each interview.			

We estimate that around 6 projects of 22 could claim to have directly influenced change in policy thinking either in the UK or abroad. Researchers were able to provide specific details during interviews on the activity undertaken. Of course neither we nor researchers claim that these were the only influence in policy change. Four examples are:

- Shaping legislation on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, especially influencing the initiation of citizenship ceremonies as part of the Runnymede Commission;
- Ongoing work by two or three key researchers to influence UK political parties on the importance of grassroots and constituency campaigning, and party organisation, prior to general elections;
- Influencing measures to ‘soften’ parallel consent regulations in the Northern Ireland Assembly to encourage the role of non-partisan parties;
- Influencing research and strategy on military transformation in the US Department of Defence and in European defence communities.

We identified 3 or 4 projects which could claim to have had a direct influence on the ways in which public services are delivered either at a domestic or international level. Three examples are:

- Contribution to debates within the voluntary sector and government on the potential scope and role of a national patients’ organisation, following a ministerial commitment in 2001 to create such as body;
- Briefing senior officials in the Department of Environment on the implementation of EU environmental sustainability regulations across UK government agencies;
- Setting up the Centre on Global Change and Health in 1999, which was designated as a collaborating centre of the World Health Organisation in 2006.

Around 5 projects could claim to have had a direct influence in the way in which wider public debates have been initiated or progressed. Two examples are:

- Influencing strategies and future planning in UK television broadcasting companies on the way in which media coverage of elections affects voters’ behaviours;
- A widely read monograph (published 2003) on the IRA generating intensive coverage by leading journalists on BBC television and in the mainstream US press.

Executive Summary

1. In November 2006 the LSE Public Policy Group was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to investigate the ‘policy and practice’ impacts of 39 ‘responsive mode’ (hereafter RM) research grants in politics and international studies which ended during the years 1998 and 2001, and to draw conclusions and recommendations to inform the ESRC’s future practices in this area.

2. The key objectives of this research were to identify:

- ways in which results from ESRC funded research projects and fellowships have been utilised and applied by policy makers and practitioners;
- how the research has influenced policy formation and development;
- how the ESRC's research has influenced changes in professional practice within the public and the private sector;
- to produce examples of impact achieved; *and*
- to explore ways in which the methods used could be improved or refined.

3. Our methods set involved a systematic consideration of all the projects’ end of award (EOA) reports coding for impacts and following up publications and other outputs directly attributable to the specific project grants. Second, we set out to assess the publication and practice impacts of these projects and their outputs using a wide range of ‘non-reactive measures’ (Webb et al, 1966), consisting mainly of systematic and in-depth search for references to our 39 projects using Google search engines and established academic databases. This gave us comprehensive non-reactive measures data on all our projects, providing a proxy for the nature and extent of impact. Third, we wrote to all lead researchers asking them to complete a short survey giving more systematic information on impacts, and updating and further reflecting on their EOA reports: we obtained a 60 per cent response. Additional outputs nominated were added into our database records for each of the projects. Fourth, we conducted 22 recorded interviews (mostly by phone but some face to face), often lasting an hour or more, in which we discussed in detail with lead researchers their survey responses and the evidence accumulated above. We conducted a further 9 interviews with ESRC and comparative bodies. Fifth, we followed

up in person with 17 people nominated as ‘impactees’ by our responding researchers. (See Appendix A and B for more on all these methods. Full details on how the research was conducted and the results obtained can be found in the Appendices to this report which are included in a second volume. References to the Appendices are shown throughout the text in pink font.)

General issues on studying ‘policy and practice’ impact

4. For many of our researchers it was difficult to isolate specific impacts from individual ESRC projects, particularly when many of these projects formed relatively small sections of much wider bodies of work ongoing over several years and decades. ESRC work was in some cases a stepping stone to much larger pieces of work, or continued perennial strands of work taking place at relatively regular periods (for example, general election studies). Researchers generally felt that to evaluate individual projects outside of the narrative of wider bodies of work could be misleading and hazardous.

5. We collected many examples of dissemination activity carried out by researchers, including numerous opportunities briefing very senior officials in and around government. Nevertheless most of our interviewees suggested that it is almost impossible to delineate with any confidence the causal relationship between their academic research and related briefings, and the outcomes of policy or practice. The ‘crowded’ environment which characterizes most policy development processes meant that researchers were invariably reluctant to make too great a claim about the impact of one isolated research project. Researchers were more inclined to see impacts from the wider body of their work over longer periods of time.

6. Many experienced researchers we interviewed pointed out strong and systemic incentives that encourage academics to focus on achieving publications in peer reviewed journals, over and above dissemination of their work in wider policy and practice environments. Some academics agreed that policy and practice impacts were important, but still their most important priority was ‘shoehorning work into good journals’. A small group of academics partially or fully rejected the idea that policy and practice impact should be an objective for academics, suggesting that the primary aim should be to encourage excellence in thinking and research within academic communities.

On non-reactive measures research

7. A systematic approach to objective indicators of dissemination and impact of academic work across wider policy and practice environments is useful in triangulating with researchers' or observers' interpretations of impact, which inevitably involve some subjectivity and inter-personal variations (for instance, in researchers' credit-claiming behaviours). There are already well established and sophisticated online tools for assessing bibliographic citations and references across academic work. A good example is the Harzing 'Publish or Perish' metric scores (see Figure 3 below). Although such tools provide quite accurate indications and proxies of impact within academic communities, we find that dissemination and impact can happen on a much wider scale, and often even these sophisticated citation tools will not capture qualitative references from other areas. These additional contributions, such as a presentation given at a conference, may be individually small scale, but in terms of securing coverage and follow-on implications in the internet era, they may be quite important. (See paragraphs 1.10 to 1.12.)

8. So, in our view, there is much to be gained from widening the bibliographic net somewhat to include more general indicators of impact from broader online searches. We argue here that Google searches allow us to gain a much more layered and diverse impression of dissemination of work, and to compile more predictive pictures of the overall impact of ESRC-funded research outside of standard academic environments. Our systematic Google searches revealed a much richer and diverse array of dissemination and impact in comparison to the narrower and more standard academic citations indexes using Web of Science and the International Bibliography of Social Sciences. On average, for every one academic reference we found using these databases, we found three Google references to the same output (sometimes including the reference found using databases). (See paragraphs 1.13 to 1.18.)

How we organized our online references search

For each project output, we typed in various combinations of title and author surname into databases and Google search engines, and looked at the first 50 results only. We recorded any references which were either:

- ***Standard academic references*** to this output from academic journal articles and book bibliographies (*weighted as number of references * 4 for the impact score*);
- ***Any other non-standard references*** to this output (e.g. working papers, university reading lists, press or media, policy related organizations) (*number of references * 3 for the impact score*);
- ***Related academic or non-academics outputs from the same authors*** (subsequent to the project itself) (*number of references * 2 for the impact score*);
- ***References to related academic or non-academic outputs*** (*number of references * 1 for the impact score*).

For each project we recorded these data. Appendix B shows the coding frame we used and Figure 10 in Part 2 shows how the different profiles recorded across these four elements.

9. Within the average three Google references to every one academic database reference, some projects generated many more Google references than others. Around one third of our case projects recorded more ‘non-standard’ than standard references, and three or four projects recorded significantly more non-standard references, suggesting quite substantial coverage in contexts other than standard academic ones. At the other end of the spectrum, three projects out of 39 scored zero on non-standard references.

10. ‘Non-standard’ references tended to be academic and policy working papers, university reading lists, or other sources such as press and media. Most non-standard references seemed to be sourced from universities and think tanks. We found quite a quick drop off for references sourced to UK government organizations and other practitioner bodies. There is still room therefore for growing the extent to which academic work in politics and international studies is cited and used by policy makers, practitioners and other bodies. There is an especially large potential for growing the use made of this research by companies and businesses in the UK and overseas, where our research generally found exceptionally low impacts. (See paragraph 2.7 and Figures 12 [A] and [B].)

11. In our survey of lead researchers, the types of stakeholders most commonly listed as main ‘impactees’ were chiefly other academics, think tanks, and to a lesser extent, policy makers in UK and non-UK government. These data suggest generally that impact is largely focused internally on the academic environment or its ‘edges’ at least. Only a small minority of lead researchers claimed that their highest impact had been on groups of stakeholders outside universities (see Question 4 in our questionnaire in Appendix F).

(See Figures 7, 8 and 9 and paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6.)

12. Taking into consideration the issues raised in paragraphs 4 to 6, particularly the importance of factoring in the weight of wider narratives of work in any evaluation about the impact of one particular project, we compiled an overall impact score for each project output. Of course, many different permutations of components scores and weighting of them are available in constructing a single index figure for each output. However, our chosen route was to multiply the number of references found in each of the four categories in the box on page 7 by 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively, and then to sum the totals. These totals gave us an indicative figure for each project output, taking into account the importance of academic publications and the background weight of citations to subsequent or wider bodies of work.

13. We found that the h-score index for each of our lead researchers bears a reasonably good correlation to the figures we compiled for total output score (R-squared linear 0.424 – see Figure 14 in Part 2). This suggests that our own impact score gives sufficient recognition to the importance of wider academic referencing of subsequent work and that the references to specific projects are appropriately weighted as well. We also found a close correlation between the h-score and the Harzing age-weighted score (see Figure 3 in Part 1), and this suggests further that impact of individual project outputs is closely linked to the experience and standing of the academics involved, that is built up over time. This observation sits well with our interviewees’ main observation that it is difficult to judge the impact of one project outside of the context of wider narratives of work. However, it does not preclude the potential for high impact from academic work by authors with low h-score or publications standing, as some of our projects demonstrate. For example, the highest scoring project output that we found belonged to an academic with one of the lowest h-score ratings in our data set. (See paragraphs 2.14 and 2.15.)

Qualitative evidence and triangulation of evidence

14. There would clearly be many problems in relying *only* on non-reactive measures to evaluate overall. For example, it is possible to miss unpublicized or ‘stealth’ activity or influence; it may be difficult to know to what extent bibliographic references equate to actual real-life impacts; and even if awareness of research can be demonstrated, it is often very hard to establish plausible causal links. A key counterweight in this respect were the survey and interviews carried out with lead researchers. Our questionnaire asked researchers to identify which were the key groups of stakeholders on which they had an impact, and to estimate their degree of impact on them. As mentioned already, the main impactees were other academics, research institutions (excluding universities), and think-tanks. (See Appendix F for a copy of the survey questionnaire.)

15. We built an average overall impact score (from 1 to 7) based on the top five (out of a possible 12) scores given by researchers in the survey. We found almost no correlation between these perceived impact scores and our impact scores from the non-reactive measures set out above. This lack of association is not surprising because many personal and temperament differences affect how a group of academics estimate their own impacts. Some lead researchers are prone to over-estimation, taking a maximalist view of their research’s impacts. Others are perhaps overly modest, refusing to claim any impacts at all for their work unless they can point to very well-supported evidence of causal linkages. (See paragraph 2.22.)

16. We sought to control for these differences in survey responses by following up in depth with interviews, after which the research team conducted systematic and deliberative sessions, to identify key examples of impact and evaluate the extent and the nature of impacts from each of our projects. We found that in interviews most academics could give detailed accounts of how their work found a wider policy and practice audience, and exerted some degree of influence over change outcomes. From our data set of 39 projects, we summarize ten good examples of significant impact work and outcomes in **Figure 1** below. (See paragraph 3.2 onwards.)

Figure 1: Nine good examples of high impact research

Impacts on policy making in British government

- Shaping legislation on the future of multi-ethnic Britain, especially influencing the initiation of citizenship ceremonies.
- Contribution to debates within the voluntary sector and within government on the potential scope and role of a national patients' organisation following a ministerial commitment in 2001 to create such a body.
- Briefing senior officials in the Department of Environment on the implementation of EU environmental sustainability regulations across UK government agencies.

Impacts on political parties and parliaments

- Ongoing work to influence UK political parties on the importance of grassroots and constituency campaigning prior to general elections.
- Influencing measures to 'soften' parallel consent regulations in the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- Improving the quality and availability of induction training for new MPs in Westminster.

Impacts on overseas governments and international policies

- Setting up a research centre on Global Change and Health, which was designated as a collaborating centre of the World Health Organization in 2006.
- Influencing research and strategy on military transformation in the US Department of Defence and in European defence communities.

Impacts on journalists and the media

- A widely read monograph on the IRA leads to intensive coverage by leading journalists on BBC television and in the mainstream US press.

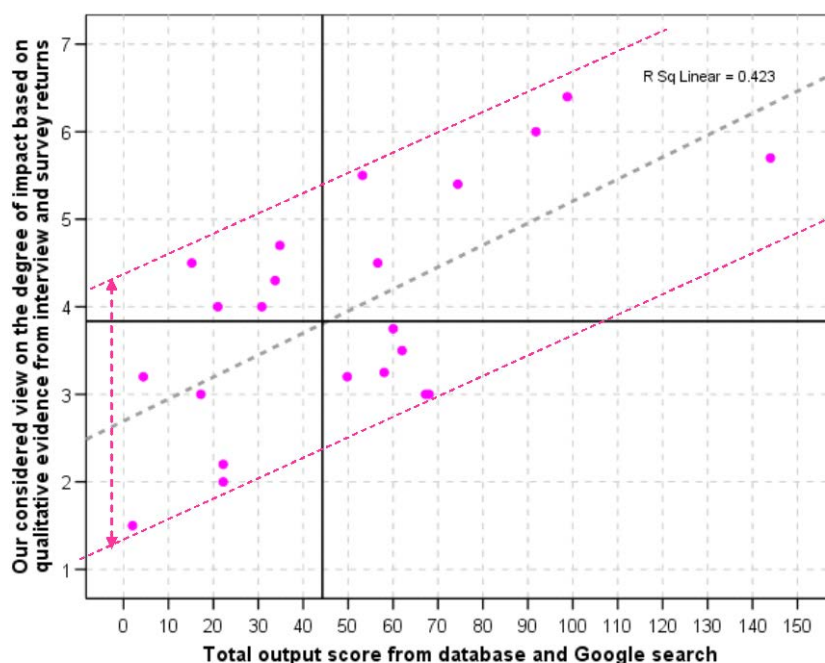
17. We estimate that around one in four of our projects could lay reasonable claim to having influenced a specific policy change (either as a direct result of the work or related subsequent work). Around half of projects (including the quarter above) could lay reasonable claim to either contributing to a specific change or providing background or briefing materials that formed part of the context for policy change. (See Figure 17.)

18. The research team also 'moderated' researchers' own impacts scores for individual stakeholders, reflecting the specific examples that researchers gave us on impacts achieved. This moderation process was completed once all interviews were undertaken and we could get a comparative sense of which projects had reasonable impacts in different areas. This exercise was carried out without reference to impact scores for each

project in the non-reactive measures part of the survey. Keeping these two variables completely separate allowed us to re-assess the level of correlation between the two.

Figure 2 below shows a reasonable correlation, suggesting that our non-reactive measures provide relatively good predictive data for the more in-depth qualitatively-based assessment of impact. There is obviously room for improving this correlation, and we provide a short discussion in Appendix D on how refinements to our method might lead to more reliable tools for triangulating impact. (See paragraphs 2.27 and 2.28.)

Figure 2: Revised degree of association between our overall qualitative impact evaluation and our impact score from our unobtrusive web search



On impacts and techniques for achieving impact

19. The most common forms of dissemination are the more ‘standard’ forms such as journal publications, academic seminars and conferences and so on. Around one third of lead researchers listed briefings of policy makers as important in their own projects, and around one quarter listed television, radio, and other press work as important. We found academics had talked about findings from their research on some very well-known programmes such as Newsnight, Westminster Hour, Start the Week. (See paragraphs 3.20 and 3.21.)

20. Many researchers pointed to the benefits of early collaboration or communication with the subjects of the research and with potential users of the research. Establishing agreement and buy-in from these organizations at an early stage in the research greatly facilitated the research process itself, but also increased the opportunities for dissemination on completion. One or two projects on the attitudes of members of political organizations led to the initiation of specific internal review and reforms inside these organizations. (See paragraphs 3.12 to 3.15.)

21. Our dataset covered only responsive mode projects ending in 1998 and 2001. A small number of academics rated publishing material on the internet as a major strategy for achieving impact, perhaps for the reason that it is seen as an important secondary activity or simply seen as too self-evident to prioritize in a survey such as this. In our search online we found surprisingly few examples of dedicated websites that had been set up by researchers to profile work generated from these projects. A greater number of academics however use their university pages to post relevant materials. There is considerable potential for encouraging greater internet-dissemination of free outputs from research projects. (See paragraph 3.22.)

22. Half of our responding lead researchers told us that establishing links with intermediary organizations such as think-tanks and interest bodies (from the very small to the global) can have significant impact in terms of packaging findings, tapping into existing policy networks, and finding new angles on academic research which might appeal to non-academic stakeholders.

23. We found many examples of academics providing both formal and informal briefings to policy makers and practitioners. In our discussions with senior research officials in UK government departments, it was apparent that the briefing arrangements most appreciated by civil servants is a style of quid pro quo which enables them to call in trusted academic experts periodically (at most ‘once or twice a month’) and ‘sound them out on particular issues’, in return for inviting academics to department events and keeping them informed about policy developments. (See paragraphs 3.8 onwards.)

24. An important consideration for evaluating the impact of specific projects is the extent to which they lead to increased research capacity and status for academics and research

units. A large minority of researchers identified their ESRC responsive mode projects as important ‘stepping stones’ to larger successful tenders, and in some cases, winning the first major research grant. We estimate that 14 out of 23 projects for which we received survey returns received subsequent funding for similar work, around 10 of which either matched the value of the initial funding or surpassed it. (See paragraphs 3.28 and 3.29.)

25. Lead researchers told us that impacts often take a while to emerge, and can depend on policy issues ‘re-emerging’ after periods of quiescence, and consequently reinvigorating interest in an existing thread or source of academic research. Researchers frequently referred to impact as a ‘question of timing’ or indeed ‘plain luck’. Often the EOA report did not catch subsequent important impacts of research projects. There is clear risk here that the ESRC may be under-estimating the impacts of its funded research.

26. Four of our ten high-impact projects featured in Figure 1 involved relatively small amounts of money and quite short research periods, but led to quite significant impacts (or impact-related activity). These researchers almost all held the view that the specific responsive mode projects we focused on had acted as kinds of seed projects, allowing them to explore case studies or conduct survey work, which in turn led on to a broadening of scope, larger grants, and a widening of their networks and connections. There was a widespread demand across all our researchers for more grants for small feasibility studies and seed-bed work, using procedures that have lower transactions costs. (See paragraphs 3.30 onwards.)

PART 1

Achieving policy and practice impacts: What can we realistically expect?

1.1 A number of recent reports have stressed the importance of academics attaining impacts beyond academia and influencing policy and practice in government and beyond. This is of particular concern for the ESRC since the research it funds inherently has far more of a public policy orientation than is true, for example, for the Arts and Humanities Research Council. The ‘Warry Report’ (Commissioned by the DTI, and chaired by Peter Warry, July 2006) looked at how Research Councils can contribute economic impact through the research that they fund. It suggested that: ‘Research Councils should make strenuous efforts to demonstrate more clearly the impact they already achieve from their investments’. In particular, the report recommended that each Research Council highlight the economic impact achieved in their field; that the RCUK create a benchmark from this information against which future reports would be assessed; and that Research Councils survey users of research to ascertain their satisfaction.

