Imperial College London

POSTDOC AND FELLOWS DEVELOPMENT CENTRE
Helping research staff to succeed

Research impact

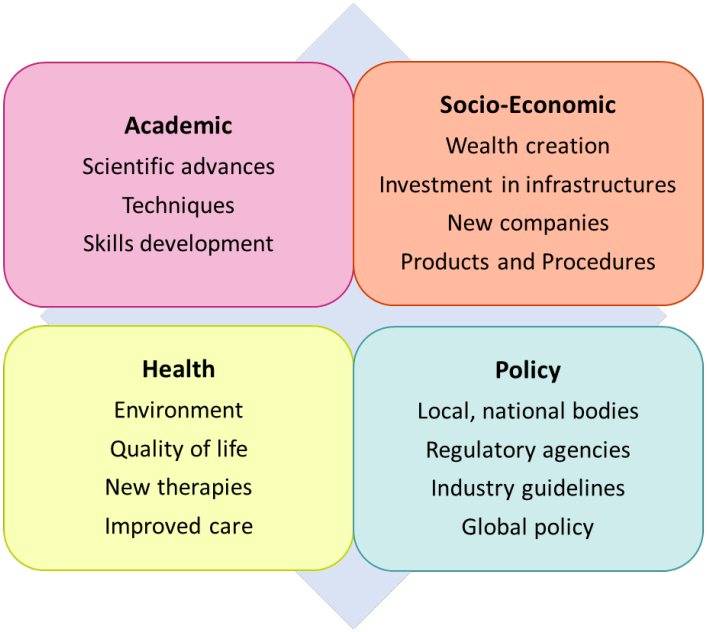
This tip-sheet provides hints and tips on how to think about the areas of impact of your research, specifically for fellowship applications.

1. Why is impact important?

Impact is an important measure of your research excellence and a way to ensure you understand how your research makes a difference.

According to the main funders, areas of impact can be generalised in 4 groups:

Academic, Socio-Economic (including industry), Health (including quality of life and environment), and Policy.



Funding bodies define impact in different ways. You should check with your funding body their definition of impact.

> "Impact occurs in many ways – through knowledge exchange, new products and processes, new companies and job creation, skills development, increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy, enhancing quality of life and health, international development."
> **UKRI**

2. Academic impact

Academic impact is about pushing your field's knowledge forward. Your research might advance your own topic, but it may also benefit other disciplines. Academic impact might come in the form of new methods or theories and new applications.

Think about the following questions:

- What will be the knowledge transfer between you and your collaborators?
- How are you / your staff's skills being developed?
- What will change in the field?
- What is the interdisciplinary reach?

Academic impact can be measured by outputs of data (papers, conferences, and workshops), software, materials, and intellectual property.

Open Access is now a requirement of many funding bodies and Imperial can provide you with support through the Scholarly Communication team.
Many organisations have signed The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) and you should also be aware of it.

3. Socio-Economic impact (including industry)

Socio-Economic impact is the contribution that research makes to the general public, industry, and public services.

Socio-economic impact relates to all the ways your research, and the knowledge you generate improves UK industry and organisations, increases economic performance, or benefits groups in society or organisations.

Think about the following questions:

- What are the benefits of this research?
- Who is going to use it or benefit from it?
- Can you quantify the extent of the benefits/number of potential users?
- Can you identify specific groups in society?
- Will you create a company out of this research project?

Funding bodies are interested to know how your research can advance technology, increase wealth creation and how you can engage with industry, and improve knowledge transfer.

When thinking about the socio-economic impact you should consider intellectual property management and exploitation (contact Enterprise).

4. Health impact (including quality of life and environment)

Your research can have an impact on quality of life and health through the development of technology or new products, increased knowledge about a specific disease mechanism or reducing the burden of disease.

This is a big area of impact, so you might want to consider some of these questions:

Health:

- Are you consulting with patients from the beginning?
- How will you inform and engage patients at a later stage?
- Will you work with the NHS / Clinical partners / Staff? How?
- How will your outputs enter the health and care system?
- Can this research lead to new technology or a new product to be trialled?

Quality of life:

- How is new technology impacting people?
- How will your research improve / benefit NHS / clinical service demand?

Environment:

- How does your research have a positive environmental impact – less plastic use, reduced carbon footprint? How will this impact the quality of life for society?
- How are you improving process efficiency and how will this be translated into the industry?

5. Policy impact

Funding bodies are interested in improving the efficiency of the public sector. Your research can provide information for future policy or influence regulatory guidelines.

Imperial provides support for contacting policymakers through The Forum.

Think about the type of research you do. Can it inform:

- Council or national government?
- NHS and Public Health England?
- Regulatory agencies?
- Industry guidelines?
- Global policy (EU and WHO)?

Policy impact might come in the form of:

- research for specific bodies (DEFRA, Public Health England, or the WHO).
- doing consultancy for environmental impact and producing guidelines.
- increase the efficiency of industrial processes that will lead to white papers.
- new guidelines in manufacturing.

6. Strategies for impact

In addition to thinking about how your research will impact these 4 general areas, you should also think about how you are going to maximise this impact and disseminate it.

Consider that your strategies can be implemented in the short, mid and/or long-term period during and after the end of your fellowship. These strategies can be divided into exploitation and dissemination.

Exploitation

How are you going to promote your research to the beneficiaries? Are you consulting with the users from the design of the project until the proposal completion?

Identify your industrial / public sector / clinical partners and explain how they are going to be involved and how will you ensure there is an uptake of your research. If there is intellectual property or commercialisation potential, you should contact Enterprise.

Dissemination

- Is your data going to be available as you produce outputs? What repository are you using?
- Are you hosting training workshops for end-users to ensure implementation?
- How are you going to inform the public about your research and results?

Public engagement and outreach are encouraged and funded by many funding bodies. These activities increase your profile as a researcher, increase your proposed impact and develop your skills.

There are different ways in which you can do outreach: you can interact with the public in events such as the Great Exhibition Road Festival, engage with the media, use social media like Twitter to communicate, write a blog or go to a school – find out more about the support Imperial provides with the Societal Engagement team.

7. How is impact assessed and how to start planning

Start thinking about Impact:

1. Who could potentially benefit from the proposed research over different timescales?
2. How might the potential users benefit?
3. What will be done during and after the project so that the research reaches the identified beneficiaries?

Note: Not all research disciplines will impact all areas. This tip-sheet is a reminder of the areas you should consider early when preparing your applications.

What funders ask you to submit: definitions

Lay Summary – a summary of your research that must be understood by a lay audience – most of the time it is published on the funder's website if the fellowship is awarded.

Beneficiaries – how your research contributes to knowledge in or outside of your discipline.

Impact Summary – who are the non-academic beneficiaries of your research and how are they going to benefit from your research (what will it do for them?).

8. Do:

- Think about impact very early in your preparation, to inform the design of your research.
- Be project specific.
- Focus on potential outcomes - societal and economic impact on top of academic impact.
- Identify and actively engage beneficiaries of research at appropriate stages.
- Plan all associated activities including timing, budget, and feasibility.
- Include evidence of any existing engagement with relevant beneficiaries.
- Think 'outside the box': be creative and innovative but be realistic.
- Have the reviewer criteria in front of you when writing your proposal.

9. Don't:

- Have vague plans lacking detail (these are rarely credible).
- Waffle.
- Make it too academically focused.
- Be predictable (e.g.: generic communicating the research to stakeholders or the public).
- Do public engagement for the sake of it.

10. Resources

You can find more information, including example statements, and read about the impact here:

- Imperial REF impact statements
- UKRI Research outcomes and impact

You can contact us:
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