

'Impact' can mean different things to different people yet all researchers are being faced with proving evidence of their own impact. **Teresa Penfield**

(http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/blog-contributors/#Teresa_Penfield) introduces the DESCRIBE project; an attempt to find a definition common to academics, international experts and professionals.



How do we define research impact? What indicators and evidence can be used to demonstrate impact?

The DESCRIBE project has been funded by JISC and is being led by The University of Exeter in partnership with Brunel University, to look at some of the challenges facing research institutions in defining and capturing research impact. DESCRIBE plans to review the current understanding of impact definitions and indicators, drawing on international experiences and deliver recommendations of how we might develop a cross-disciplinary approach to research impact evaluation which will assist with the development of systems for capturing the full spectrum of research impact.

One of the main objectives of the DESCRIBE project is to develop an understanding of what impact means to different groups of people and the specific challenges faced in defining and evidencing impact across a broad range of research fields.

As part of our data gathering process and to develop an in depth understanding of impact we are conducting a fact finding workshop and semi-structured interviews with leading international impact experts, professionals, academics and representatives of user groups.

Some interesting discussion points have been raised by the interviews we have conducted to date, which we will investigate and develop through the course of the project but a few examples are listed below.

- Are universities becoming the R&D arm of industry?
- Will there be a devaluation of knowledge exchange and public engagement as a result of the "impact agenda"?
- Funding excellence will result in impacts but by funding impact, will excellence be compromised?

As part of our data gathering we will also be developing an on-line survey to gather opinion from a wider group of individuals. This survey will be sent out in the autumn and if you would be interested in taking part, please email (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/describe>) the DESCRIBE team and we will be in contact later in the year.

You can keep up to date with progress on the DESCRIBE project using our website (<http://www.exeter.ac.uk/describe>) or by following us on Twitter, @uofe_impact.

Related posts:

1. In a fractured funding landscape, the ESRC are looking to invest in excellence with impact. A combination of academic merit and project management skills is essential (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/08/10/the-esrc-centres-and-large-grants-competition-is/>)
2. What do the social sciences have in common with baseball? The story of Moneyball, academic impact, and quantitative methods. (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/12/21/moneyball-politics/>)
3. We need a two-pronged approach to impact to understand how research can influence, and to offer a critical reflection of the impact process (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/05/03/two-pronged-approach-impact/>)
4. Our research must eventually become irrelevant: this is how to prove we had an impact on policymaking (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/02/13/research-impact-irrelevant/>)

5. The REF doesn't capture what government wants from academics or how academic impact on policymaking takes place (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2012/03/27/ref-doesnt-capture-impact-policymaking/>)