

Economic and Social Research Council: Approaches to assessing the policy and practice impact of research

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Overview of Methodological Approaches

- Programme of **Policy and Practice Case Studies** – four to date
- Purpose:
 - to demonstrate examples of the impact of research and contribute to the development of assessment techniques
- Methodology:
 - Mainly qualitative approaches: combination of surveys and interviews
 - “Payback approach”: based on logic model of the research process - knowledge production through to societal and broader economic benefits
 - Tracking forward from research outputs to impacts through:
 - Tracing and examining the relationships between researchers, knowledge brokers/intermediaries and users
 - “Unobtrusive” or “non-reactive” measures, involving web-based searches

Lessons from practice

- Value of case study approach:
 - identifying nature of impacts – but limited evidence and difficult to generalise
 - understanding factors influencing/contributing to impact – stronger evidence
- Nature of impact:
 - policy: direct/instrumental v indirect/'enlightenment' ('climate of opinion')
 - public services
 - business: direct (eg. working conditions) v indirect (eg. regulation, guidance)
 - public knowledge/opinion ⇔ public debate/participation
 - wider social welfare (eg. education)
- Factors influencing/contributing to impact:
 - nature of research – specificity, relevance, timing
 - characteristics of 'provider' – reputation, commitment, responsiveness
 - communication/linkages – media, relationships, people
 - characteristics of 'user' – 'receptivity', engagement
 - contextual factors

Issues

- Value of case study approach:
 - summative v formative
 - time and resource intensive
- Non-linearity/complexity – limitations of linear ‘results chain’ models
- Contextual factors
- Identification and attribution
- Timing of impacts
- Capacity for generalisation