Generating Impact from Your Work

An Intranet Resource for CIPH Members
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Introduction

This is a resource for Cambridge Institute of Public Health (CIPH) researchers, which addresses how to generate impact, in a wide sense (i.e. not limited to e.g. policy impact). It is meant to complement CIPH policy impact resources, such as our internet top tips document and film (http://www.iph.cam.ac.uk/public-health-policy/resources/), as well as our intranet annotated short guide to policy impact (http://www.iph.cam.ac.uk/policyhelp/). This resource is a slightly edited version of Oliver Francis’ guide for the MRC Epidemiology Unit intranet.
What Is Impact and Why Does It Matter?

In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise, impact was defined as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.’

Public health research has obvious relevance beyond academia, for example in informing population approaches to disease prevention and health promotion. You likely want your research to benefit individuals on the ground, as will your funders. The University and CIPH’s missions also include creating impact from our research. For examples of public health policy impact, click here.

The image below is from the UK civil service, which recognises the importance of evidence in creating good policy – although ‘evidence’ is seen as a much larger category than just academic research.

This guide is intended to help you think through some of the steps involved in identifying audiences and collaborators outside academia, communicating your work, and achieving and measuring impact. You can use it when:

- Planning the dissemination for a particular paper, study, or programme of work
- Writing the impact, engagement and communications sections of grant applications
- Planning a research project that is likely to involve non-academic collaborators
Remember that impact isn’t just something to think about after you’ve done your research. There are multiple opportunities within the research cycle at which the interactions, communications, and partnerships that will help knowledge exchange lead to impact.

CIHR Model of Knowledge Translation (2005)

This guide is presented as a step-by-step process, but the reality is likely to be far more iterative.

Translational framework for public health (Ogilvie et al 2009)
This guide is not exhaustive, and cannot cover every method and technique, or all of the wider discussions about different theories of how evidence does and doesn’t inform policy.

If you would like more support or advice, please contact your communication and impact colleagues, including:

- **PCU Communications**: Lucy Lloyd li448@medschl.cam.ac.uk
- **Head of Communications and Knowledge Exchange, MRC Epidemiology Unit and CEDAR**: Oliver Francis ocf26@cam.ac.uk
Finding Your Stakeholders

Everything starts here (and if you get stuck, come back here). Think about who you most want to influence or learn from, and how and why your research matters to them.

This is relevant to the Impact Summary section in Research Councils UK (RCUK) applications, which is a ‘short description of the beneficiaries and potential impacts.’ This is not to be confused with the Pathways to Impact, which is how you plan to reach these beneficiaries and achieve impacts.

This is not something just to think about once your research is complete, as there may be many groups you can work with to conduct your research. Remember that people from outside academia can help you improve the design and delivery of your studies. Ideally you consult the end users of your research whilst devising your research, in order to maximise the potential impact of your work.

Some questions to ask:
In which sectors do you have stakeholders?
- Academia
- Clinical practice
- Local and national policy
- International agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Charities and voluntary organisations
- Health campaigners
- The media
- The private sector – everything from small companies to multinational corporations
- The public(s) - don’t treat the public as a single entity

Within these sectors, which organisations do you need to target?

Within organisations, which individuals do you need to target? For example, in Whitehall, there will likely only be a few individuals working on your topic. What are your goals in engaging with them? What might their goals be in engaging with you?

If you want feedback from your audience, how will you get it? And how will you use the feedback you get?
Prioritise!
It’s unlikely you’ll be able to reach all of your potential stakeholders, so prioritise the most important ones. Think:

- **How influential** are different organisations in the area you want to change?
- **How sympathetic** to your research might they be?
- **How easy to reach** are different organisations?
- For instance, it’s likely that you’ll want to spend more time on highly influential organisations, and not necessarily only those who are ‘sympathetic’: try to find ways of including those important organisations and people who might be disengaged or even hostile. Even if you can’t change their minds, you might be able to neutralise a potential blockage.
- If you can’t get directly to these people, think whether your sympathetic stakeholders might offer routes to them. For example, a public health officer in a council might have a contact with a councillor who is sceptical about public health efforts.
While less influential stakeholders will merit less individual attention, you should think about whether you can reach large numbers of them quickly and at low cost so they are at least kept informed.