1.2 The Lambert Review of business-university collaboration for HM Treasury (December 2003) also noted that ‘the most effective forms of knowledge transfer involve human interaction ... bringing together people from businesses and universities’. It also stated that the ‘funding should be allocated in a way that actively supports multi-disciplinary research’. Whilst not finding a ‘silver bullet’ for enabling maximum knowledge transfer and use of academic research by business users, this report acknowledged the importance of academic research to wealth and skills creation. In response the ESRC has undertaken a wide range of initiatives designed to improve policy and practice impacts.¹

¹ The 2006 ESRC Delivery Report states that ‘in the past year the emphasis on evaluating not only scholarly research impacts but also impacts on policy and practice has increased and ESRC is developing new methods for evaluating research impacts’. During our research we came across at a tangent a range of initiatives designed to further this aim. These include the ‘research broker role’ being developed in some policy areas; TROIKA meetings for Programme, Centre and ESRC staff; specific knowledge transfer activities such as seminars on particular themes and work with RDAs; the Impact Grants Scheme, set up in 2005 to enable researchers currently funded or recently funded by the ESRC to generate new or additional activity that demonstrates the impact of their research; major investment consolidation (including the idea of experimenting with ‘public services’ zone); specific projects undertaken by the ESRC’s communications

1.3 It is notoriously difficult to assess the policy and practice impacts of social science research. But the ESRC has commissioned a number of insightful studies covering different discipline areas and different types of research grant funding. They range from major programmes and centres at one end of the spectrum, to the impacts from ‘responsive mode’ (RM) research projects, on which we also focus here.² Accounting for around 30 per cent of the ESRC’s total funding, RM grants are made in response to independent applications by individual researchers or project teams for funding to back their ideas. Most RM grants are small and few are very substantial. This is especially true of our dataset which comprises all RM projects completed in 1998 and 2001 in the fields of politics and international studies. They are, by definition, scattered across a wide range of topics and foci, discussed in Part 2.

1.4 We could not credibly expect to see visible or strong policy and practice impacts occurring for all individual RM grants. Instead the ESRC can be thought of as behaving analogously to an investor who creates a portfolio of investments, each of which may have some desirable outcomes, but by no means uniformly. The owner of the portfolio looks to obtain a balance of net advantages from their investments, taken as a whole. Similarly across a whole set of the ESRC’s RM grants we should expect to see some projects having strong policy and practice impacts and others perhaps having solely academic impacts. An interesting research question which we can partly answer below concerns how strong the association is between these two different aspects.

1.5 There are features of research in political science and international studies that could be expected to result in strong impacts on the political process, on public policies at home or abroad and on government regulation of economic and social life. A high proportion of

team; new publications such as *The Edge* and *Britain Today*; plain English summaries of projects; festivals; and above all a revamped website www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk, which includes the migration of Regard content to a new online database.

² Two very helpful and methodologically suggestive evaluations of ESRC’s Directive mode research funding have been completed recently - one on the Future of Work Programme by RAND Europe and the other on the Centre for Business Research by Sussex University. In each case, the evaluations found that significant policy and practice impacts could be traced to ESRC support, particularly in terms of providing context for policy decisions or confirming recent policy decisions. Major problems of attribution were noted in both reports, as was the difficulty of separating the impacts of particular ESRC-funded projects from the wider work of a Programme or Centre. We think that our findings are complementary in many ways to these reports, and we have sought to use some similar approaches undertaken for evaluating these ‘directive mode’ initiatives in our assessment of the smaller RM projects here.

empirical work in the discipline will tend to have some potential for achieving impact, especially work that from its outset focuses on public policy or on key political institutions (like parties) that extensively shape policy processes and political life. Only a small part of the discipline, mainly in political philosophy and theory, will not have any direct policy relevance – and we show below that only one out of our 39 projects fell into that category. We might expect higher policy relevance rates to result also from the ESRC’s selection processes themselves, where achieving some degree of policy impact is quite prominently prioritized.

1.6 At the same time academic researchers in political science and international studies are competing for influence over policy in a naturally crowded (perhaps necessarily crowded) market. Researchers vie with parties, politicians, bureaucracies, think tanks, interest groups and many other actors and sources of influence for an impact on the composite thing called ‘policy’. An appropriate benchmark might be to ask about the policy impact of other actors or institutions closely involved in policy making. There are a spectrum of possible touchstones here.

1.7 At one end, a body like the UK’s National Audit Office operates its ‘value for money’ studies, accounting for around £22 million expenditure (two fifths of its total budget). NAO has legally guaranteed access to government departments and agencies’ data and to Parliament, where its reports mostly are considered by the Public Accounts Committee. The NAO seeks to show every year that it saves the taxpayer 8 or 9 times its budgetary costs, a highly demanding criterion, although not necessarily one that is closely linked to the long-run efficacy of NAO activities.

1.8 At this end of the spectrum there are a few studies of the impact of policy analysis work within government, and of research that is directly government-funded. Here the influence detected varies a good deal. A study of the efficacy of the UK government research effort as a whole carried out for the NAO failed to find any easy denominator of influence or effectiveness, but concluded that there was considerable scope for the positive impacts of government-funded R & D to improve. But much of this money goes on science, technology and administrative projects, remote from the concerns of the social sciences, including political science.

1.9 A more directly relevant example is provided by a detailed study by Feldman (1989) of policy analysts operating in the US Department of Energy, some being federal civil servants and others seconded to the department from private sector firms and consultancies. She demonstrated that although these analysts operated in the closest possible proximity to policy makers, and within the scope of government secrecy etc, their research very rarely resulted in any concrete policy impacts. Feldman argues that the US Department of Energy (and by extension most central government bureaucracies) invests in building a 'research inventory' of policy proposals, options and analyses that provides a just-in-case capability and that responds to a wide range of stimuli. Many applied research projects are initiated but then not followed up by policy makers – usually because of the time taken to complete research, so that the window of political opportunity passes, or there is churn amongst political executives and decision-makers, with new arrivals often not interested in following up their predecessors' ideas. Feldman found that the policy analysts she studied were well aware that most of the time their research will not eventuate in policy changes, and that in the rare cases where influence did occur it was inevitably shared with the influence of many other actors and external factors.

1.10 One might well ask, if this is true of policy analysts working directly for and to decision-makers within government, how much more likely will this be normally true of external academics, whose projects are primarily formulated to express academic concerns and only secondarily to have policy or practice impacts? The UK Political Studies Association coined a new annual national award in 2003 for work in political science that has most clearly resulted in public policy impacts or changes. The 'Making A Difference' award has been awarded only twice in the subsequent four year period.

1.11 In their important book, *Useable Knowledge: Social Science and Social Problem Solving* the US political scientist Charles Lindblom and educationist David Cohen argued for the social sciences to abandon the ideal of creating a joined up fabric of 'professional social inquiry' that could in time (after the expenditure of vast amounts of money and academic effort) create a comprehensive evidence base to help guide public policy decision-making. They argued that professional social science was so expensive and time-consuming to do that it will never be able to offer more than 'pinprick' illumination of social and economic processes. Research will shed light on small parts of a wider canvass

where the dots are joined up ‘ordinary knowledge’ or common sense – using evidence and hunches that have not been validated by professional social science methods. In addition they argued that professional social science is inherently non-authoritative for a variety of reasons, including the constant variation of states of the world and the strong capacity of human beings to change their behaviour, specifically to change their behaviour in response to analyses of it once they are published.

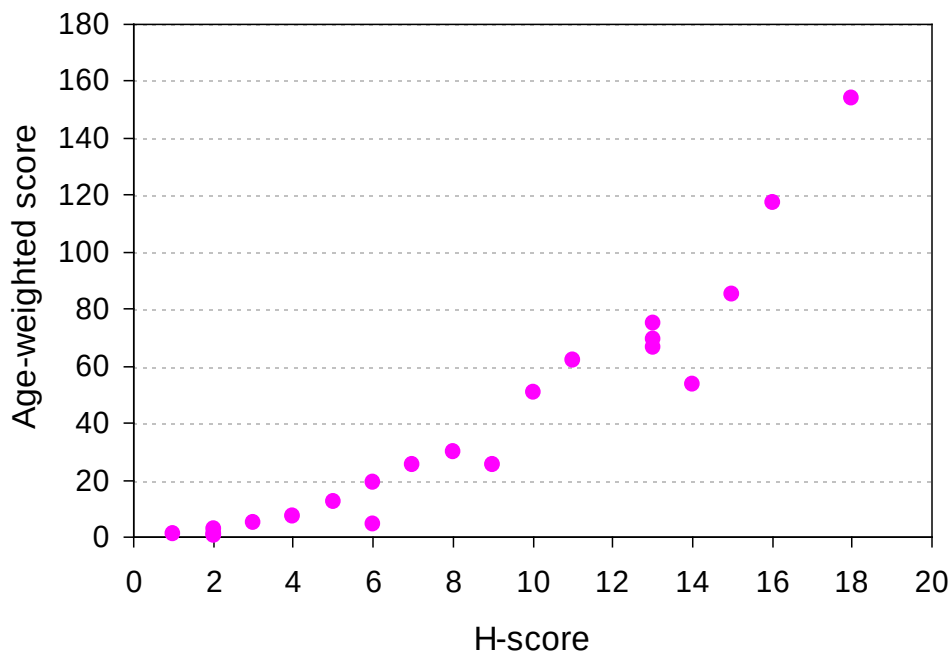
More detailed methods for assessing impacts

1.12 In addition to these meta-level difficulties, it is particularly difficult to assess the policy and practice impacts of academic research for a range of reasons. Historically, academic work has been valued by *quality*, where a research output, such as an article in a prestigious journal has elucidated an original analysis. This quality element has been associated with individual academics being leaders within their chosen field of study and the recognition of such expertise has usually been conferred by peers - other academics. This kind of valuation can be easily mapped by bibliometric measures which are now well-developed with established sources, such as the Web of Knowledge citation indices, and the International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS). Two key indicators of a successful piece of academic work are first, its publication in a well-esteemed and refereed journal, and then the number of citations that this original article accrues over time (and the ‘quality’ of those citations, again delineated by the type and esteem of the publication). These data can be pulled together in different bibliographic indicators. These have recently been harnessed in the internet era by creating software such as the Harzing ‘Publish or Perish’ tool. This allows users to find out the published recorded output of academics by searching on a name, and bringing up a list of possible relevant publication and citation scores. By selecting the relevant ones for the chosen academic, it is possible to generate a number of numerical indicators, which give a picture of the quantity and quality of that person’s historic output.

1.13 **Figure 3** below shows the correlation of two of the Harzing ‘Publish or Perish’ indicators - Hirsch’s h-score and a Harzing-generated Age-related weighted score. The software uses data collected by Google Scholar to produce results, but in some ways the results appear more comprehensive and relevant than doing a search on Google Scholar itself, and the metrics are automatically generated. The h-score is one of the pioneering

measures in the field, which at its simplest is a count based on the number of publications (n) with at least n citations for each of these publications. (Thus an h-score of 18 denotes an individual who has achieved at least 18 publications which all have 18 or more recognised citations.) The Age-related weighted score produces a score based on the average number of citations a year accrued by the individual's works over their career to date. As can be seen from Figure 3, there is quite a clear correlation in our sample of 39 lead researchers, showing that once academics generate a certain number of outputs, their body of work in general becomes quite widely recognised by other academics. These quite sophisticated kinds of measures for academic impact suggest that it is possible to derive metrics to assess the significance (if not the wider impact) of research within the academic community.

Figure 3: The H scores for the 39 lead researchers in our set of responsive mode research projects



Explanatory note: The data points show the location of individual academics within our sample, giving both their h-scores and an Age-Weighted score. Both of these data points are computed by the Harzing software. The h-score is proposed by J.E. Hirsch in his paper 'An index to quantify an individual's scientific research output', [arXiv:physics/0508025](https://arxiv.org/abs/physics/0508025), 5 (29), September 2005. It aims to provide a robust single-number metric of an academic's impact, combining quality with quantity. The Age-weighted score is: Age-weighted citation rate (AWCR) and AW-index. The AWCR measures the average number of citations to an entire body of work, adjusted for the age of each individual paper. It was inspired by Bihui Jin's note *The AR-index: complementing the h-index*, ISSI Newsletter, 3 (1), 2007 p. 6. The Publish or Perish implementation differs from Jin's definition in that it sums over *all* papers instead of only the h-core papers.

1.14 But what of the impacts more widely for policy makers and practitioners?

Less work has been done to assess the impact of academic research impact in these other (non-academic) arenas, not least because it is difficult to delineate and hard to attribute causal links. However, new electronic search tools such as Google, Google Book Search and Google Scholar provide useful opportunities for constructing indicative measures of non-academic impact. Our research team conducted unobtrusive searches using different Google searches to find different types of outputs from the projects we analysed. **Figure 4** shows that adding data from these measures to data generated from conventional citations databases has important gains in terms of broadening our understanding of the impacts of research in a systematic way that was not previously available.

Figure 4: Using web-based indicators as a proxy for dissemination and impact

Websites are not only a valuable source of material for academic research, but they are also a valuable landscape or domain of modern social life which itself can become the object for research. In the modern era, people will increasingly expect to see some organizations (especially governments, media organizations and universities) demonstrating their activities and thinking online. And in the private sector, where social networking has taken off and online games such as 'Second Life' allow people to recreate their actual lives, online environments have now reached a level of sophistication and universality that means that they can be legitimately treated as a proxy for (or at least a pretty clear reflection of) activity in actual life.

The online search component of this review starts from the basis that search engines such as Google are now sophisticated enough to identify most or all references on the internet to a particular body of work. More importantly, if there are no references on the internet to a body of work, then it is likely that activity off-line around that body of work will be scarce or non-existent. Put simply, if it is not on the internet, then it does not exist.

There are certainly some exceptions to this general approach:

- *Work may be so confidential and secret* that no references exist to it on the internet. This may include briefings with senior government officials, or advice to private sector organizations where commercial confidentiality is involved (we term this 'stealth' activity in Figure 5 below);
- *Work published online may exaggerate the level of activity of influence achieved in order to maximize public relations impacts* (we refer to this as 'façade' activity below).

These kinds of exceptions are certainly possible, and where they occur they may be important for assessing policy and practice impacts. Many briefings for government or politicians may be informal and off the record, for instance. And websites can easily create an illusion of organizational structure and profile. However, our approach is based on triangulating across a range of methods, and we use survey and interviews to look for and control for 'stealth' and 'façade' activity.

1.15 We have already noted above the difficulties in ascribing unique causal influence to any one piece of policy analysis or research, and the presence in all public policy fields of many different stakeholders, ‘advocacy coalitions’ and actors vying for influence. Attributing unique causation in such circumstances is almost always asking for the impossible. Yet a broader web-citations based analysis can partly address this difficulty, because (as **Figure 5** shows) it is more inclusive (without of course being comprehensive). The main continuing problems that arise in placing some reliance on web-based measures are shown below:

Figure 5: Web-based measures for assessing activity

<i>Actual activity is...</i>	<i>On the web activity is...</i>	
	Low	High
Not taking place	Evidence of <i>low activity</i>	Possible <i>façade</i> activity
Taking place	Possible <i>stealth</i> activity	Evidence of <i>high activity</i>

A web-based method will work well in interpreting activity levels as indicating high or low influence by actors or research teams/organizations that lie in the upper left and lower right quadrants in the table. In the lower quadrant an academic has policy or practice influence and his/her web profile indicates that, picking up media references or some citations by organizations outside academic life. In the upper quadrant the analyst correctly interprets the absence of web-based indicators of influence as revealing little or no actual influence.

1.16 However, web-based methods will not successfully identify some influence shown in the lower right quadrant where actual activity is taking place within government or other organizations but researchers have adopted an insider or ‘stealth’ profile of not advertising or communicating their work. However, increasingly in advanced industrial countries exerting ‘stealth’ influence is likely to be a rarer and rarer occurrence. We might hope therefore that the number of such cases, of under-estimating the influence of research, would be small. Far more commonly though, web-based methods may record ‘false positives’ for façade activity by researchers or organizations with good PR or networking

skills and visible websites claiming influence, but where there is in fact little underlying influence-exertion taking place. For instance, work may be well cited but policy makers are not very interested in heeding academic research lessons, or because policy makers have ‘fixed ideas’ that they pursue largely in default of an evidence-base justification. Here however, by looking very systematically it may be feasible to crack this façade. An actor or organization may successfully project an impression of influence or activity in one or two areas without in fact doing very much, but yet not have any great ability to do this in a way that carries conviction in all methods or checks. For instance, a policy impact claim that is not backed up by non-academic citations may be considered pretty implausible a priori. We conclude that in principle web-based methods can usefully extend our armoury for achieving a broader-based picture of impacts, as we seek to demonstrate below.

1.17 There are two great advantages of web-based methods, namely that it is easier to undertake comprehensive checks, that is, to conduct a full census of a relevant population and not have to rely on drawing a sample. Secondly, a citations analysis approach is a non-responsive one – it is not dependent upon subjective impressions, which are notoriously liable to distortion by actors in ways that serve their interests or reflect selective processes of remembering or forgetting. And once a broad-based influence grid is available, and especially for an in-depth research report such as this one, it is extremely useful to seek to ‘triangulate’ between non-responsive methods data and that gathered by reactive means, such as surveys and interviews. We asked all of the lead researchers for projects in our study set to fill in an e-survey (also available in paper form). We had a 60 per cent response rate from lead researchers (after allowing for some uncontactable people) a respectable rate in a study of this kind. We especially asked lead researchers to rate their influence in a more disaggregated way. We additionally followed up with 22 of these responding lead researchers by conducting taped phone interviews and some face-to-face interviews. Predominantly in these interviews we worked through the specific survey return, testing the basis for the researcher’s ascriptions of influence, asking about publications’ impacts and about conversations with policy makers, looking for impacts on political, third sector or business organizations, and trying to register contacts with civil service or other decision-makers. We also spent a good deal of time investigating how researchers themselves assessed the specific influence of their ESRC-funded research

against that of a broader volume of preceding and succeeding work, which generally blurs the ascription of influence to smaller RM kinds of projects.

1.18 The survey and interviews with lead researchers also allowed us to try to generate the names of specific impactees of research. We followed up with letters and phone calls to 40 impactees identified by the lead researchers who returned a survey form. Of these, 17 responded, either with an email response or a phone interview. The long time lags involved in following up on research that ended 9 and 6 years ago produced both less feedback and more general feedback than we had hoped to get from this element of our work.

1.19 Lastly, we undertook a broader range of more general interviews with ESRC, AHRC, BBSRC and British Academy to see how they saw the current RM grants process and how it might be improved. We asked our lead researchers the same questions in phone interviews and in the survey, and we conducted interviews with some prominent political scientists not included in the 1998 or 2001 sets of projects but with extensive experience of undertaking ESRC research and trying to disseminate and create impacts from the findings generated.

1.20 We would like to express our profound thanks to all those academics and policy makers who took time to respond so fully and generously to our survey and interview requests. Their unstinting co-operation and supportive engagement made this an extremely fulfilling project to undertake. It also spoke volumes for their commitment to commenting on and seeking to improve ESRC's procedures, and especially its commitment of resources to RM research.

PART 2

The policy and practice impacts achieved and how to measure them

2.1 This part examines the policy and practice impacts achieved by our 39 case study projects and methods for measuring impacts. In particular we focus on:

- the range of outputs produced;
- the main types of impacts claimed by researchers;
- unobtrusive methods for triangulating claims about impact; *and*
- the overall degree of impact achieved.

