

# 'Payback' approach has scope to continue evolving, concludes research impact workshop

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/04/18/report-back-from-the-state-of-the-art-in-assessing-research-impact-workshop-at-brunel/](http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2011/04/18/report-back-from-the-state-of-the-art-in-assessing-research-impact-workshop-at-brunel/)

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In March, [Brunel University's Health Economics Research Group](#) (HERG) hosted an international two-day workshop on 'State of the Art in Assessing Research Impact'. The workshop built on HERG's leadership in assessing research impact, especially the 'Payback' Framework pioneered by Professor Martin Buxton and Professor Stephen Hanney in the 1990s to assess the outcomes of healthcare research. This approach gauges the contribution of research to knowledge production, capacity building, informing policy or product development, and broader social and economic benefits.

Participants included leading researchers from the USA, The Netherlands, Spain, and the UK, policymakers from the UK research councils and the [Higher Education Funding Council for England](#) (HEFCE), Brunel's [Research Support and Development Office](#), and Brunel's Research Excellence Framework (REF) implementation team. The event was designed to draw on diverse disciplinary perspectives including healthcare research, science and technology studies, sociology, social policy, political science, philosophy, and research evaluation.

The workshop began by exploring recent 'Payback' studies of the impact of healthcare research in Ireland and in the US National Institutes of Health, and the application of the 'Payback' approach to assessing the impact of social science research.

Following that a new 'productive interactions' concept was discussed, focusing on reciprocal engagement between researchers and key stakeholders. Other papers dealt with approaches to assessing the impact of environmental research on policy, the use of *ex ante* peer review of grant proposals to assess potential research impact, and perspectives on assessing impact in the forthcoming REF.

Assessing research impact is a hot topic, and so lively discussion ensued. The role of impact assessment in the REF dominated the final discussion, with Professor John Brewer (Aberdeen University and President of the [British Sociological Association](#)) viewing this as "a sheep in wolf's clothing" while Professor Ben Martin (Science and Technology Policy Research University, University of Sussex) was concerned that 'Payback' assessments are a craft skill and assessing impact for REF will shift to 'mass production' and so lose sophistication. The key workshop outcome was that HERG's 'Payback' approach was endorsed as state of the art, but with scope to continue evolving.

The workshop papers will be published as a special edition of the journal *Research Evaluation* in September 2011, which Dr Claire Donovan (HERG) will guest edit.

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