You may find it helpful to produce a quick table of stakeholders to help with other parts of the planning, e.g.:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>Engagement goals</th>
<th>Principal methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local schools</td>
<td>Recruit participants, increase understanding of feasibility of intervention, highlight evidence once published</td>
<td>Liaison with head teachers, focus groups, regular newsletter, invite teachers to study events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distilling Your Key Messages

You will need to make your work accessible to your stakeholders. A good place to start is by writing a **lay summary** of your research – whether that’s a short plain English summary of findings from a specific paper, or a synthesis of a wider body of research. For a single study it might only be a couple of paragraphs. Even for a larger body of work, it’s a very good idea to be able to say everything you need to in less than two sides of A4. Grant applications often require a lay summary, for example, RCUK requires a 4000 character summary.

![Diagram](image)

Some things to consider about your messages:
- Adapt them for your audience: why might *they* might be interested in what you have to say? This might not be the same as the bits you find most interesting scientifically.
- What action, if any, can people take as a result of your findings?

If you can only convey **three important facts or concepts**, what should they be? Which is the **most important**?

See [How to write a lay summary (Monica Duke, Digital Curation Centre)](https://digitalcurationcentre.ac.uk/) for more.

Summaries can be in forms other than writing. One way to think about how to communicate your work to non-academic audiences verbally is through **media training**.
Your messages will also vary depending on the methods and media you use.

Selecting the Studies to Profile

Whilst all research can be presented in an accessible form, not all research is seen as equally useful by policymakers. So, select the types of research you want to prioritise for communications. These types of research papers (and methodologies) are often seen as useful:

- **Synthesis**: a paper that provides a rigorous and unbiased synthesis of current knowledge around a topic or question
- **Challenge current thinking**: a data-based paper which makes a single policy point well backed-up and with all potential limitations laid out
- **Models (including economic)**: models are frequently used to predict the possible impact of a change in policy or its cost/benefit implications
- **Social science papers**: focused on practical policy-relevant questions
- **Trials**: many, but not all, policy questions can be addressed with a trial

See also: *What makes an academic paper useful for health policy?* (Whitty, CJM, 2015 BMC Medicine)
Deciding on Your Methods and Pathways

Who you are communicating with will influence the methods you choose. Some methods are likely to be generic, and some targeted.

The methods suggested below are some of the things you will want to consider when promoting your research. You can also use them as part of your plan for a Pathways to Impact and Communications section of RCUK grants. Other funders will have similar sections – they may be called ‘communications’ or ‘dissemination’.

Effort, Reach, Impact and Fidelity

Many simple dissemination methods (which include media and social media) can require relatively little effort and reach large numbers of people. However, they are unlikely on their own to have a large impact. Nevertheless, they can be part of laying the groundwork for activities that involve more direct engagement with stakeholders. These direct engagements will take more effort and may reach fewer people in one go, but are more likely to lead to more meaningful engagement and impact. Also consider fidelity – i.e. how much control you have over the final messages. When you use intermediaries to increase your reach (such as the news media), you can lose the fidelity of the message.

Try to choose a balance of these activities – based on your time and resources, who you want to reach, and why you want to reach them.
For example:

- A press release might **raise awareness**
- Lay summaries, and blogs might **improve understanding**
- One to one meetings can **create connections and win trust**
- And collaboration and co-production can **build relationships and help shape decisions**

### a. Media and Social Media

**Press releases:** Papers suitable for press release will be those that reflect mature research and add something new to public knowledge on an issue. Talk to your communications colleagues for more, and remember that they’ll want to know about your papers before they’re published.

**Web stories:** If something isn’t suitable for a press release, it can still be written up as a lay summary and publish it on our website news sections, and shared with local networks etc.