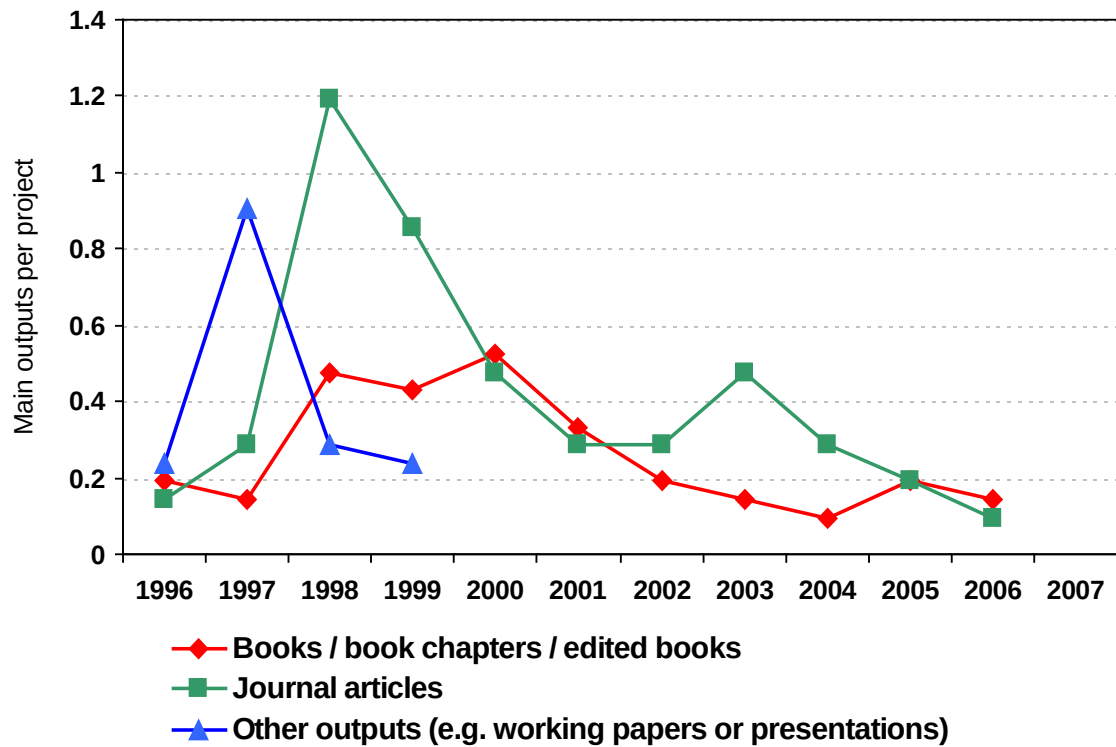
The range of outputs produced

2.2 We created a database of all publication outputs cited in the End of Award (EOA) reports (usually around five outputs) and up to five subsequent publications which we regarded as closely related to the subject of the specific projects and by the same authors (or broadly the same). During our interviews with researchers we checked to make sure that our selection of five publications covered the most important in terms of impact. For each project this gave us selection of 10 or so publications, which could reasonably be seen as either direct or related outputs from the projects.

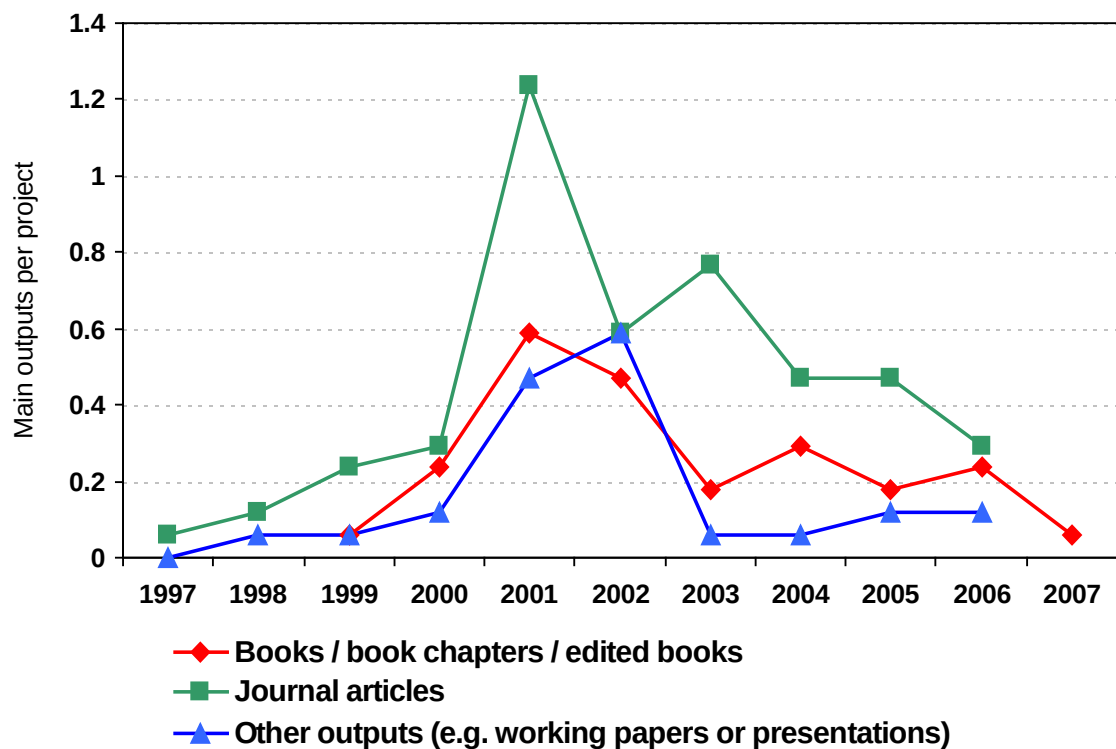
2.3 **Figure 6 [A] and [B]** shows the average number of different types of outputs per project per year for the two sets of projects. This gives an indication in any given year what the overall average output from a project may be. For example, a project ending in 1998 might on average produce 1.2 journal papers in that year, 0.85 in the next year, 0.5 in the next and so on. Over these years therefore, one project may produce on average around two and a half journal papers. Not surprisingly, there is a peaking of academic publication outputs in the same year as research projects finishes, but then a scatter of later publications after (and sometimes long after) the project finishes. These mainly reflect the considerable time delays involved in getting journal articles published, and perhaps in writing longer books. The long tail in terms of outputs in these graphs supports this observation. Other outputs (i.e. working papers and conference presentations) tend to be concentrated in or just after the period when the project was funded.

Figure 6: The average number of main outputs per project per year

[A]. Projects ending in 1998



[B]. Projects ending in 2001



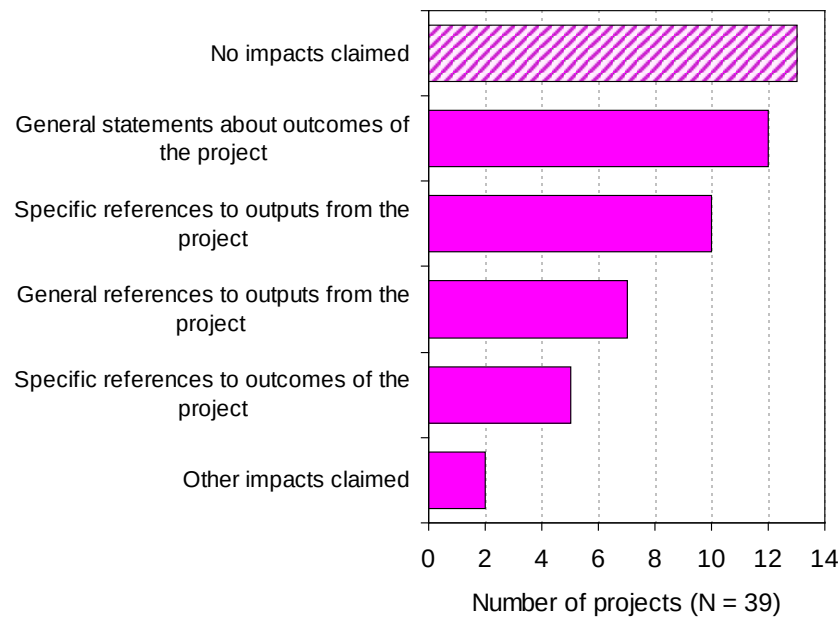
The main types of impacts claimed by researchers

2.4 The centrepiece of our survey was to ask lead researchers to assess the impacts that their ESRC project had achieved. But, six or nine years after the projects finished, we wanted also to see how these judgments would relate to what researchers had originally said about impacts in their contemporaneous EOA reports. We reviewed all the text provided in the section in the EOA report on ‘Impacts’. We coded up all claims made by researchers on the likely impacts of their work and established five categories as follows:

1. *General references to outputs* from the project – this includes all general references to project outputs being relevant or important in the field, but with no specific reference to whom and how.
2. *Specific reference to outputs* from the project – this includes references to project outputs that are seen as relevant to particular organizations or in a particular way.
3. *General references to outcomes* from the project – this includes any general claims that the work has changed views or been of interest in a particular field.
4. *Specific references to outcomes* from the project – this includes any specific examples of how users or impactees have been influenced by the work.
5. *Any other impacts* – particularly structural and capacity building impacts for research institutions, and further funding resulting from this particular project.

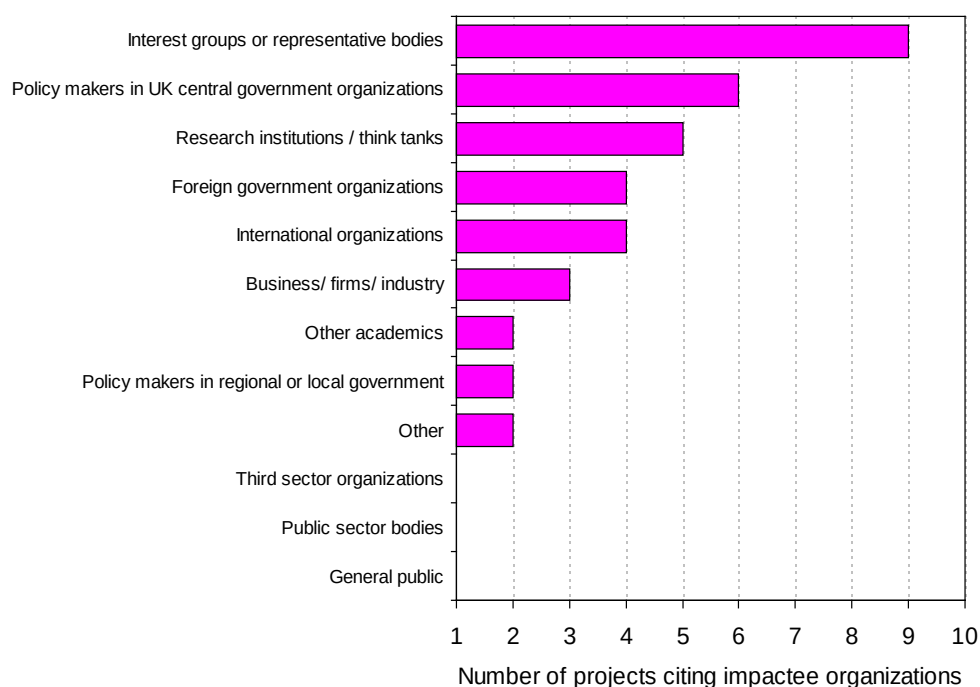
Figure 7 shows the results of this analysis. The modal category was for lead researchers to say nothing about claimed impacts, and the most specific references were made about publications. Specific references to outcomes were relatively scarce, with only 5 projects out of 39 providing written statements about claimed outcomes from the research. General statements about outcomes were far more common. This perhaps reflects a mix of factors determining the extent to which researchers can say with confidence what the outcomes might be. In many cases it is just too early after completion of the research for specific outcomes to be identified. In some cases researchers are not yet aware of the outcomes which have flowed from their project.

Figure 7: The impacts claimed in their End of Award reports by researchers



2.5 We also looked at the range of impactees mentioned in the EOA reports and **Figure 8** highlights those mentioned. Interest groups and parties featured most but policymakers in UK central government were cited second. Business impactees in the UK or elsewhere were rarely mentioned, less than overseas governments.

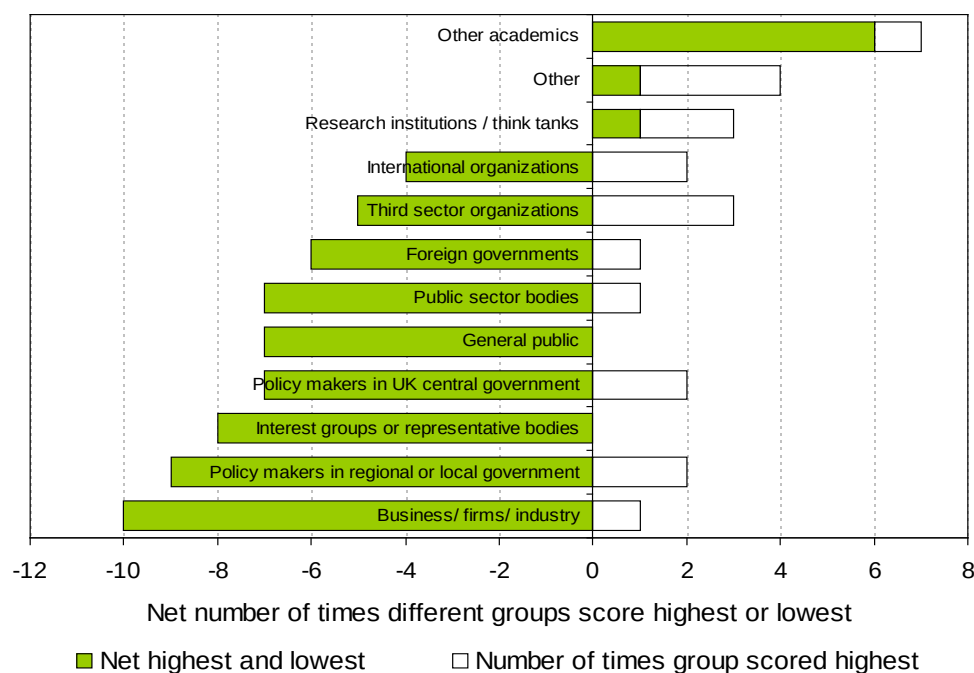
Figure 8: The number of projects citing different kinds of impactees in their End of Award reports



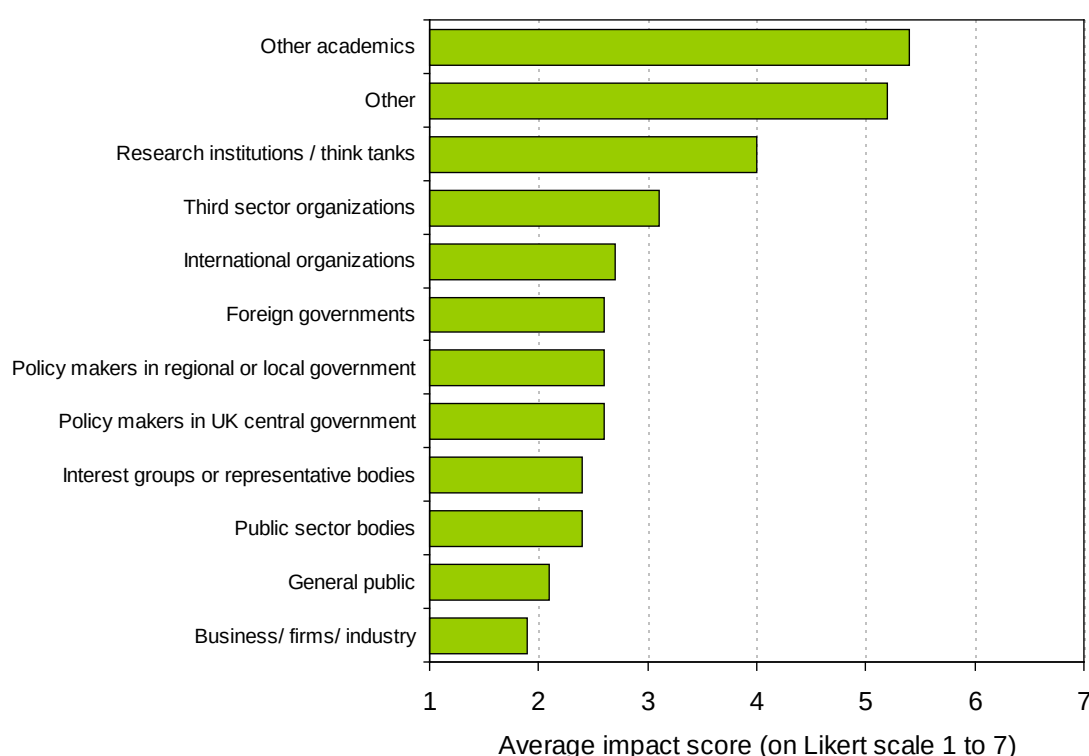
2.6 Turning to the survey responses we received about impacts, generated well after these earlier EOA assessments, researchers had few difficulties about responding to questions on impacts. These data have the virtue that they reflect a more comprehensive view of impacts, rather than researchers having to remember to claim impacts in their EOA reports. They are also more considered judgements, illuminated by hindsight. Finally since we reminded all our survey respondents of main publication outputs achieved and their basic reception, we hoped to counteract the defects arising from relying on researchers recalling events that occurred some years ago. **Figure 9 [A] and [B]** below shows that there was a noticeably different pattern of influence claimed across all responding projects for the impactees. The predominant impacts achieved were seen as coming via impacts on other academics, and next by impacts on a cluster of non-governmental policy actors, specifically parties and parliamentary bodies, think tanks, and research organizations. Impacts claimed for UK central government were much less prominent than in Figure 8, and no more than those cited for foreign governments and UK regional and local government.

Figure 9: impact scores from survey responses

[A]. The number of times researchers scored different impactees as ‘highest’ and ‘lowest’ in the survey



[B]. The average scores claimed across all projects in our survey for different kinds of impactees



Note for Figure 9 [A] and [B]: We asked survey respondents to score the extent to which they felt their work had had an impact on different groups of stakeholders. Scores were given on a Likert scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is equivalent to Very low impact and 7 is equivalent to Very high impact. **[A]** shows the number of times each type of stakeholder scored highest and the number of times they were scored lowest. The solid bar shows the net score. **[B]** shows the average scores for each group of stakeholders. The ‘other’ category here includes GB and NI political parties and the House of Commons authorities.

Unobtrusive methods for triangulating claims about impact

2.7 We looked next to see what light objective and non-reactive measures can shed on the impacts achieved by our RM projects. Our key approach here was to look for references to closely related project outputs in two places, the normal academic publication databases (Web of Knowledge and IBSS) and the broader Google databases. There are well known difficulties in using general internet search engines like Google, whose operations are very considerably affected by apparently small changes in the choice of search terms. We sought to address these problems by adopting a very carefully designed and consistently operated set of procedures that are set out in full in Appendix B below. We used four variations of search terms for each project output, and our view would be that we uncovered a good proportion of relevant references existing in electronic format.