**Blogs:** *‘Blogging is quite simply, one of the most important things that an academic should be doing right now’* - Prof Patrick Dunleavy / Chris Gibson, LSE. Blogs are an opportunity for you to talk more informally about your research, often in a wider context. There are lots of potential places that we can publish blogs or offer content, including:

- CIPH and Department websites
- Blogs related to your study area or related policy area

**The Conversation** is a collaboration between editors and academics to provide informed news analysis and commentary. There are a couple of ways we can engage in it:

- Pitching an article to coincide with the publication of a paper
- Responding to current events with an academic perspective (these will need to be fast turn-around pieces)
If you think you’d like to write for The Conversation, please contact your communications colleagues. See an example of CIPH and Department work here.

Twitter: CIPH’s twitter handle is @InstPubHealth and the Department’s is @DPHPC. Please let your communications colleagues know about your tweets. If you’re already on Twitter, tag them in your tweet and they can retweet you. Everyone has an opinion on how to best use Twitter. Here is one.

Additional options: Google Scholar, LinkedIn, Mendeley etc. All these and more are covered in some depth in the 30 Day Impact Challenge from LSE.

b. Evidence Summaries

Evidence briefs: CIPH member CEDAR has a series of Evidence Briefs – succinct summaries of their research findings for policymakers and practitioners. If you’re interested in producing an Evidence Brief, please contact your impact and knowledge exchange colleagues.

Data visualisation: CEDAR’s Food, income and education and Food price changes interactive visualisations are examples of engaging ways to share research. Check out their Propensity to Cycle Tool and Food environment assessment tool (Feat) for more inspiration. Again, talk to your communications and knowledge exchange colleagues for support.

c. Evidence Submissions to Guidance and Policy Bodies

For a regularly updated list of open public health policy consultations click here. For examples of consultation responses, you can find previous submissions from the MRC Epidemiology Unit and CEDAR here.

d. Events, Workshops and Seminars

One of the top tips the Research into Policy Project receives from policymakers and influential academics is for researchers to build relationships with stakeholders. Consider whether you might be able to arrange a forum where you and other researchers can interact with important stakeholders.

e. One to One Contacts

If there are stakeholders who you think might be interested in your new study, don’t be shy about letting them know about it when it’s published. You might even want to create an email list for users interested in your research and regularly update them.
The Centre for Science and Policy (CSaP) help to create opportunities for interaction with policymakers. The main route is the Policy Fellows Programme.

Consider whether any secondments or internships might provide opportunities for experience in policy environments. For example, the MRC and Academy of Medical Sciences run an internship scheme, and the Royal Society run an academic/policymaker pairing scheme.

For more support, talk to your impact colleagues and visit http://www.iph.cam.ac.uk/public-health-policy/resources/.

f. Public Engagement and Involvement

Public engagement can be included as a pathway to impact. It can provide insight into the relevance of your research, raise your profile as a researcher and be used to develop other impact-relevant skills.

Speak to your communications and knowledge exchange colleagues and check out the University’s resources here.

Patient and public involvement should be more about how you include people in the actual research process, although there is inevitably some overlap with wider engagement work.

g. Additional Methods

- Are there opportunities for direct collaboration in research with non-academics in the development, conduct or application of your research?
- Are there clinical pathways through which your research might be applied?
- Is your work suitable for industry collaboration or development?
Measuring and Evaluating Impact

Trying to create impact is a complex intervention, with all the associated considerations for evaluation. We need to use quantitative, qualitative and narrative ways of capturing the effects we might be having on policy and practice. Often the final outcomes will be very hard to measure and attribute to the original research, particularly when it comes to policy. While it is important to distinguish between the ‘pathways to impact’ (i.e. what you did) and the impact itself (i.e. the resulting change in policy or practice), it is still possible to measure the effectiveness of the processes and pathways used as a way of assessing impact.

Have a theory of change. Relate your impact measures to the relevant dissemination methods. Think about what change you might expect from your efforts. What does success look like? How might you measure that?

Types of policy impact evidence and indicators from REF 2014
- Citation in government report
- Citation in parliamentary debate or other public proceedings
- Documented personal testimony by policymaker
- Appointment to policy decision making authority or committee
- Citation in report by international body
- Documented evidence of debate among practitioners and policy makers referring to research evidence
- Independent documented evidence by third party including testimony of experts and users
- Engagement with campaign and pressure groups and other civil organisations
• Documented evidence of change to legislation, regulations or guidelines
• Measures of improved public services or policy outcomes
• Evidence of change in policy process or use of technology in delivery of public services

Collecting Evidence
Make a commitment to keep track of policy developments in your area, and maintain relationships required in order to access evidence of policy impact. You can be upfront with stakeholders that you may require support from them at some stage to document policy impact.

Don’t forget to take screen grabs of web pages that might disappear by the time we are submitting REF impact case studies.

Quantitative Measures
• Traditional citations: Record your potential impact evidence in Symplectic.
• Altmetrics: A system that tracks the attention that scholarly articles and datasets receive online, over and above traditional academic citation counts and Impact Factors. It does this by pulling in data from traditional and social media, online reference managers, post-publication peer review, and policy documents. Read more about accessing Altmetrics at Cambridge University here.
• Symplectic Elements: The University’s research information management system, which provides a closed environment within which Cambridge researchers can create a profile and share information within the University of Cambridge community. It should be used to record all the activities you take part in that might create impact, from policy interactions to public engagement activities. So, update early and update often!
• Other possible quantitative measures might include web and social media analytics, document downloads, attendance at events etc.

Qualitative Measures
Look for opportunities to gather user reaction to your research and impact activities. It might include
• Feedback forms at policy events
• Testimonies from stakeholders outside academia
• Minutes of meetings
• Interviews with, or surveys of, key stakeholders and participants
• Analysis of media coverage achieved

Narrative
• Case studies: Measurement of impact in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) was based on impact case studies.
- Read REF 2014 impact case studies: http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/search1.aspx
- Read analysis of REF 2014 impact case studies: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/REFimpact/

• **Impact awards:** In part to help prepare for the next REF exercise, in 2016 the University of Cambridge launched their Impact and Public Engagement with Research Awards, and it anticipated this will run in future years.

Photo credit: Oliver Francis
Further Reading

CIPH
- Visit http://www.iph.cam.ac.uk/public-health-policy/resources/

University of Cambridge
- University of Cambridge Research Strategy Office’s Impact pages www.research-strategy.admin.cam.ac.uk/impact

Funders
- RCUK Pathways to Impact guidance www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/impacts/
- ESRC Impact Toolkit www.esrc.ac.uk/research/impact-toolkit/
- MRC outputs, outcomes and impact of MRC research: 2014/15 report www.mrc.ac.uk/successes/outputs-report/

LSE Impact Blog http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/
- Five key principles and practical tips for effective knowledge exchange and impact.
- Nine ways research gets into Parliament

Resources and guides
- Knowledge Translation: Introduction to Models, Strategies, and Measures (Center on Knowledge Translation for Disability and Rehabilitation Research)
- The 10 commandments for influencing policymakers (Times Higher Education, May 2016)
- Communicating your research – a toolkit (The Health Foundation, 2017)
- USING EVIDENCE What works? A discussion paper (Alliance for Useful Evidence)
- National Coordinating Centre for Public Involvement: Guide to working with policy maker
- Expanding our understanding of K* (KT, KE, KTT, KMb, KB, KM, etc.) A concept paper emerging from the K* conference held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, April 2012

Academic papers (a small selection of a growing field)
- A translational framework for public health research (Ogilvie D et al 2009, BMC Public Health)
- The in-between world of knowledge brokering (Lomas J, 2007, BMJ)
- What makes an academic paper useful for health policy? (Whitty, CJM, 2015 BMC Medicine)
- A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers (Oliver K et al 2014, BMC Health Services Research)

• **Negotiating multisectoral evidence: a qualitative study of knowledge exchange at the intersection of transport and public health** (Guell C et al 2016, BMC Public Health)

• **The science of using science: researching the use of research evidence in decision-making.** (UCL EPPI Centre, 2016)

• **A Map of the Interface Between Science & Policy** (Staff Papers, Council of Canadian Academies, 2007)

• **A randomized controlled trial evaluating the impact of knowledge translation and exchange strategies** (Dobbins et al Implementation Science, 2009)