2.8 Approaches for looking at different types of references online are still in an early stage of development. We have used a methodology here that we feel fits the brief set for this report by the ESRC, building on new software tools and our previous experience in these areas. Results for these online tools may be regarded as exploratory. We separated our search into four main types of reference to the specific listed outputs from each project:

Two specific indicators of impact:

- [1] *Standard academic references*: references to the listed output from academic journal articles or books;
- [2] *Other or 'non-standard' references*: references to the listed output in other types of publications (e.g. working papers, university reading lists, press or media, government, policy related organizations);

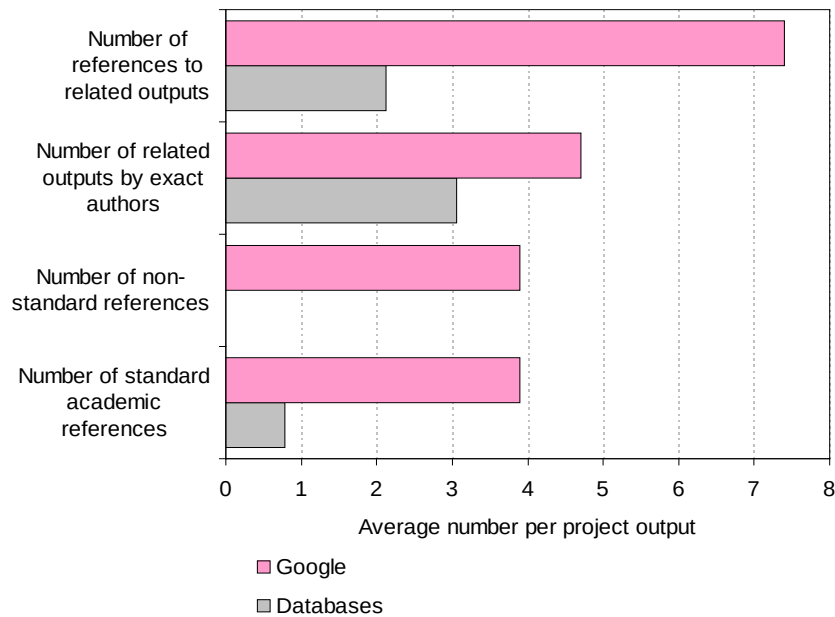
Two background indicators of impact:

- [3] *Related outputs by same authors*: subsequent academic outputs or non-academics outputs from the same authors (subsequent to the project itself);
- [4] *References to related academic or non-academic outputs*: any references by other publications to related outputs by same authors.

This approach allowed us to assess the extent to which each individual listed output from our 39 projects gained coverage in both academic and wider contexts. For each output it also gave us a picture of the density and profile of subsequent work in the area. Given that we were running identical searches for each output (up to five for each project), the chances would be high that any existing background or subsequent material would be locatable using our methods.

2.9 We completed searches for each of our listed outputs in two established databases and in Google search engines. **Figure 10** shows that when implemented in this systematic way, the Google-based approach generates results that are generally consistent with what we would expect from the academic database data and yet are appreciably broader in what impacts they reveal. On average, for every one academic reference found in academic databases, we located a further two or three using Google search tools. We were of course careful to control for repeated references. We found on average 4 non-standard references for each project, an area which academic databases are not set up to cover.

Figure 10: The average number of references to project outputs in academic databases and from our Google searches



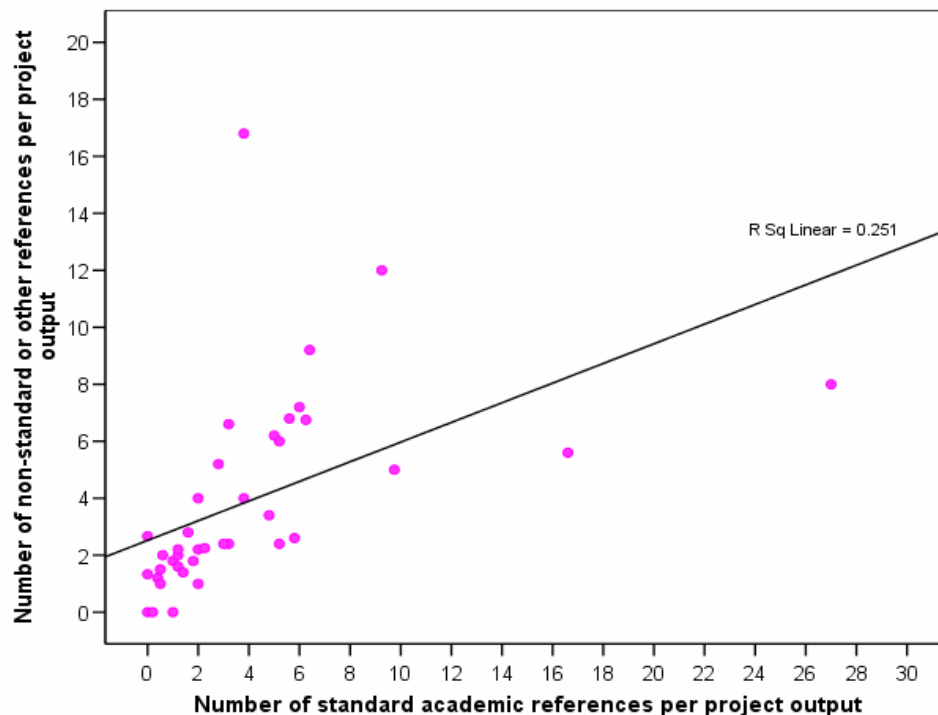
Explanatory note: For each search, we typed in the full name of the paper and the surnames of the authors, and looked at the first 50 results only. We recorded any references which were either:

- Standard references to this output from academic journal articles and book bibliographies;
- Other non-standard references to this output (e.g. working papers, university reading lists, press or media, policy related organizations);
- Related academic or non-academics outputs from the same authors (subsequent to the project itself);
- References to related academic or non-academic outputs.

For each project we recorded these data. Appendix B shows the coding frame we used. This graph shows the average of references found in academic databases (Web of Science and IBSS) against the average number of references found in Google searches.

2.10 We chart the relationship of these two kinds of measures of impacts from project outputs in **Figure 11** below. It shows a reasonable association between them (R-squared 0.251), as we would expect, because many Google references are driven by publications. This association increases to 0.46 if we remove the point above 16, furthest from the best-fit line. The best-fit line in this Figure suggests that for every 10 standard academic references we can expect around 6 non-standard references. This is perhaps a more accurate picture, less affected by outliers. It also paints a less optimistic picture for impacts in that academic references are still predominant over other types of references, suggesting that if some projects can achieve more non-standard references than academic ones, there is significant scope for many more projects to follow suit.

Figure 11: The relationship between standard academic and non-standard (or ‘other’ types of) references to project outputs

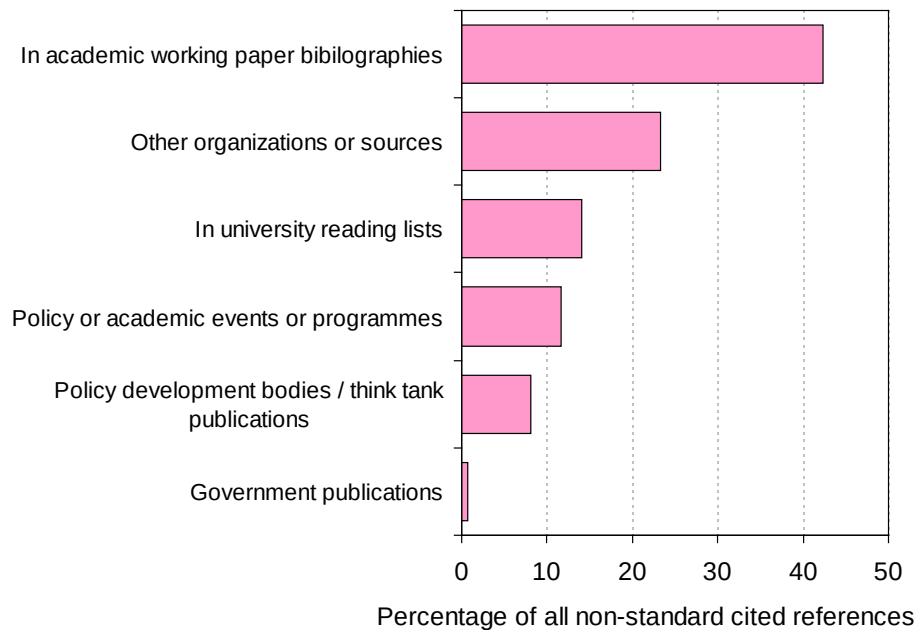


Note: This graph shows the relationship between the average number of standard academic references per project output and the average number of non-standard project outputs. By standard academic reference, we mean any references in journal articles or books. By non-standard, we mean working papers, university reading list references, press and media references, publications by policy makers or practitioners, events, conferences or seminar programmes, and any other reference. The dots show average scores for each project.

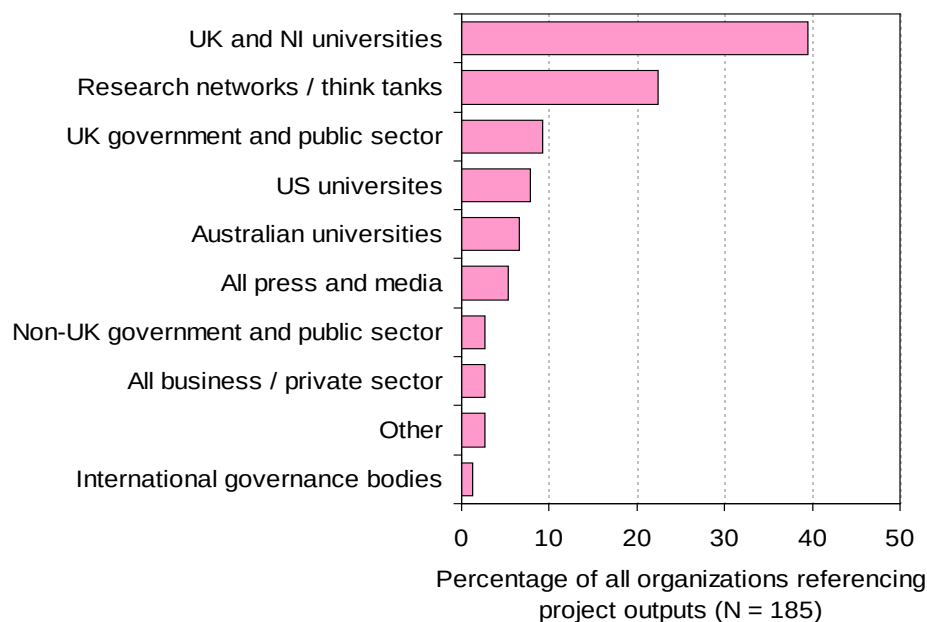
2.11 Our coding frame allows us to record the variation in type of non-standard references we found. **Figure 12 [A]** below shows that in all, 63 per cent of the non-standard references came from other kinds of academic sources, especially citations in working papers and citations in university reading lists. However, at least 37 per cent of these references also come from organizations and sources outside the academic world. **Figure 12 [B]** shows that only just over half of the organizations originating non-standard references were universities in the UK or overseas. Fully 47 per cent of the bodies originating non-standard references were other kinds of organizations, of

Figure 12: Non-standard references

[A]. Where ‘non-standard’ references to project outputs were found



[B]. The types of organizations originating non-standard references to project outputs

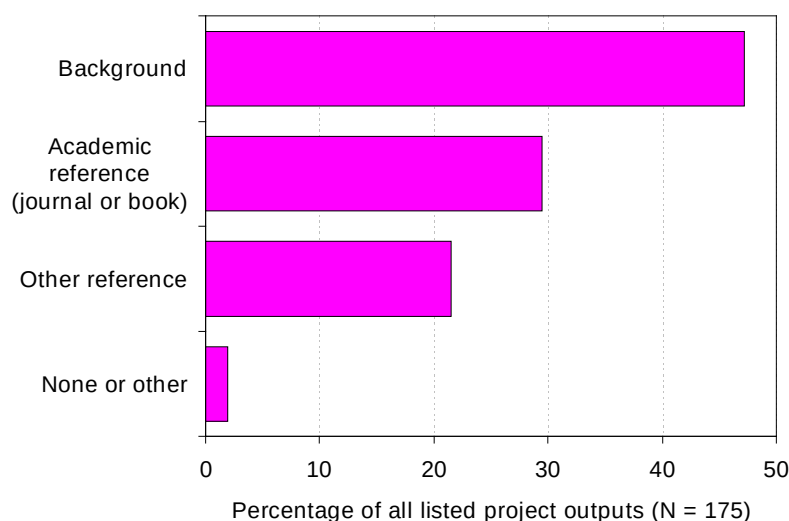


Note: In our Google searches, we recorded all references to listed outputs, the type of referencing publication and the originating body. All referencing publications which were not academic journals and books, we defined ‘non-standard references’. These graphs show all non-standard references by type of source and type of referencing organization. In total we found 870 references from our 39 projects to specific output publications (not including journals and book references), averaging around 20 references per project. Some projects scored much higher than five and others much lower. The ‘Other’ category includes references in press and media sources to specific outputs.

which the biggest source were research networks and think tanks, followed by media references. Citations of project outputs in government and business publications or web materials were small scale (around 10 per cent of the total). But clearly many of the wider references found in our controlled Google searches are highly relevant for assessing the policy and practice impacts, especially references made in think tank or research institute outputs, media coverage and references by interest groups, parties, politicians and (occasionally) references in government publications.

2.12 We looked to see to what extent individual outputs and projects were achieving higher numbers of academic references compared to non-standard or other types of references, and how each of these compared to the number of other references which we found relating to similar and subsequent work in the field. **Figure 13** below shows the number of times different types of references were scored highest (across all four types). For example, searching for a working paper might achieve high numbers of references from non-academic contexts and comparatively less in terms of standard academic references. This would be coded as an ‘Other’ reference. If the highest scores were in either subsequent material or references to subsequent material, then we coded this as ‘Background’. Around 20 per cent of outputs were most frequently referenced by ‘Other’ sources. Almost half scored highest in Background categories, suggesting that the specific outputs themselves did not have great impact on their own but were clearly linked to other relevant material with impact wrapped up in the cumulative effect of the whole (see Figure B1 in Appendix B for more details).

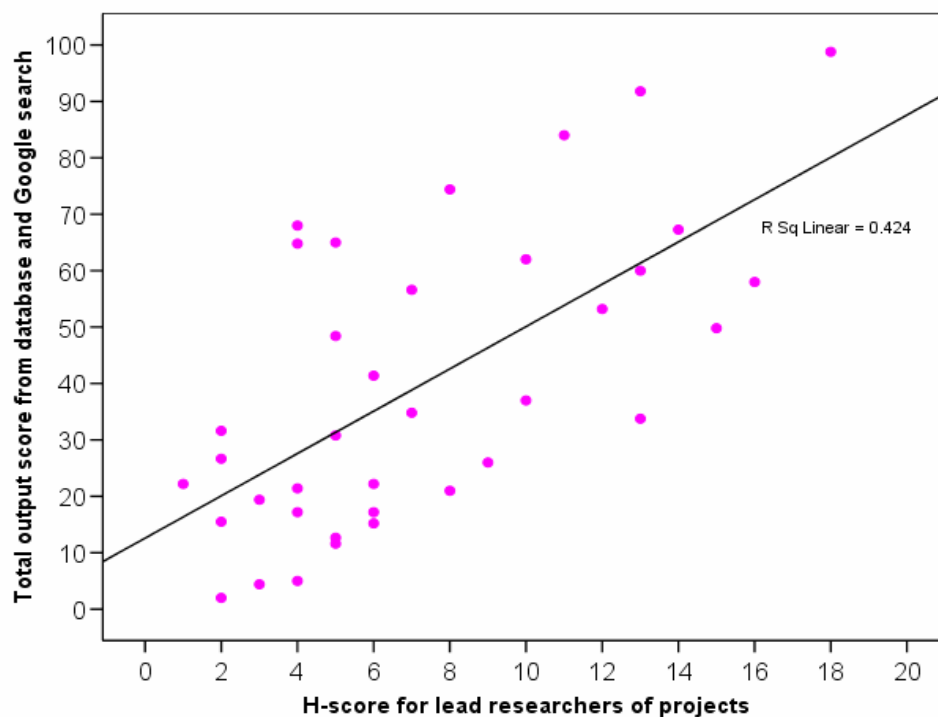
Figure 13: How different outputs were most frequently referenced



The overall impact of projects in the context of wider bodies of work

2.13 We have highlighted the difficulties of isolating lines of causality between specific research projects and specific outcomes, and the difficulty of isolating the impact of one specific research project in a broader body or series of work done in a similar area by the same academic(s). These two fundamental conceptual problems have been at the heart of the research from the outset. Researchers were cautious about making claims in their survey returns on the extent to which their work has led to specific outcomes. But in interviews they provided many specific examples of where they have been involved in decision making processes or information exchanges that seem to have contributed to policy debates and eventual policy outcomes. As much of the material in this Part suggests, the impact of a particular research project is often linked closely to the overall standing of the academics involved. This standing is built up over the long term with serial research projects, regular and quality publications, and development of academic esteem.

Figure 14: Comparing h-scores for our lead researchers and our overall project impact scores



2.14 **Figure 14** above plots the h-score of lead researchers against the overall output score from database and Google searches. As explained above the h-score gives an indication of the academics' overall publication strength, specifically the number of publications produced which receive at least the same number of citations or references from other publications. Our own output score gives a broad proxy for the impact of each of our specific research projects studied, incorporating points for direct references to listed output publications, but also for subsequent relevant publications and references to them (see Appendix E). There is a reasonably close association between h-scores and overall impact scores, supporting the argument that taking into account wider bodies of work and overall publication standing of the academics is important when designing proxies for the impact of specific projects.

2.15 Of course, this fairly strong link does not mean that academics with higher h-score standing will inevitably achieve high impact with individual projects simply by having a high h-score. Nor does it show that researchers with lower h-scores cannot achieve a stellar impact with individual projects. Rather it may simply be that an individual project is of high quality, or has obvious value to policy practitioners or media, or benefits from lucky timing bringing the work's relevance to the fore, all factors operating quite independently from the standing of the academic. However, each of these influences may be boosted in cases where an academic already has an established h-score and recognizability.

2.16 In order to get even a basic comparative overview of the way in which our different projects have achieved different impacts, we have greatly simplified our unobtrusive survey and coding process into some summary indicators. **Figure 15** below consists of six columns, each coded into High/Medium/Low, incorporating the spread of results from our various searches (details on High/Medium/Low categories can be found in the Note beneath the Figure). Columns [1] to [4] show the results from our unobtrusive survey work, where [1] gives an overall score and [2] to [4] gives constituent parts making up this overall score. Column [5] shows the rating for references to five key subsequent publications ('Subsequent output rating'), and column [6] gives the current 'h-score rating' for the lead researcher on the project.

Figure 15: Overall impact profiles for each project (grouped High, Medium and Low)

[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]		
Overall Project Output Rating	Academic references	Other references	Background references	Subsequent output rating	H score rating	Description of subject area	Grant size (£)
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	International health policy	More than £100k
HIGH	Medium	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	EU environmental policy	£41k to £100k
HIGH	Low	Low	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	UK political parties and elections	£41k to £100k
HIGH	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH*	Medium	Federalism, party systems and fiscal redistribution	£11k to £40k
HIGH	Medium	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	Media and elections in the UK	£41k to £100k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Low	Irish military and political history	£11k to £40k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	Liberalism and multicultural diversity	£11k to £40k
HIGH	Medium	Low	HIGH	Medium*	HIGH	UK political parties and elections	£11k to £40k
HIGH	Medium	HIGH	Medium	Medium	HIGH	Grassroots democracy and accountability in India	£11k to £40k
HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	UK political parties and elections	£11k to £40k
HIGH	Medium	Medium	HIGH	Medium	HIGH	European national and regional policy making	More than £100k
HIGH	HIGH	Medium	Medium	Low*	HIGH	Policy change in the UK primary industry sector	£41k to £100k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Low*	HIGH	Public opinion and post-communism	£11k to £40k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Low	Medium	Environment, constitution and rights	£11k to £40k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	Low	Medium	Globalization and South Korea	Less than £10k
HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	Medium	Low	Low	Northern Irish politics	Less than £10k
HIGH	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	Low*	Low	European identity and citizenship	£11k to £40k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	HIGH	HIGH	Public choice and UK local government	£41k to £100k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	HIGH	Medium	Policy transfer, employment and welfare	£41k to £100k
Medium	Medium	Low	Low	HIGH*	Medium	Core executive and policy process in Spain	£41k to £100k
Medium	Medium	Low	Medium	HIGH	Medium	Politics of patient groups in the UK health sector	£41k to £100k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium*	HIGH	Sustainable development and affluent societies	£11k to £40k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	UK political parties and elections	£11k to £40k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium	Caribbean politics	Less than £10k
Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium	Medium*	Medium	International relations theory and practice	£11k to £40k
Medium	Low	Medium	HIGH	Medium*	Low	Liberalism and citizenship	£11k to £40k

(continued from previous page)

[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]		
Overall Project Output Rating	Academic references	Other references	Background references	Subsequent output rating	H score rating	Description of subject area	Grant size (£)
Medium	Low	Medium	Medium	Medium*	Low	International relations theory and practice	£41k to £100k
Medium	Low	Medium	Low	Low	Low	Local government accountability in the UK	£41k to £100k
Medium	Low	Low	Medium	Low*	Low	UK political parties and elections	More than £100k
Low	Low	Low	Low	HIGH	Medium	UK parliamentary practices and standards	£11k to £40k
Low	Low	Low	Medium	HIGH*	Medium	Globalisation and public policy	£11k to £40k
Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium*	Medium	European integration and UK national attitudes	£11k to £40k
Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium	UK civil service	Less than £10k
Low	Low	Low	Medium	Medium*	Low	Media and elections in Russia	£41k to £100k
Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium*	Low	Democracy, integrity, and standards	£11k to £40k
Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low*	Low	UK political parties and elections	£41k to £100k
Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low*	Low	Economic cooperation and South Korea	Less than £10k
Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	UK transport policy and implementation	£41k to £100k
Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	Low	E-democracy and e-government	£11k to £40k

Note: Key indicators of impact Overall project score rating is based on scores from our database and Google searches where High = 50 or above, Medium = 20 to 49, Low = Less than 20. **Subsequent output rating** is based on citations scores from searches in Google Scholar for 5 subsequent publications nominated by researchers where possible. Entries in red indicate that 5 publications were identified by our research team but they were not confirmed with researchers. Subsequent output ratings are categorised where High = Average above 10, Medium = 2 to 10, Low = Less than 2. **H-scores** are categorized where High = 10 or above, Medium = 5 to 9, Low = Less than 5. **Constituent parts of the overall project score** are simply grouped scores for references to Academic outputs from the specific project, Other outputs from the specific project, and Background references to subsequent work relating to the specific project.

2.17 Focusing first on columns [1], [4] and [5] in Figure 15, three projects out of 39 score HIGH across all three key indicators, suggesting that the specific outputs from the projects themselves have had considerable impact and that the lead researchers have achieved high standing in terms of general referencing to their wider work. The three ‘top impact’ projects involved a major study on international health policy and the activities of the UN in this policy area, a study on the Europeanization of environmental policies across UK government, and a large-scale longitudinal study of attitudes and behaviour of Labour party members before and after 1997. However even across these three top impact projects, we see a high degree of variation in the balance between standard academic references and other types of reference (shown in greyscale font in Columns [2] to [4]). One scores highly on both academic references and other references, one scores highly on other references, while the third scores most highly on background, suggesting that the impact of this specific project lies predominantly in subsequent related work by the same authors.

2.18 The next three projects in the table all score highly in terms of our impact score overall and references to subsequent work in related areas, but here the lead researchers themselves tend to have less prolific h-score ratings. This profile may be because they are successes early in the career of academics involved or because these researchers have had relatively few but high-scoring referenced publications. For example, one project scores highly in all components of our combined output score, and in terms of references to subsequent related outputs, while the researcher’s h-score is low. The lead researcher in this project is the youngest of all our 39 lead researchers, suggesting that this researcher has been quick to develop academic excellence and success in other types of dissemination and the h-score will presumably follow once publications grow in number.

2.19 Eleven out of 39 projects are categorized as HIGH in terms of specific impact of the listed projects outputs, but score either MEDIUM or LOW on references to subsequent work. These projects may be one-off pieces or may involve the researcher coming to the end of a thematic strand of work and moving to other fields not directly related, or these profiles may suggest a need for more investigation of what are the key outputs. In one or two projects academics have retired or moved to Emeritus positions and have therefore not published much in the area since. Two projects at the

bottom of this high cluster are categorized as 'low' for both subsequent work and h-score. One of these projects involved the publication of a book that has been very widely cited, in fact that is the most frequently referenced of all outputs we reviewed.

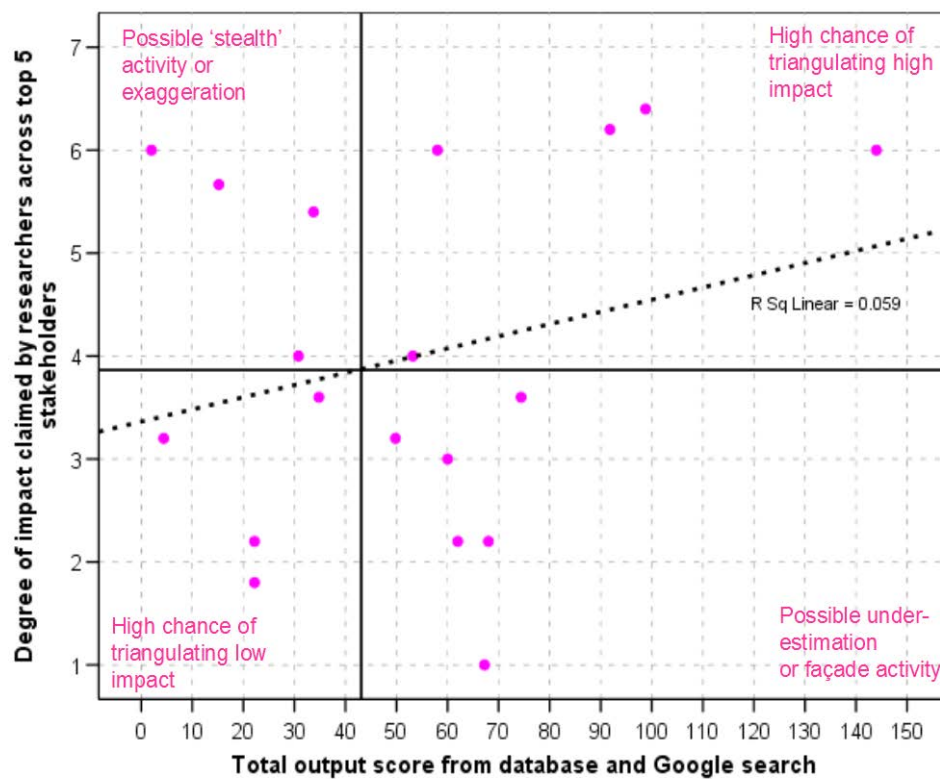
2.20 Focusing now on the 12 projects categorized as MEDIUM, we see that a quarter show signs of comparatively higher impact with subsequent publications in a related area. The MEDIUM scores for these projects tend to be bolstered by relatively frequent referencing to subsequent work while references to actual listed outputs from the projects, either academic or other types, are often categorized as LOW. One project scored MEDIUM overall with HIGH referencing of subsequent work and with the researcher having a HIGH h-score. The lead researcher told us that the particular project had been one of the early pieces of work in this area, 'pioneering in some respects', and that subsequent studies had developed the model. This fits in with the overall picture suggested in this summary table.

2.21 We were not able to secure an interview with or receive a completed survey from six out of ten projects that scored LOW in our overall impact analysis (shown with an asterisk in Column [5]). Out of 16 projects for which we were not able to arrange an interview or receive a completed survey, 12 were in the bottom half of our overall summary table. It is important to point out however that projects scoring LOW in our online search did not necessarily have low impact in actual and overall terms. We conducted interviews and received survey returns from four projects categorized as LOW, and this research raised a number of important examples of impact of the kind we discuss in the earlier sections of this Part. Six out of ten projects scoring LOW overall did score either MEDIUM or HIGH on subsequent publications. Two projects scored LOW right across the board, but even one of these projects showed signs of some relatively innovative and forward thinking in the research topic. Both researchers involved either retired or left academia relatively soon after the completion of the project, possibly explaining the low scores on subsequent referencing.

Estimating research projects' degree of impact

2.22 We look next at how far objective evidence provides grounding for the claims made by researchers in our survey about their projects' impacts. Figures 8 and 9 above already show the types of stakeholders with whom our researchers claimed some degree of impact. In order to get an overall index measure of perceived impact we took the average of the five highest scores given by our researchers in question 4 of our survey, and plotted these average figures against our own impact scores generated from our unobtrusive web searches. The results are shown in **Figure 16** below. If our researchers' perceptions are accurate and our own unobtrusive indicators are reliable, then we might hope to see a relatively close association between these two variables. In fact, we do not, as the low R-squared score shows (0.059).

Figure 16: Impacts claimed for projects graphed against the number of references achieved

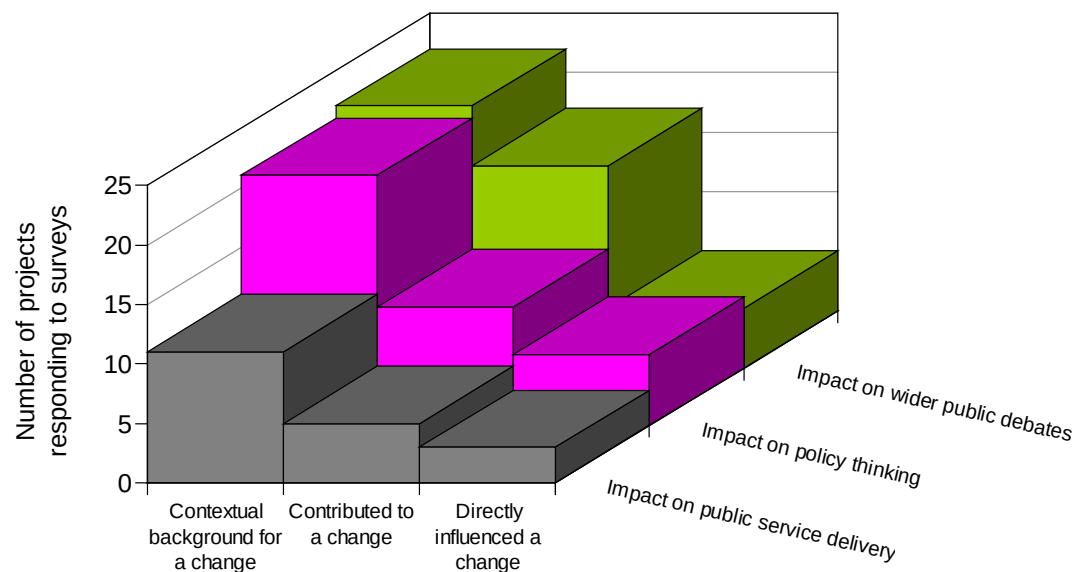


2.23 One possible reason for this negligible relation may be that researchers underestimate or over-state the extent of their projects' impacts, not an unlikely thing given the difficulties of isolating the impacts of academic research. Nevertheless, this data

does help us to illustrate the key point behind Figure 5 in Part 1 of the report, namely that triangulating perception data with more objective and unobtrusive data can help us to weed out and control for over-estimations and under-estimations, and arrive at a best-guesstimate of impact in reality. As Figure 16 above suggests, of the 19 researchers providing an answer to question 4 in the survey, then 4 or 5 projects would seem to be underestimating their impact based on our unobtrusive findings (in the bottom right quadrant) and three projects would seem to be over-estimating their impacts (in the top left quadrant). The alternative possibility here is that although by its nature our unobtrusive web search work looks for relatively objective data on the extent of dissemination, coverage, and by inference, impact of our research projects, there are of course very reasonable question marks around the level of validity of such online data when taken on its own.

2.24 At the end of our survey we wanted to get away from the detailed listing or quantification of project outputs and impacts, and instead ask the lead researchers themselves to offer an overall evaluation of how their projects achieved an impact. We invited researchers to fill in a matrix which identified impact in different areas and the nature of the impact. **Figure 17** below shows the schema we used of types of changes and types of causal influence claimed. The responses obtained showed a good spread of direct and more contextual range of impacts on policies, areas of implementation and delivery of public services, and wider societal debates. Again we found quite high variation in the extent to which researchers were willing to claim impacts. Based on evidence returned in the survey and our own impressions of impact from detailed interview discussions, Figure 17 provides at best an impressionistic overview of different degrees and types of impact.

Figure 17: The overall patterns of impacts claimed for ESRC projects by responding lead researchers



Note: This Figure is based on responses to question 9 in our survey. On completion of all interviews and survey responses, our research team held two in-depth discussion sessions to work through each project and identify to what extent each one fulfilled criteria for different categories above. The data presented is impressionistic and is based on the views of the research team working from transcripts of each interview.

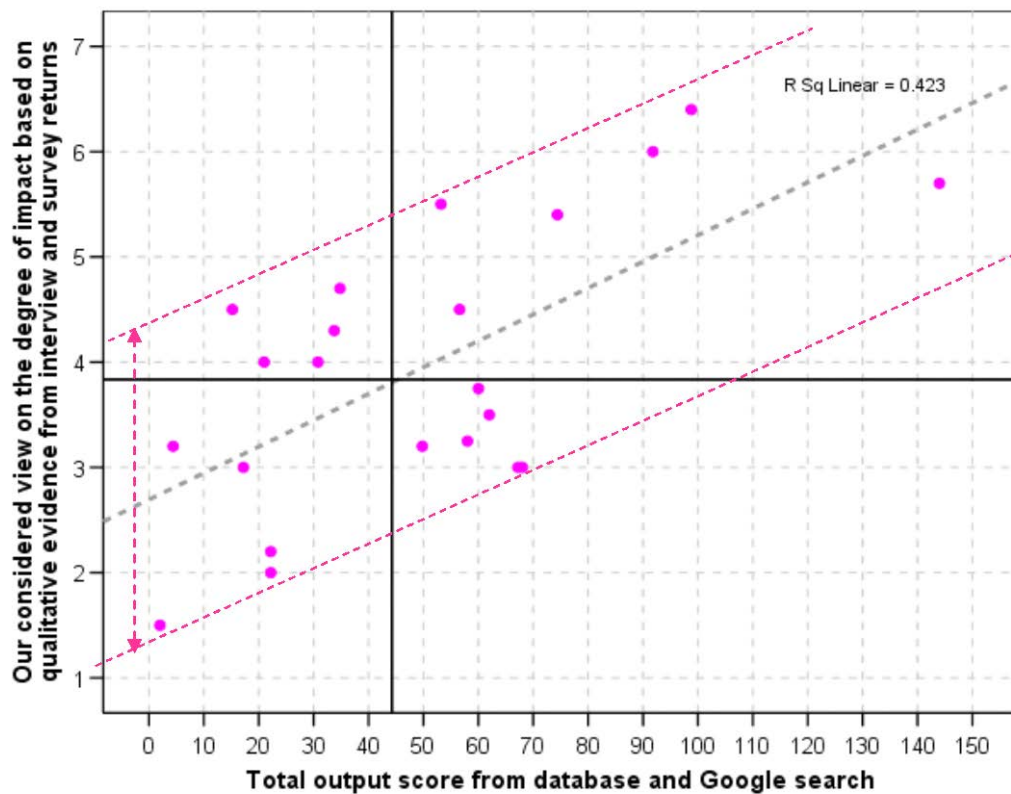
2.25 After in-depth discussion amongst our research team and review of survey returns, we can identify around six examples of researchers' work directly influencing a specific policy change either within an organization or relating to wider government policy. We found a further four cases where research work 'contributed to a change' in policy thinking but where researchers were reluctant to say that their work directly influenced the change. We found three specific examples of research directly influencing a change in the way that public services are delivered. Around ten or eleven projects in total could claim to have had an indirect impact by providing 'contextual background for changes' in the way that public services are delivered. Around four or five researchers claimed impact on wider debates. Across the three general areas of impact, researchers were more likely to claim 'contribution to a change' to wider societal debates. A number of interviewees made the connection here between publication of books which have achieved wide readership (see Figure 19 for details on ten high impact projects).

2.26 The illustrations and examples of specific impacts of the kind listed in the preceding paragraphs provided a basis for us to form a view about the degree and field of impact of each of our projects. After each of our 22 interviews, our research team systematically wrote up a transcript of the discussion, to highlight specific instances of impact and help form a view of how projects fared comparatively. The classification of projects by impact in this way is impressionistic at best and the sheer range of subjects and stakeholders involved across our 39 projects make it very difficult, if not impossible, to standardize completely across different cases.

2.27 Having reiterated these obvious limitations, there was clearly scope for our own research team to ‘moderate’ and re-score indicators in question 4 of the survey in such a way as to standardise at least a little more the impact values ascribed by researchers. During some interviews we invited researchers to reconsider their scores on the basis of examples they had given us, and in practically all cases, researchers were happy to see their scores rise. However, as a separate exercise, after all interviews had been completed, we held a detailed deliberative session to ‘re-evaluate’ the top five impact scores given by researchers, and to downscale or upscale them conservatively in response to the evidence provided in interviews and survey returns. It is important to mention that this exercise was carried out independently from our unobtrusive scores for each project, to the best of our ability behind a ‘Chinese wall’, to ensure that we were not upgrading or downgrading to fit a pre-ordained pattern.

2.28 **Figure 18** below shows the association between the moderated scores set for projects’ perceived impacts and our unchanged unobtrusive measures. The R-squared here is 0.423, considerably higher than the previous association based on the unmoderated perception scores from 23 disparate researchers. But it is still only a reasonable association between the two measures. There are no obvious outliers in this revised picture, although only a handful of projects are very close to the best-fit line. Furthermore, the 3 or 4 high scoring projects on both axes (higher than 70 on the x-axis and above 5 on the y-axis) tend to have quite a high influence on the trajectory of the best-fit line.

Figure 18: Revised degree of association between our overall moderated impact evaluation and our impact score from our unobtrusive web search



2.29 The distribution in Figure 18 above suggests a channel or field of impact demarcated by the broken lines and encompassing a possible range of around three impact points on the y-axis for any point on the x-axis. For example, between 10 and 30 points on the x-axis, the lowest impact score is 2 and the highest is 4.5. Between 50 and 70 impact points, the lowest is 3 and the highest is 5.5. Within this channel of possible impact points, projects can move up and down depending on the specific impacts they make on different groups of stakeholders, and they can move laterally depending on the extent to which dissemination and outputs are made visible online. The two seem intuitively linked. The more researchers publicize their work or at least make it easily accessible and visible, the more they are likely to get noticed and have impacts. Similarly the more specific impacts they have, the more likely it is that particular outputs will be referenced. The next Part evaluates the tools and techniques that researchers have used to achieve impact, or in terms of this Figure above, the things that can be done to shift researchers vertically and laterally.

PART 3

How policy and practice impacts happen

3.1 In this Part we examine the range of factors that might facilitate researchers moving towards the upper-right quadrant of our graph in Figure 18 at the end of Part 2. We cover:

- some leading examples of high impacts from projects;
- the approaches used by project leaders to achieve policy and practice impacts;
- the scope for further boosting the impacts from responsive mode projects.

Looking at high impact projects in more detail

3.2 Before looking for general propositions about achieving impacts, it is useful to present some more detailed qualitative evidence of the strongest impacts by work in our dataset. These cases were compiled through interviews with researchers, through processing survey returns, and from discussions with the impactees of academic research (as nominated by researchers), in each case cross-checked against objective measures of influence and patterns of association from our unobtrusive measures work. **Figure 19** below gives an overview of ten projects and the specific impacts that they have achieved either directly as a result of the project itself or as a result of subsequent research and dissemination activity.

Figure 19: Nine good examples of policy and practice impacts from our studies

Impacts on policy making in British government

- The lead researcher on a small project on ethnic relations was asked to assist the work of a high profile Commission set up by a Secretary of State and chaired by a leading public intellectual to consult and develop policy on the future of multi-ethnic Britain. The Commission produced an influential report which created public controversy with some strong media attacks, but many of its recommendations (such as citizenship ceremonies) were implemented in whole or part. The ESRC-funded project itself was not the key policy-influencing document here, but it was formative in the researcher joining the Commission's work. Later on in a stream of subsequent work drawing on the themes first set out in the ESRC project, the researcher met with a key Downing Street advisor and junior ministers and pressed the case for anti-religious discrimination legislation, subsequently implemented.
- Researchers funded by the ESRC to examine the role of patients' and carers' organisations in policy development, were invited to sit on the advisory group of a Department of Health-funded scoping study for the establishment of a cross-sector umbrella organisation for patients. They also provided evidence to a sector-wide consultation on the potential role of a national patients' organisation as proposed by ministers in 2001. This process ultimately led to the establishment of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) in 2003.
- The ESRC funded research into the implementation of European directives on environmental sustainability and practice across UK central government organizations. Liaison with the Department for Environment during the research led to a presentation of main findings to 50 key civil servants from across government. The researchers also delivered evidence to select committees and worked with Dutch government on similar issues.

Impact on political parties and parliaments

- A number of projects in our dataset involved work by established political scientists on the influence of party political campaigning at general elections and its importance for parties' performance at the polls. Some of this work coincided or was associated with efforts made by major political parties in the UK to grow their membership and activities at grassroots level in the run up to the 1997 general election. The research clearly increased levels of awareness amongst senior party professionals about the importance of constituency campaigning.
- ESRC-funded research examined the attitudes and characteristics of members of the Alliance Party during the period in the run-up to the Northern Ireland Agreement. Researchers secured the support of the party to carry out a major survey of party members. The subject organization used the findings to underpin a review of their own policies and structures. This research also helped to bring about a 'softening' in the rules on parallel consent in the Assembly to provide greater recognition for centrist parties.

- The process for inducting new Members of Parliament was the subject for ongoing work by ESRC-funded researchers covering the 1992 and 1997 general elections. Findings were fed back to the House of Commons authorities and to the parliamentary parties. They helped to encourage a strengthening in the procedures and guidance for inducting MPs leading into the 2001 general election. Researchers also gave evidence to the Conservative Party Commission on strengthening parliament, and to the Hansard Society Commission on scrutiny in parliament.

Impact on foreign governments and international policies

- An ESRC-backed project on the global governance of major world public health issues led to intensive collaboration with international actors such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and other UN agencies involved in health. The researchers were amongst the first to systematically explore global health issues and the role of international governance, for example tracking the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in four African countries. They have since played a direct role in the WHO programme on globalization and in 1999 set up the Centre on Global Change and Health, which was designated as a collaborating centre of the WHO in 2006
- A RM project on the cultural and operational transformation of the Irish military forces led to a range of well-cited journal articles and books. This research subsequently led to a larger project on European military transformation as part of the ESRC New Security Challenges Programme. Senior US Pentagon officials have used the work in Departmental studies of diffusion of military ideas. Researchers have also carried out applied research at the NATO school on officers' views of military transformation.

Impact on journalists and media

- The least costly grant in our dataset went to a researcher to produce a monograph on the history of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), which received a strikingly high amount of coverage in the press and high citations scores. The book was featured on the BBC radio programme Start the Week, and other quality media programmes. At an international press event, two very well-known journalists, one from the BBC and one from the New York Times, debated the book's lessons.

Approaches used to achieve policy and practice impacts

3.3 We turn next to how project leaders went about the task of producing policy and practice impacts, beginning with the most specific and targeted methods employed and then considering later the more 'broadcast' methods of achieving influence by contributing to media, policy and academic debates.

Involving the subjects of research

3.4 Especially in a field like politics and international studies, where policy makers or organizations contributing to policy debates are major foci of research, then involving the subjects or users of research in the research process, or at the least consulting them about it, clearly has a bearing on the degree to which impacts are made. Many researchers told us during interviews that it was helpful to be ‘upfront and honest’ or to have ‘some form of constructive’ communication with the subject bodies involved in the research or with organizations potentially interested in the findings of the research; it helped smooth the research process itself and/or increased the coverage of findings. Reviewing our 39 projects shows that at least two thirds involve intensive stakeholder interviewing programmes, while around one third involve large-scale survey work. Just under a third entailed some kind of collaboration with subject organizations or third party organizations on previously collected data or knowledge (see Appendix E). Researchers generally agreed that the way in which research methods are designed can be critical in determining the quality of impact. Some suggested that were they to replay the same research again, they would make more concerted efforts to involve subject bodies at an early stage in the research process.

3.5 For example, a project on the role of constituency campaigning for UK political parties, provided both party elites and grassroots organizations with valuable insights into the gains that can be achieved through local canvassing and campaign action, and building links and cooperation with these stakeholders from the beginning greatly facilitated the research process (and the dissemination of findings). Similarly another project involved sending a survey to 9,000 Labour party members asking them about their attitudes to the party and to party politics. Here the survey generates reflection and interest at individual level, but also can have organizational responses that can have important multiplier effects in terms of impact. As the lead researcher for this project told us, ‘party professionals paid increasing attention to . . . campaigns (and continue to do so)’. This project rated ‘Briefing policy makers and practitioners’ as its second most important impact activity. Initiating constructive links with political parties in this case also allowed the research team to get access to contact details and demographic data for members.

On integrating users or subjects of the research at an early stage

‘We got over the nervousness of [political] parties by meeting with officials regularly and integrating them into the research.’

‘We made a deal with the [party], which had previously instructed MPs to only respond to constituency surveys, and in return we shared aggregate data with them.’

‘The process of doing the research probably had more impact than the conclusions. Consulting and bringing together researchers and practitioners across Europe for the exchange of experiences and ideas was very satisfying and of considerable interest.’

‘The thought of having users involved in the research horrifies me.’

‘My work is driven by my own research interests, not by what users or policy makers want.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.6 Often the most successful cases of impacts have been where subject organizations have clear incentives to play a part in the research or collaborate on issues relevant to them. Research into the centrist Alliance Party in Northern Ireland involved a questionnaire survey of around 700 members as well as semi-structured interviews focusing on the composition and attitudes of the membership. Having received a supportive letter from the Party at an early stage, the researchers were able to feed back findings through relatively senior gatekeepers at an important time for the party as its profile as a centrist organization in the Assembly was at a high point. This research subsequently served as the basis for a review of Alliance Party policy and strategy. These examples show how independent research can allow subject organizations to do things that they might otherwise find it difficult to initiate, such as probing and asking questions about their own policies and inner workings, while ensuring a degree of objectivity and trust.

3.7 However, subject organizations may be reticent or unwilling to cooperate in independent academic research, even where cooperation could generate free goods for them (in the form of better understanding of their own organization). We found one or two examples where subject organizations for various reasons were reluctant to cooperate with ESRC work. These researchers specifically pointed out that the impact of their work could have been improved had those organizations been more willing to play a part. Although researchers were almost unanimously in agreement about the

inherent value of early and constructive links with subject organizations, some pointed out that building subject organizations more systematically into research applications and research design could lead to problems of conflict of interest and undermine the quality and independence of the academic research itself.

Expert briefing and advice to policy makers and practitioners

3.8 Around one in four researchers suggested that briefing policy makers and practitioners was a main activity in terms of achieving impact. A further one in three said that this was a secondary activity, mostly supplementing more standard dissemination through journals and book contributions. Similarly around one in three EOA reports made reference to either presenting findings at conferences or events at which policy makers and practitioners were present or more direct expert briefing. We found many and varied examples of researchers coming into contact with policy makers and practitioners both in the UK and abroad. Our interviews suggested that around half of researchers could identify specific situations which involved participation in relatively focused practitioners groups, provision of written evidence to standing committees in Parliament, and on a few occasions, one-to-one meetings with senior members of the government. Very few researchers indeed indicated any similar interaction and therefore impact on private sector businesses.

3.9 Around one third of our researchers could point to senior level contact with UK government elites and senior officials from foreign governments and political parties. One experienced researcher identified his particular RM project as an ‘important stepping stone’ to his appointment to a prestigious Commission set up by a key foundation with the blessing of the minister involved and chaired by a well-known intellectual to inform government policy on multiculturalism in the UK. Some key findings of the Commission’s report were largely implemented by the government, such as the instigation of citizenship ceremonies. This influence led to the researcher receiving frequent invitations to make presentations to local authorities, health authorities, and trade unions on issues surrounding implementation. Another researcher identified influential meetings with senior officials in the Australian and British Labour parties, and a meeting with David Miliband in 10 Downing Street

during early 2000 on issues of strategy relating to the Australian Labour Party and lessons for the Labour Party in the UK.

On getting through to policy makers and practitioners

‘It is hard to know if this work has had impact. Policy makers hear what they want to hear.’

‘We didn’t try to feed research findings into policy process. Instead I got involved in process and became an actor.’

‘It’s hard to build up relationships with [government department] staff, as they seem to change post around every two years.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.10 Researchers could also point to quite specific opportunities to influence the policies and work of UK central government departments and agencies. One gave a presentation to around 50 senior and mid-level staff from the UK Department for Environment on findings relating to the extent to which UK government had been successful in implementing European regulations and directives on environment sustainability in government. This opportunity emerged from early meetings with the Department to introduce the research and subsequent interviews with key officials responsible for implementation of EU policy across government. Another project, on the role of health consumer groups, led to members of the research team giving evidence to and having representation on an advisory committee supporting a scoping study for a new national patients’ body. The team were also invited to participate in a sector-wide consultation on the potential role of this organisation, bringing in evidence of their findings. Some researchers identified parliamentary and standing committee briefings as excellent ways to get their research on record and to get publications more widely known.

Using intermediaries and networking

3.11 Coordination and cooperation with intermediary organizations ranging from large international interest representation bodies through to small nationally specific think tanks and policy consultants is a critical aspect of achieving impact for academic research in politics and international studies. Figures 8 and 9 in Part 2 above show that researchers rated think tanks and non-academic research institutions as the third

most influenced group of stakeholders, after other academics in the UK and abroad. (These were the organizations which had a net positive score in terms of the number of times our survey respondents rated them highest minus the number of times they were rated lowest - see Figure 9 for more details.) The bottom line is that intermediary organizations acted in many instances as influential multipliers of reach and dissemination for our RM projects.

3.12 In our discussions with other research councils, we found that collaborative and interdisciplinary research projects were often specifically encouraged or at least looked upon favourably at the application evaluation stage. Out of 63 principal researchers named in our 39 projects, around one in five were based in university departments other than political science, government, international relations and politics. We estimate that around 4 or 5 projects could be said to be ‘interdisciplinary’ in terms of affiliations and subject expertise of lead researchers. Around one quarter of the research projects in our dataset involved some kind of collaboration with academics based in other countries. None of our projects involved any specific collaborative application with other types of organizations, such as private sector or third sector organizations. Many of our researchers said that there should be more opportunities for academic research applications for collaborative research involving partnerships between academic and other types of institutions.

3.13 Many lead researchers pointed out that large interest groups and public affairs/public policy consultants operate at the interface between academic research, public affairs and lobbying, and communications and marketing. Key barriers to achieving impact that are highlighted in Figure 21 below involve a lack of capacity in the research team to do impact work. Tapping into established networks which these intermediary organizations already operate can greatly reduce the transactions costs for researchers of raising awareness and dissemination, costs that are often too great to absorb otherwise. Linking to special interest bodies can also help to bring out new angles to topics that are not generally seen by researchers. As one researcher put it: ‘Placed in the hands of these guys [public affairs consultants], you become aware of new issues and angles which you might not necessarily have been aware at the time’. One of our projects looked at public policy issues around geographical borders inside and on the peripheries of the EU. The research team themselves had built a highly

collaborative and international mix of national and regional policy experts. Yet the lead researcher subsequently identified the biggest factor in producing impact for this research as the work carried out by a Brussels-based think tank, the Centre for European Policy Studies (www.ceps.be), to re-package the findings in a useable format for European officials, and then channel it through established networks, circulating findings in tandem with the organization of events to discuss them.

On collaboration and interdisciplinary research

‘It is not really a conscious strategy to do collaboration...but the advantages outweigh disadvantages.’

‘It is important to encourage collaboration across institutions, across countries...and interdisciplinary research. It has a bearing on impact.’

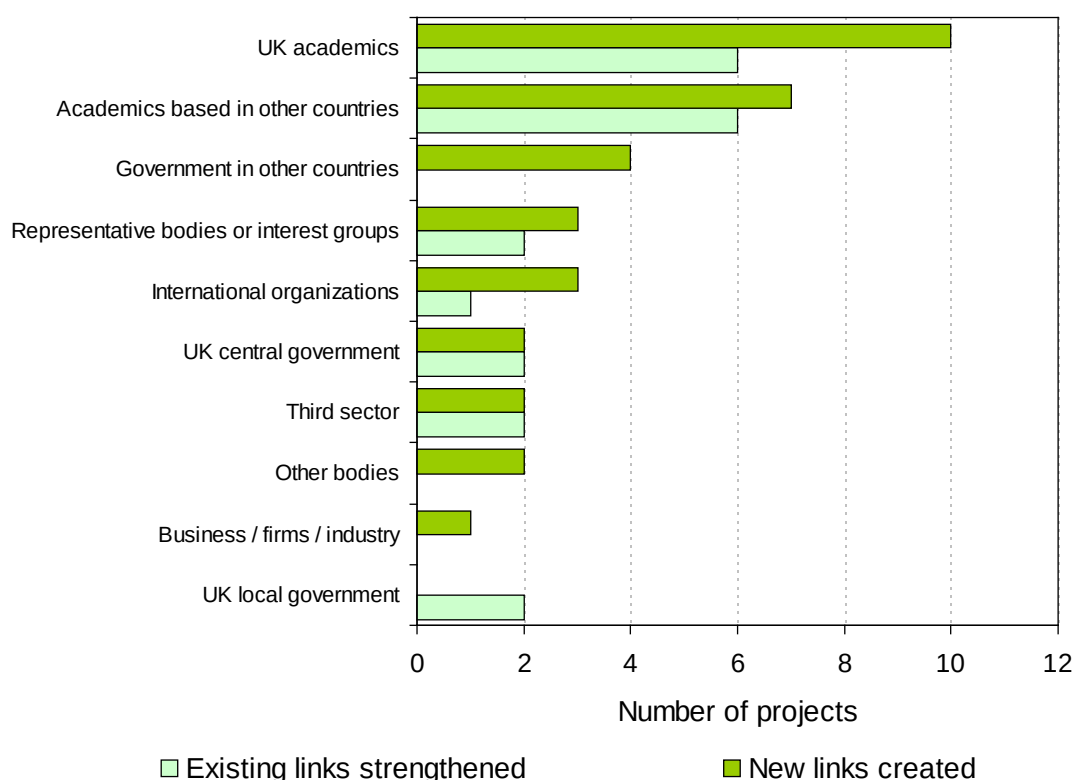
‘Larger grants may be better because (they) result in research teams being built, and the echo effect of research capacity that comes out of that (for) future research.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.14 Many of our researchers told us that one of the key considerations in this kind of impact analysis was finding a way to factor all the informal (and often serendipitous) meetings and connections that take place and which lead to wider coverage and future collaborations. As one researcher put it: ‘Talking to people is more important than writing, when thinking about impact’. This can include chance meetings at conferences, speculative emails in response to circulation of papers and presentations: ‘Things which lead to other things and other things and so on’. These occurrences are inherently hard to track – we asked in our survey about serendipitous influence opportunities but researchers provided few examples. Researchers stress that policy and practice impacts are diffuse, often hard to predict, even harder to audit, and at times rely on luck or vagaries of circumstance.

3.15 One way of attaching some specifics to such a diffuse subject was to ask lead researchers to identify any new collaborations which grew out of the research process or indeed existing collaborations which were strengthened. **Figure 20** below shows

Figure 20: New collaborations forged and existing collaborations strengthened

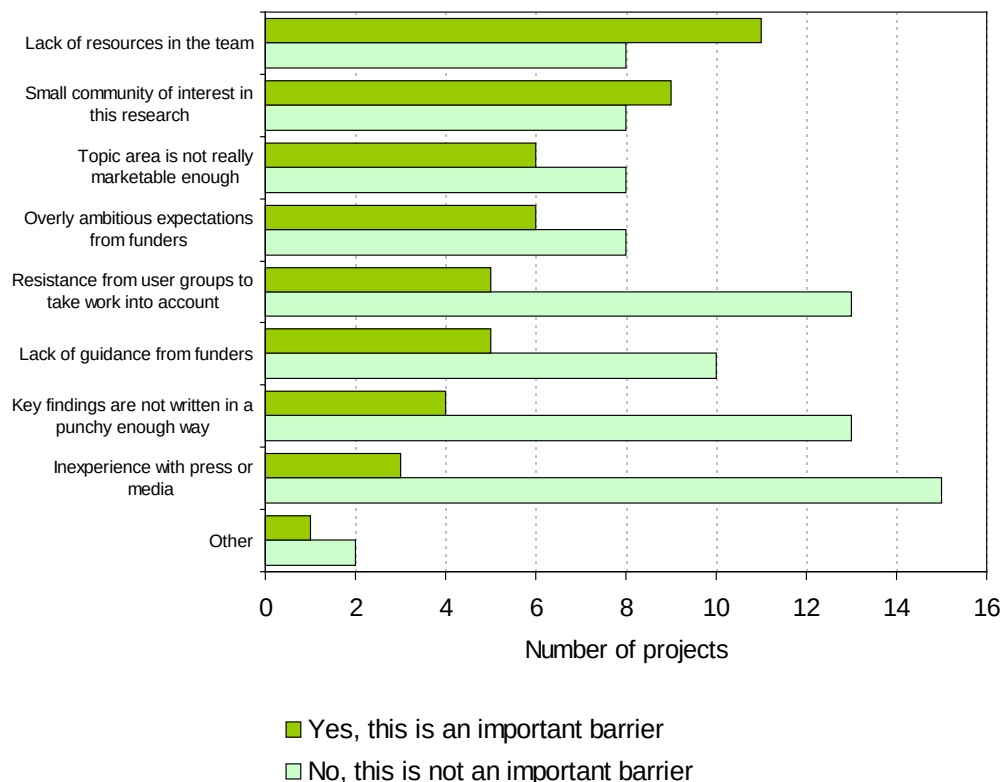


the spread of new and strengthened collaborations. Once again the most common new links were with academics, both in the UK (half of the projects) and abroad (just over one quarter). Four projects told us that they established new working links with officials in foreign governments. One project, looking at the influence of mass media and communications on the election process in the UK and the US, established a new link with the private sector in the form of large broadcasters. The lead researcher told us that these organizations were briefed on the research findings, and were interested ‘for a short while at least’. Surprisingly only three projects out of the 23 responding created new links with voluntary or third sector bodies or international organizations.

Media and publicity work

3.16 Our review of EOA reports and the survey of lead researchers both show that around 1 in every 4 projects directly involved some TV, radio or other media dissemination work. This is not to say that a much higher proportion of our 39 lead researchers are not doing media work on a regular basis, and indeed our interviews suggest that this is the case. The key point here is that 1 in 4 projects directly involved media dissemination. Some researchers found the 1 in 4 ratio lower than they would expect and related it to variations across academics in their interest, and skills, in making the most of media interest. Others found the ratio about right, suggesting that academic research is often of marginal interest to mainstream media, and that it is often difficult to package findings into 30-second slots or limited column inches. Our survey asked researchers to identify important barriers to achieving impacts, and **Figure 21** suggests that while niche-areas and lack of wider interest in research findings are seen as significant barriers, inexperience with press or media is ranked the least significant barrier.

Figure 21: Barriers to achieving impact from academic work



3.17 Research relating to parliamentary parties and elections seems to have attracted the most intensive media interest. Data in Appendix E shows around one in four projects have been in this area. Researchers gave us a long list of mainstream TV and radio programmes and stations where academic findings have been discussed, such as Newsnight, Today Programme, Westminster Hour, Start the Week, World Service, Hearts and Minds, and Radio Ulster.

On the importance of TV and radio work

‘I get quoted quite a lot because I think I’m quite media-friendly.’

‘I was happy to be [involved], in a way that I know some academics aren’t [...] I was willing to become a public intellectual actor rather than someone just saying: “There’s some evidence that I think will help you to improve your policy”. That’s why I use the media more, and I have more impact and so on.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.18 It is difficult to isolate the importance of media work in relation to specific academic research projects for several reasons. First, it is very often the case that an issue will come to the fore within the media independently of the academic research itself, and the media will draw on any existing work by established academics that can shed light on or give background to the issue. Fostering links with journalists is therefore a key part of the impact chain. As one researcher put it:

‘It is very rare that I will phone up a journalist and brief them on a specific finding from my research. It is much more likely that I will get a call from journalists either asking for some general background briefing or opinions on specific matters. That is when research findings can be discussed.’

Another told us that: ‘Impact is not a one-shot process. It is about building up relationships [with journalists] over time’.

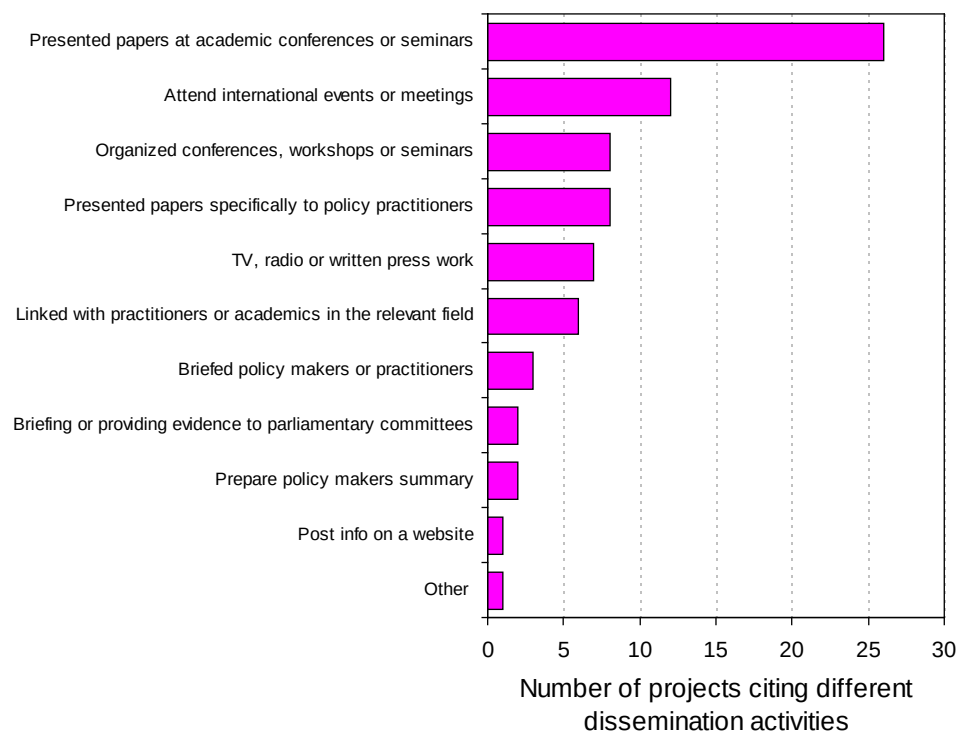
3.19 There is nevertheless an important requirement to brief press and media on the findings from completed research projects. The ESRC will usually commission a press release for those RM projects which have been evaluated as ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’, in conjunction with the researchers themselves. Researchers were generally positive about the impact of the press release, although some complained about the requirement to be available at the time of release to answer any questions

and do follow-on briefings if required. Some researchers suggested to us that it would be a good idea for ESRC to commission press releases, apparently unaware that they were already relatively standard practice for projects deemed of high enough quality and with relevant results.

Making outputs available and visible

3.20 As an initial overview of the tools and techniques used to disseminate findings of research, we coded up responses from the EOA report section asking principal researchers to list their outputs, activities, and impacts from the research period. Lead researchers are asked to submit the EOA report 3 months after the end of the grant period, and so activities to disseminate findings are still very much at an early stage of development, as is impact. Nevertheless, these reports give a good indication of completed and intended dissemination activity. We present some of the most commonly cited activities in **Figure 22** below, of which the most frequently cited was presenting papers at academic conferences and seminars (26 out of 39 projects). Around half this number of projects were involved in organizing events themselves to present their work. Around one quarter of EOA reports specifically mention that the researchers presented their work at events at which policy makers and practitioners were present. Around one in eight lead researchers specifically mentioned TV or radio or other media work, and again only a handful specifically mentioned other forms of briefing or dissemination. It is clear from our projects that impact can often take a while to happen. Many of our researchers suggested during interviews that the EOA report stage is often too soon to meaningfully capture all impacts from the work.

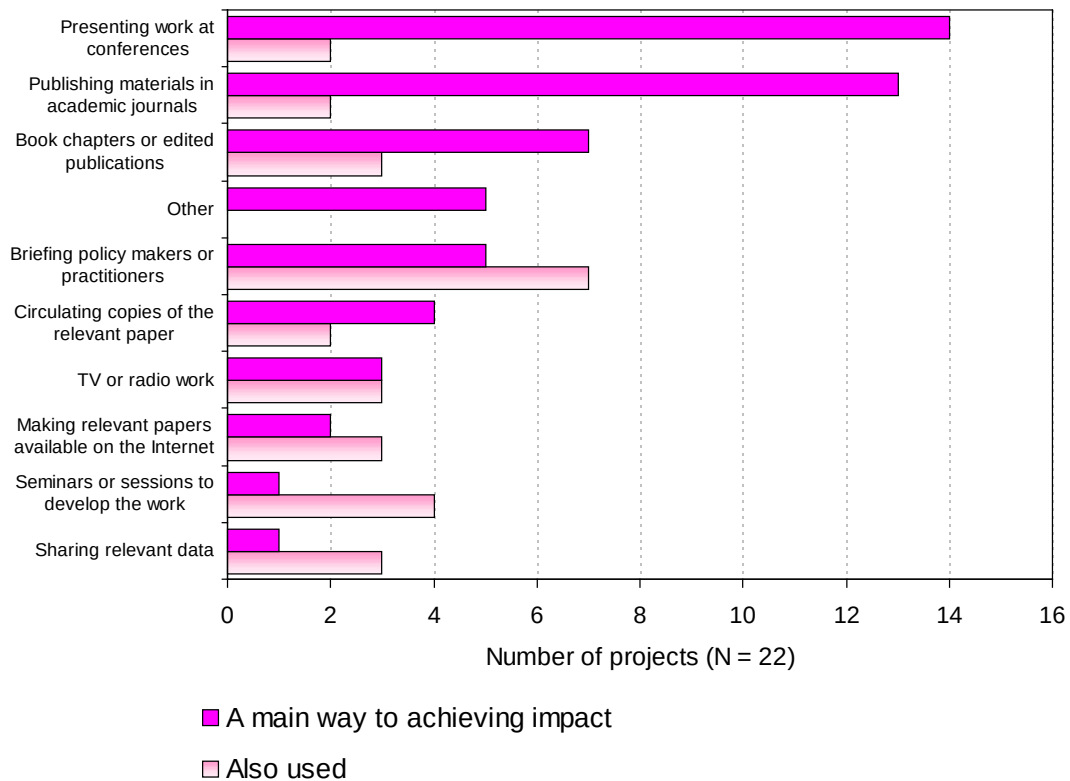
Figure 22: Activities cited in End of Award reports



Note: We reviewed the EOA report for each of our 39 projects. Focusing in particular on the sections labelled ‘Activities’, ‘Outputs’ and ‘Impacts’, we recorded all activities listed which would have relevance for achieving dissemination and impact. The ‘Other’ category consists of providing information in foreign languages for policy makers and practitioners.

3.21 In our survey we asked researchers to tell us which were the main ways in which they sought to achieve impact with their work, and which activities were also used. Respondents were asked to give up to three ‘main ways’ and up to three ‘other ways’ used to help achieve impacts. **Figure 23** below shows that standard academic methods of dissemination are still prominent in this retrospective view, with presenting work at conferences and publishing articles in journals as the two most important activities. Briefing policy makers and practitioners was listed in five cases out of 22 as one of the main ways for achieving impact, but it is interesting that it scored more frequently in the ‘other ways’ heading, suggesting that it figures more as an important secondary-level activity after the more standard activities of publishing in journals and books. Six out of 22 projects reported TV or radio work as either a main or an ‘other’ way of achieving impact.

Figure 23: Ways in which researchers said that their work achieved impacts in responding to our survey

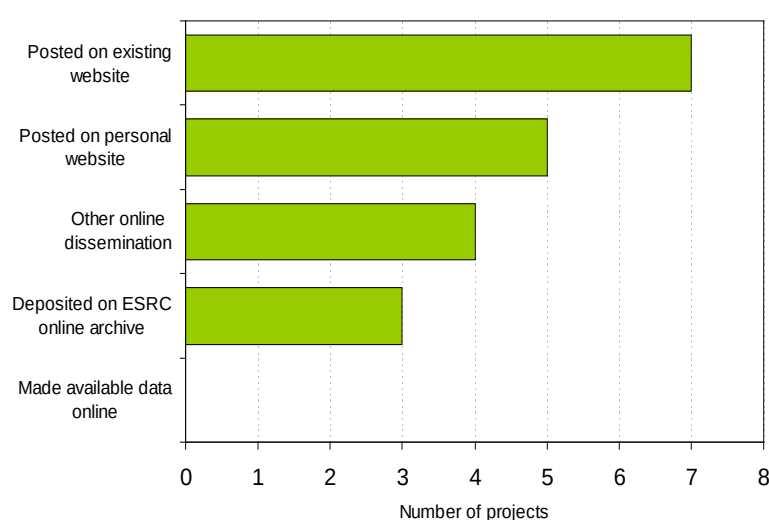


Note: Question 1 of the survey (see Appendix F for the full survey) - We asked researchers to identify the main ways in which they achieved impacts with their research, and then a further three ways which were also used. This graph shows the relative weight of different ways of achieving impact. 'Other' responses included a published book, writing articles in professional practitioner magazines, and participating in a high profile policy making committee.

3.22 Providing free and open access to working papers, presentations and other materials that have not been formerly published as part of journals or books is a vital part of any modern dissemination and impact strategy. Although our 39 projects were all completed by 2001, relatively early in terms of the use of internet in academic research dissemination, we would expect that most funded researchers would provide all relevant publications either through their own university web pages or through dedicated websites. Yet Figures 22 and 23 above suggest that publishing materials on the internet is only seen by 2 out of 22 responding researchers as a 'main way' of achieving impact and as a supplementary way by a further 3 out of 22. In our survey we found that 16 out of 22 researchers had posted materials from their research on websites, either existing university sites or personal sites, and in one or two cases on dedicated research or campaign sites (see **Figure 24**). We searched for a current web

presence for all 39 lead researchers in our dataset. Taking into account one or two retirements, we found that 35 researchers had listings on their university websites. Around four or five had significant presence on the policy-relevant pages of another organization’s website (for example, the comprehensive site on environment politics run by ECPR at www.greenpolitics-ecpr.org). We found only one lead researcher with a ‘blog’. Furthermore we found only one academic with a current Wikipedia entry, and only one academic (not the same one) with a reference found in the blogging community (using a search on Technorati).

Figure 24: How many survey responses list website posting?



3.23 We discussed with our interviewees the web presence from our 39 funded projects as well as more generally the lead researchers responsible for them and many people we spoke to were surprised by the common medium to low profiles. Most lead researchers agreed that there is value in making relevant materials not formally published freely available online. Some admitted to feeling exasperated when it is not possible to access papers in PDF format when they are referenced in working papers and other publications. In our discussions with academics who have successfully built an online presence through well-known and frequently accessed websites, it was clear that this can be done at relatively low cost and can be an invaluable point of reference for interested parties to stay up to speed with latest publications, and indeed to submit their own information and comments. The website www.revolt.org is good example of how an ESRC-funded project in political science (not part of our dataset) can help

to build a trusted and informative online asset, which can then be used and developed subsequently by researchers and practitioners alike.

On the importance of websites

‘Website technology is very easy. But there is attitude of: “If you tell people about something, you’ll lose something” [...] People should have open access.’

‘For (details about the) British Election Study, people tend to go straight to my website.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.24 RM grant recipients are required to maintain an up-to-date list of publications in downloadable format on the ESRC website *Society Today*. This provides a useful central directory of ongoing and past research and many of our researchers told us that they found it is a useful reference tool for reviewing previous work and datasets. For our 39 funded researchers we reviewed the *Society Today* site to see to what extent listed publications were in fact available in downloadable form. Out of 343 listed outputs for our 39 projects, just less than one quarter are currently available in downloadable format. Some researchers expressed reservations about how realistic it is to expect them to keep an up-to-date inventory of all relevant materials on this site. One or two researchers suggested that a more disaggregated approach may be preferable, whereby the *Society Today* website keeps a comprehensive bibliography of relevant project outputs and provides links to academics’ websites for access to downloadable documents. As one researcher put it: ‘It doesn’t work if you are doing lots of briefing papers [...] one or two a week [...] In total we published about a hundred briefing papers [...] You can’t keep updating the database [...] It’s ridiculous’.

3.25 Although only three researchers who responded to the survey told us that they had posted data at the Essex Data Archive, our interviews suggested that this figure is probably somewhat higher. Researchers do in general comply with the requirement to post datasets for use by other academics. Yet few researchers knew to what extent their datasets had been used subsequently. One or two researchers said that they had seen references to their own datasets occasionally in subsequent work by other academics, but could say little more about its re-use. One interviewee suggested that better information about latest postings to the data archive and a more effective search

facility would greatly help researchers to maximize the value of the vast wealth of data warehoused from previous projects.

Edited books and monographs

3.26 Of the outputs listed in EOA reports (176 in total) around 13 per cent were edited books or full monographs. Of subsequent outputs nominated by our researchers (181 in total), just under 1 in 10 were edited books or monographs. In three or four striking cases, published monographs have achieved very high rates of citation and by the authors' own admission, have served as a lasting and easily accessible reference point for a wide range of stakeholders from members of the public, to researchers in universities, and practitioners. In these cases the size of the grant was relatively small, covering travel and subsistence, interview expenses, and in some cases, buy-out from teaching from a term or two to give authors time to compile a manuscript. The most frequently cited of all our 176 outputs was a book on the Irish Republican Army, which then won the Political Studies Association's book of the year award for 2003, and has since achieved around 15,000 copies sold since publication. The grant allocation for this project was around £4,000, making it not only the most cited book in our dataset but the smallest RM grant. In terms of 'bangs per buck' for the ESRC, this would seem to be way ahead.

On the impact potential of books

'Books have quite a high impact, especially if have key information in a particular student area.'

'Academic reviews of my book have been excellent and very encouraging.'

'The ESRC grant gave me the ability to write a much more informed and data-rich monograph.'

'The book has stunning reviews.'

'When the book came out in March 2003 there was an initial flurry of quite a lot of interest from journalists. I was on Start the Week (Radio 4) and Nightwaves (Radio 3); I did an interview on Radio 5 Live, and one for the BBC World Service... [and] a lot of radio in the UK and Belfast.'

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.27 Some researchers suggested that a great way to achieve lasting impact is to get a book onto university reading lists and into university libraries. One researcher told us that the grant funding helped to generate a key textbook. By getting this book on reading lists around the country, it was reaching up to 10,000 students per year and in its various editions had sold somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000 copies. Several lead researchers told us that often the price of a book was a key determining factor on its rate of dissemination, and that it is important to maintain demand for the book so that it is published in paperback form. One said that his book received very high critical acclaim at the time of publication, but that its £80 price tag served as significant barrier to wider dissemination.

Subsequent funding and capacity building

3.28 An important yet perhaps not often considered secondary area of impact for funded research is the extent to which it leads to further funding in a similar area. Thinking retrospectively first of all, we estimate that around one quarter of the research projects in our database can be seen as ongoing work resulting from previous work funded by the ESRC. For some researchers, the specific projects that we asked them about are only one in an already established series of grants received at earlier points in their career. Essentially this boils down to the ESRC funding an ongoing and coherent body of work over a number of years, often stretching for long periods. One experienced researcher told us that this particular project was the fourth or fifth funded by the ESRC over a period of around 20 years, and that each of the projects had very strong unifying themes. Other established researchers have used a series of grants to establish major longitudinal surveys or cyclical surveys. Again, this makes it very difficult to isolate the impact of one project on its own, when much of the intellectual investment and output is inextricably linked to projects from previous grants.

On the cumulative effect of project funding

‘This project was definitely a seed for further work - the next ESRC project fitted perfectly.’

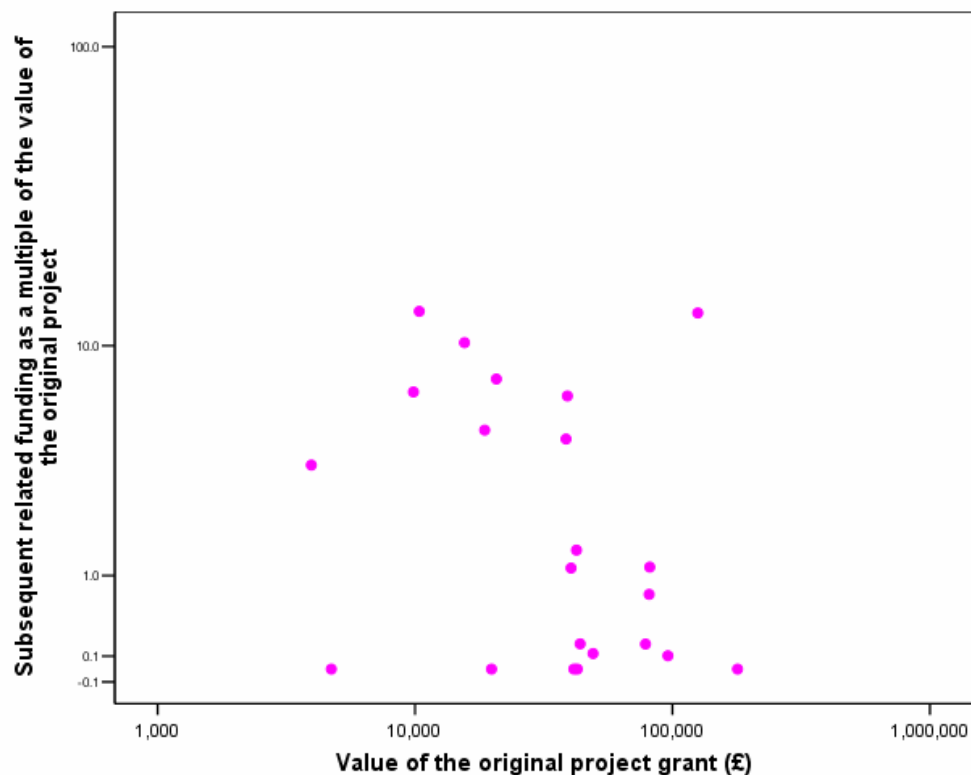
‘Holding an ESRC grant (even a relatively small one) was a very important part of my development from early career lecturer to more confident scholar. It gave an exponential boost to my research career.’

‘Many former students who contributed formally or informally to the research are now established researchers, policy makers and practitioners.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.29 A good proportion of projects also listed significant further funding in response to our survey, shown in **Figure 25**. This is a useful indicator of valuable research in academic and impact terms and serial funding opportunities may also foster the growth of research capacity over time, especially for younger or less experienced researchers applying for the first time for responsive mode funding. Some researchers suggested that RM money received was integral in helping to grow the esteem of the research units in which they were working. Interviewees suggested that the ESRC grant, combined with other grants and income sources, helped to establish credibility and reputation for future research applications. In some projects lead researchers were able to employ research assistants, secure salaried funding, and give them a start in building a career in academic research. Although this is not specifically leading to direct non-academic impact, it obviously has relevance for building capacity and networking opportunities for research units. One researcher suggested that consecutive grants from the ESRC had formed the basis for setting up a journal from scratch with now has a circulation of around 5,000 subscribers. Figure 25 shows subsequent funding as a multiple of the original project grant value. Two separate clusters suggest that the smaller grants have tended to show comparatively higher value subsequent funding.

Figure 25: The value of subsequent funding on similar research areas as a multiple of the original value of the project grant



On the importance of capacity building

‘I think the ESRC should focus on institution-building... There’s an old saying: “If you’re going to dig a well, dig in one place”.’

[The ESRC project] ‘was one of our flagship projects which eventually led us to create the Unit... to pull research together... [now] a roaring success.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

Can projects’ impacts be boosted?

3.30 Our interviews and surveys have given rise to some important recurring themes on the nature and study of impact. In this final section we draw together some of the most common issues and relate them back to our findings, both from our unobtrusive work and from our discussions on specific qualitative examples of impact and how they have come about.

3.31 The bottom line for most of the academics we have spoken to was to achieve publications in peer reviewed journals and books. This ‘bread and butter’ activity, as one interviewee termed it, is still dominant. Given the pressures of modern academic life, and incentives created by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), it remains likely that the incentive to gain academic publications will remain the main factor for both junior academics building their careers and more established academics who have made a name in their field and developed relationships with their peers and with relevant journalists and practitioners. As one researcher told us: ‘The research process is a question of shoehorning your material into good journals’. And as another confirmed: ‘Academic peer review is still first priority. There’ll need to be some change to incentive structures to reach out to non-academic communities’.

On achieving standard academic impact

‘The most satisfying impact I can point to is having my papers referenced by other academics.’

‘I only ever expected to impact on scholarly debates with this project [...] and in this regard I exceeded my expectations.’

‘I did not seek to achieve impacts on policy or practice. I sought to alter ways of thinking and understanding.’

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.32 As we point out at the end of Part 2, there is undoubtedly a link between impact of specific projects and the cumulative impact of a wider body of research which takes its narrative from years and possibly decades of work in the area. In some respects, it is unquestionably difficult to separate the impact of one project from the cumulative impact of work over time. The decent correlation between h-scores and our own output scores from our unobtrusive research supports this relatively self-evident point. We have collected many examples of the knock-on and subsequent impact effects resulting from our specific projects. One of our researchers recently received a sizeable grant from the ESRC to study European military transformation and told us:

At the heart of [this project] is an argument about the transnational diffusion of military ideas, and that directly flows from my arguments about transnational culture, which in turn directly comes from my work on the Irish Army [the original RM project]. So there’s this kind of indirect road where I’d been

working on military organizations and the Irish case study led me to think about this issue in a whole new way.

3.33 Related to this important point is that it is often difficult for researchers to know what the impact of their work will be, certainly from the outset of the research but also on completion. Of course they will have expectations or clear ideas about likely groups of impacted stakeholders. But many of the specific impacts we have found have happened much later than the EOA report stage, and often in combination with subsequent work or new angles brought in by intermediaries or other academics some years later. Some researchers have also suggested that the particular projects we have looked at were never designed to have policy or practice impacts. Some interviewees were quite sceptical about the use of trying to assess one project in isolation. As one researcher told us: '[My research] was an academic, largely technical, piece [...] aimed at developing methods of [...] analysis. Most of your survey questions are irrelevant to it'.

3.34 Another common response to our interviews and surveys has been that researchers simply do not know what the impact of their work has been. Again, this seems an entirely reasonable situation to be in, given the time pressures on academics and difficulties in tracing lines of causation and outcome. Their views of the impacts achieved will be impressionistic and often subject to interpretation of stakeholders involved. Even the 10 'best' impacts sketched out in Figure 19 come with a whole range of caveats and a certain inevitable vagueness.

On difficulties of self-assessing impacts

'I think it is almost impossible for me to judge the impact of my own research.'

'I have no evidence of direct impact on policy.'

'It is very difficult to say. If you mean impact on practitioners, then my guess (and it is only a guess) is that we had no impact.'

Source: Quotes taken from surveys and interviews with lead researchers.

3.35 Much of the material in this report suggests that cycles of impact can vary quite considerably. It is unrealistic to think that specific projects should always achieve up-front impacts that then fizzle out over the mid and long term. As one interviewee put

it: ‘Some projects are sleepers’. Or as another said: ‘Some research projects are completed and [just] get added to an existing pool of knowledge’. Several respondents said that the issues that come to the fore in the media and even in policy making involve ideas or concepts that come back around through a cycle, and have made previous research fashionable or attractive once again. One academic suggested to us that much of the work that he and fellow academics had been doing over two or three decades had underpinned the recent and so-called ‘choice’ agenda in the UK. When pushed to evaluate the impact of his own research in this agenda, the response was essentially that it was obviously not his work alone, but the cumulative impact of waves of academic work by ‘him and people like him’ over the years. Another researcher told us (with some humility) that:

After a period of over a decade of influence, my perspective has been out of favour over the last few years [...] I remain optimistic that I will continue to be recognized as an important participant in relevant debates and that that may prove to be influential with policy makers again in the near future.

3.36 This general point leads to a more specific one frequently raised by our interviewees on *timing*. Lead researchers would often say that their research had come along at just the right time, or that their research had caught a wave or groundswell of interest. The take-up of research by policy makers and practitioners was often more intensive when the prevailing external conditions were favourable. Striking examples from our cases show how broader change can activate or reactivate research findings. The researchers looking at the implementation of EU policies on environmental sustainability in government received large amounts of interest from UK government departmental staff at a time when departments were having to transform their working to comply more closely with EU regulations. Similarly, in several cases the completion of a small research project coincided with government decisions to set up high-level commissions or consultations, in which the researchers then became actively involved.

3.37 Most of the high profile researchers in our dataset are plugged into policy and practice developments, and are to varying degrees ‘insiders’ in policy processes and change. Hence the timing issue is not solely a question of luck or serendipity. It does require that researchers are visible and active at the interface between policy makers, practitioners, knowledge transfer agents such as think-tanks and interest associations,

and that they are able to shrewdly anticipate upcoming issues and design research around them. For example, the research team looking at the role of health consumer groups saw intensive work to make contact with key stakeholders such as patient groups and the Department of Health as important preparation work. ‘We spent a lot of time preparing for it’, the lead researcher told us, ‘building up informal data on what was happening. If you are familiar with what is happening, you can build up an archive over time, return to it, update it, and it comes in very useful’.

3.38 The issue of timing links quite closely to the extent to which academic research is calibrated to be responsive and agile in its outputs and dissemination. Senior research directors at two large UK ministerial departments relevant for politics and international studies research told us that the academic research cycles tends to be much longer than policy development cycles. Although they acknowledged that policy cycles also vary a lot, they felt that academic cycles often were not sufficiently geared to policy development cycles. These officials suggested that they would speak to selected academics possibly once or twice a month depending on the issues at stake, and that their needs were more geared to short and digestible policy summaries, background, independent insights, and so on. One of our interviewees suggested that a ‘quid pro quo’ style of arrangement existed, where he could call on academics every so often for advice or background briefing, and in return, make available research funding opportunities and invite academics to departmental seminars and briefings where relevant.

3.39 This style of light-touch and regularized interaction with the academic community also chimed with the views of most people nominated as impactees. They stressed that research outputs should be available in a range of usable formats, especially summaries and digests of research findings written in ways that are easily processed by policy makers or practitioners. Apart from the ESRC press release, there is nothing really equivalent to the 3 or 4 page ‘Policy Findings’ summaries produced as a matter of course by researchers for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, or the excellent accessible accounts of research published by some ESRC Research Centres (such as the LSE magazine *Centrepiece*). Many of our researchers told us that they sent out briefings or summaries to relevant stakeholders, as well as giving presentations to policy makers or practitioners. But some said that they could have

done more to package their work for differentiated audiences. As one researcher told us: ‘The research was not set up to have impacts with people outside of the academic community. For example, we did not write it up in a way which would have immediate relevance to policy makers’.

3.40 We found a range of views amongst our researchers on the merits of large grants and small grants, and the relationship between different sizes and different types of impact. Some interviewees backed large grants, suggesting that it is often necessary to approach research over a decent period of time and that employing research staff can often have institutional impacts over the longer term. A good range of interviewees however thought that small grants allowed for focused work that can often serve as a theoretical or empirical basis for further study. Six of our research projects led to more in-depth and larger funded research in similar areas, and a further five initiated or continued regular forms of survey work. Our interview evidence also suggests that smaller and more focused grants tend to reduce the time-span between research starting and the generation of usable knowledge and findings. As our case projects have shown, some very small grants resulted in some high-impact publications. But in addition, the opportunity for building small grants in a modular fashion allows researchers to mix research with dissemination in more manageable chunks, give presentations and run seminars on results so far, and engage potential users at more regular intervals. As one researcher put it: ‘Research is often incremental and does not consist of eureka moments [...] It should be a question of making it easier to get small amounts of money as seed funding and build research over time [...]’. Another experienced researcher told us: ‘As with most good relationships, they take time to build. There needs to be regular contact, a degree of trust, and a reason for both parties to be in it in the first place’.

PART 4

Recommendations

4.1 The primary aim of this research has been to shed light on the ways in which politics and international studies projects have achieved policy and practice impacts. However, our brief also called for us to make limited recommendations on how the assessment of these impacts in future might be improved. And in our interviews with lead researchers many people made useful and extended suggestions about how the impacts of ESRC-funded responsive mode projects could be improved, suggestions that we pass on below.

Improving the assessment of impacts from responsive mode projects

4.2 Although this research has been of limited scale and duration we hope to have demonstrated that it is perhaps more feasible than might be supposed for the ESRC to measure well the impacts of its RM grants and the projects that they support. By triangulating across a range of measures, the approach used here shows that a reasonably well-evidenced set of conclusions can be reached about impacts of academic research. Specifically we would suggest:

(A) The current End of Award report form might be revised so that it is at once less burdensome for lead researchers to fill in (for example, being in an e-survey form and allowing more publications and materials for review to be directly attached) while also incorporating more targeted and specific questions about impacts, on the lines of those in our questionnaire to researchers, shown in Appendix F below. Researchers often said to us in interviews that they could have given more impacts data at the EOA stage had they had more of an idea of what ESRC might be interested in, and more reminders of factors to consider. It would be useful to incorporate a small number of scale response questions into the EOA report. This would allow the ESRC to better calibrate the strength of impact suggested in free-text responses, and it would provide a useful source for management information and improving the external reporting of impact issues.

(B) Many of our interviewees suggested that impacts often take a while to happen, and so it is often not possible to give evidence of impacts immediately on completion of the research and submission of the EOA report. In our discussions with other research councils, we found that some send out a follow-up impact evaluation request to researchers some years after completion of the project. This makes it possible to follow up on impacts with researchers productively and relatively painlessly. At three years out from the EOA reports, ESRC could resend lead researchers electronically their previously completed EOA impact score numbers and accompanying text boxes. Lead researchers would be asked then:

- a) to fill out any further progress made with outputs;
- b) to perhaps list the citations and references that their outputs have by now attracted; and
- c) to say with a bit of hindsight how they would now overall judge the impacts of their project.

Our findings above show that the 3 year time limit would be ideal in terms of encompassing the maximum number of outputs, while still being near enough in time for lead researchers to have clear recall of the project and of how it worked out. It is important to recognize too that from now on the time-limits appropriate for assessing the influences from projects will need to compress, to reflect the speedier dissemination of the internet era.

(C) The ESRC could helpfully institutionalize something similar to the operation that we have carried out here, by not just commissioning reviewers to report on individual EOA reports, but by additionally asking two reviewers to look at the top level impacts achieved by the whole set of politics and international studies projects finishing in a given year. Either the same two reviewers or new ones could also be asked to look at the 3 year returns. Introducing these procedures would mean that the ESRC was reinforcing its commitment to managing *portfolios* of RM projects, instead of just monitoring individual grants. Clearly, a good deal of thought would need to be put into the redesign of the EOA forms and of the 3 year updates. But with modern e-

survey methods a great deal of information can now be collected without increasing the transactions costs for lead researchers.

4.3 It would be important to ensure that the impact components in the EOA report and, if acted upon, the three year follow up report, have credibility and profile enough for academic researchers to complete them comprehensively. As in this study, a small number of researchers in our own study will be reluctant to complete the survey (or to take part in follow-up research at all). Rather than envisaging adding to the mandatory requirements on RM award holders, it might be sensible for ESRC to consider how they might build in better incentives for academics to report impacts into the process.

4.4 Of course, these suggestions for improving impact assessment are drawn only from a limited study of RM work in one disciplinary area, politics and international studies. The ESRC has commissioned a range of work in recent years to understand more fully how impacts emerge from academic work across a wide range of disciplines. However, we are reasonably confident from conversations with a wide range of bodies involved in funding academic research and developing feedback on policy impacts that these suggestions could have wider applicability across the range of the ESRC's RM activities. Of course, the nature of the items to be included in EOA and 3 year follow-up questionnaires would need to be carefully considered to ensure general applicability across disciplines - but without losing the capacity to help lead researchers respond productively by stimulating recall and triggering relevant connections.

Improving the impacts from responsive mode projects

4.5 In our interactions with researchers it became clear that the design and use of a set of tools to measure impact in a more systematic and explicit way might also have positive effects in improving the underlying transfer of academic knowledge into public policy making and policy debates. It would do so by 'socializing' researchers more regularly and more specifically into the need to focus on policy and practice impacts. ESRC could do more to generate useful impacts simply by better communicating to researchers, in a more consistent and focused way, that this is an area where it values researchers' performance. In our discussions with lead

researchers, we were almost bombarded with ‘collateral’ suggestions on how the impacts from RM projects could be improved. Although the ideas below perhaps fall out-of-scope for our research, we hope that it may none the less be useful to set out a range of the most commonly occurring suggestions for consideration by the ESRC.

4.6 For projects completed during our research period, and also largely for those since, the ESRC produces a press release in cooperation with the researchers, which is usually written up to six months after submission of the EOA report. Some researchers suggested that this should be produced more promptly and could be part of a more ‘differentiated’ set of outputs such as short digests summarizing relevant points for policy makers and practitioners. In large institutions with well-established press offices (like the LSE) the ESRC’s input is not very relevant and normally comes too late in the process to be valuable. But in many other universities, whose press offices are primarily orientated to course marketing, the ESRC’s assistance was much more valuable for researchers, but often came too late to be topical or to secure coverage. A more proactive and speedier service, focusing more help on researchers without their own in-house dissemination resources, would improve incentives to look for and develop impact opportunities.

4.7 Many researchers said to us that it would be useful to have a small funding scheme designed to help current or past RM researchers boost the impact of their research. A large proportion of those researchers making this point had not heard of the Impact Grants Scheme, currently in its second year and designed to do exactly what the researchers were suggesting. We recommend that the ESRC consider ways to raise the profile of this scheme, perhaps especially for those researchers submitting the most impact-conscious EOA reports. The ESRC might also wish to consider how to make this scheme flexible yet focused enough to encourage a wider range of researchers.

4.8 In our general discussions with researchers and with other research councils, we were struck by the extent to which collaborative projects yielded much wider and networked impacts. Collaborations in some cases involved partnerships with third sector bodies, or interdisciplinary cooperation across academic departments. Could ESRC do more to ensure that collaborative experience brought into research grant

applications is better recognized and encouraged, and that past impact-achievements by principal applicants are more constructively valued at the applications stage? This might involve innovating with schemes which ‘match funding’ from ESRC with funding from collaborative partnerships.

4.9 Some of the research projects in our dataset have involved relatively small amounts of money and yet have led to comparatively high impact publications such as text books and popular monographs. In terms of ‘bangs per buck’, this funding model seems to have lasting value both for the researchers involved and for the ESRC. A substantial number of researchers asked if ESRC could consider methods of encouraging small grants targeting high impact books or monographs, ideally in ways that would avoid both departmental approvals being needed or large slices of money being diverted from the total grant amount in university administrative headings. For researchers receiving ‘serial’ funding for numerous projects over the years, some kind of small, personally focused grant scheme for drawing together work and improving its visibility could have potential.

4.10 There was a quite pervasive feeling amongst the RM lead researchers whom we interviewed that ESRC could productively spend small amounts of money by allowing further investment in or support for those projects that can make a proven case for having achieved impacts. For example, this might include money to help support researchers writing books or pulling together results from a number of linked studies, often serially funded by ESRC alone or with other foundations, so as to increase their public visibility. There was also a demand for additional small amounts of help for quantitative researchers to help create linked databases from ESRC and other funded studies conducted by the same researcher or research team.

4.11 Some researchers suggested to us that the requirement to produce full economic costs for all RM applications can often be quite burdensome, particularly for applications for relatively small grants. This can act as an incentive to inflate the size of the funding required, and can have the effect of increasing risk for the ESRC. Some research councils have a category for small grants that do not require full economic costs from researchers. These are frequently used for feasibility studies, small surveys, piloting or case studies, and they can serve as a stepping stone to larger

grants, where impact issues can be better handled from a more knowledgeable foundation. ESRC might consider the economic and researcher-incentive benefits from introducing a small grant category free of full economic costs, for quick and very targeted ‘seed’ research that pays explicit attention to impacts issues.

4.12 Many of our researchers have had funding from the ESRC previous to the specific projects we covered, and likewise, many had received funding subsequently. Much of the work focused on very similar areas of research, and in some cases involved re-running previously funded research to look for changes over time. Some researchers complained of a kind of blank, ‘Do we know you attitude?’ to successor or serial bids – perhaps reflecting a propriety concern by ESRC staff to treat all grant applications with due equality. Although the administration of RM should be open and flexible enough to encourage new researchers to enter the field and to provide funding for high quality one-off pieces of research, there is clearly potential to develop customer relationship management (CRM) systems with established researchers, and to better capitalize on potential impact synergies (and transaction cost economies) created by serial applications.

4.13 A final point put us by quite a few respondents is mentioned here *simply for information*, and strictly falls well outside our brief. A large proportion of the projects in our data set were valued at less than £50,000. The current threshold between small and standard sized projects is £100,000 with full economic costing, a money level exceeded in this batch of projects only 4 times. Some more experienced researchers suggested to us that the cross-ESRC threshold for small grants is somewhat artificial given this distribution of grant sizes in politics and international studies. They argued that the ESRC should consider the option of reducing the threshold for small projects down to £50,000 and innovating with different schemes to encourage varied types of research application.