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What is research impact, why does it matter and how to incorporate it into funding bids?

Introduction

Research Information, Quality & Impact - Research & Enterprise Services

- Research Quality & Impact team
  rqi@sussex.ac.uk
- **James Morland** Research Impact Manager
- **Dominic Dean** Senior Research Quality and Impact Manager

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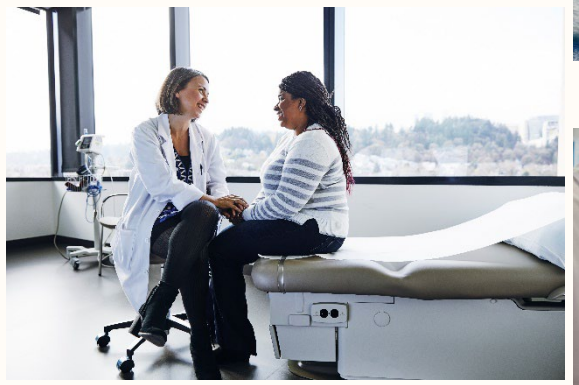
What is research impact?

What is research impact?

Research impact is:

- Demonstrable and/or perceived **benefit(s),**
- To **individuals, groups, organisations and society** beyond academia (incl. natural / physical entities),
- That is **causally linked to your research**,
- Achieved through communication, engagement, collaboration and/or co-creation **activity** with relevant **stakeholders.**



⚠ May not materialise quickly, easily or ever (largely out of our control!)

👍 Well-informed planning and targeted, sustained engagement with stakeholders are crucial

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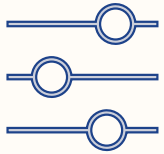
Types of impact



Impact can be achieved in many different settings.

There may be some that you are more naturally inclined to due to the nature of your research, but you might be surprised where you can make an impact.

Cross-disciplinary collaboration has been shown to produce some of the strongest research impact. Recent work by the NCACE has shown that ‘arts and culture’ impact was evidenced across all UOAs in REF2021, with 11% of Physics impact case studies relating to arts and culture.

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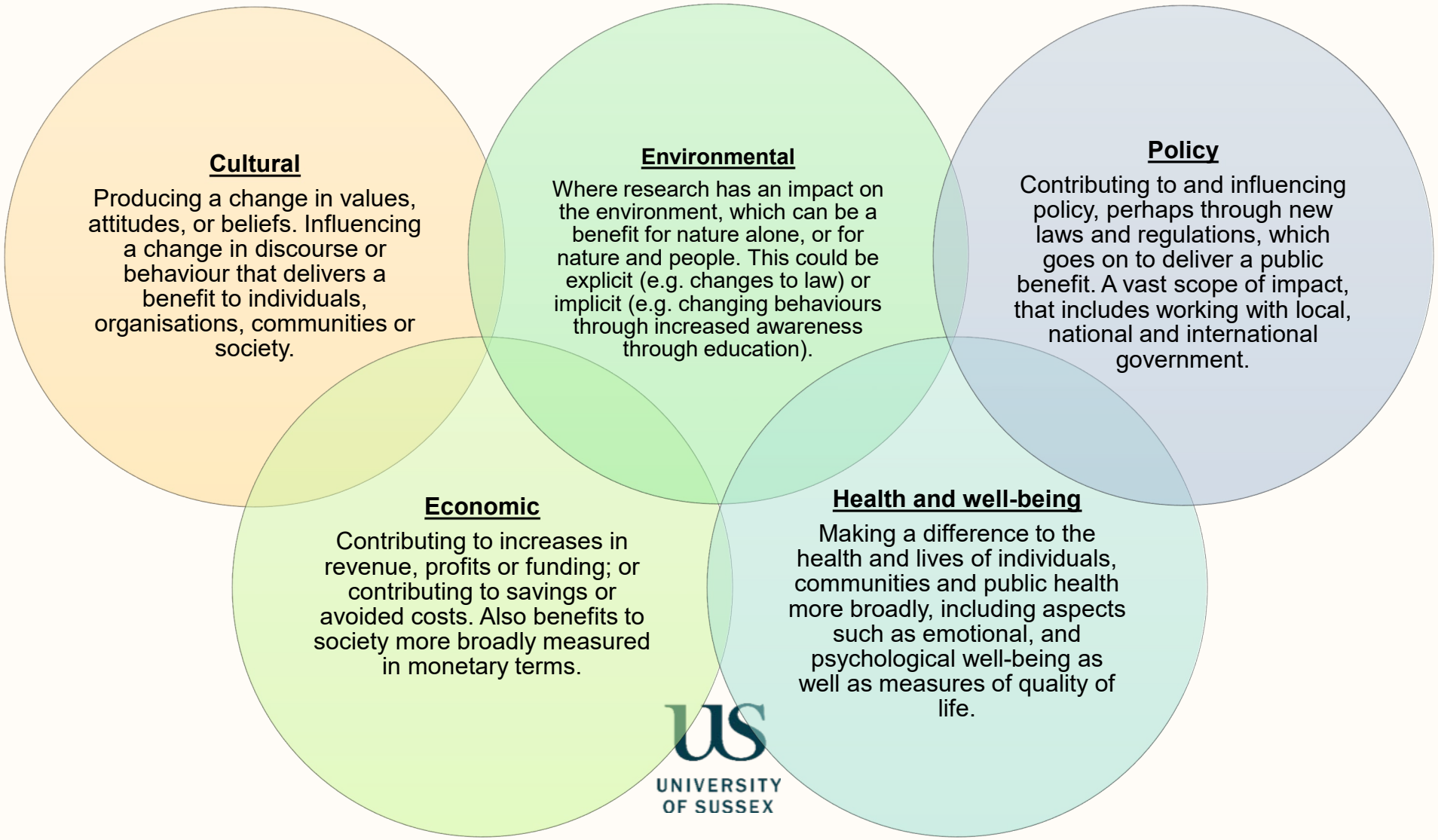
Types of impact



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Difference between engagement and impact

Engagement can take many forms:

- Media (i.e. Research featured on a documentary; appearing in the news or on radio; debates; blog posts)
- Events (i.e. public engagement events, roundtables, workshops, non-academic conferences)
- Advisory (i.e. Contributions to parliamentary inquiries, reports, debates, boards, committees and groups etc.)
- Dissemination (i.e. policy or research briefs; reports; online resources)
- Collaborations with public, voluntary and independent sectors. (i.e., consultancy, commissioned research)

But these are pathways to impact not impact in themselves.

Impact is what happens next and the difference that these engagements have made.

We want to know who listened and understood something that they didn't before because of your research and engagement?

And how did that change in understanding affect and benefit others?

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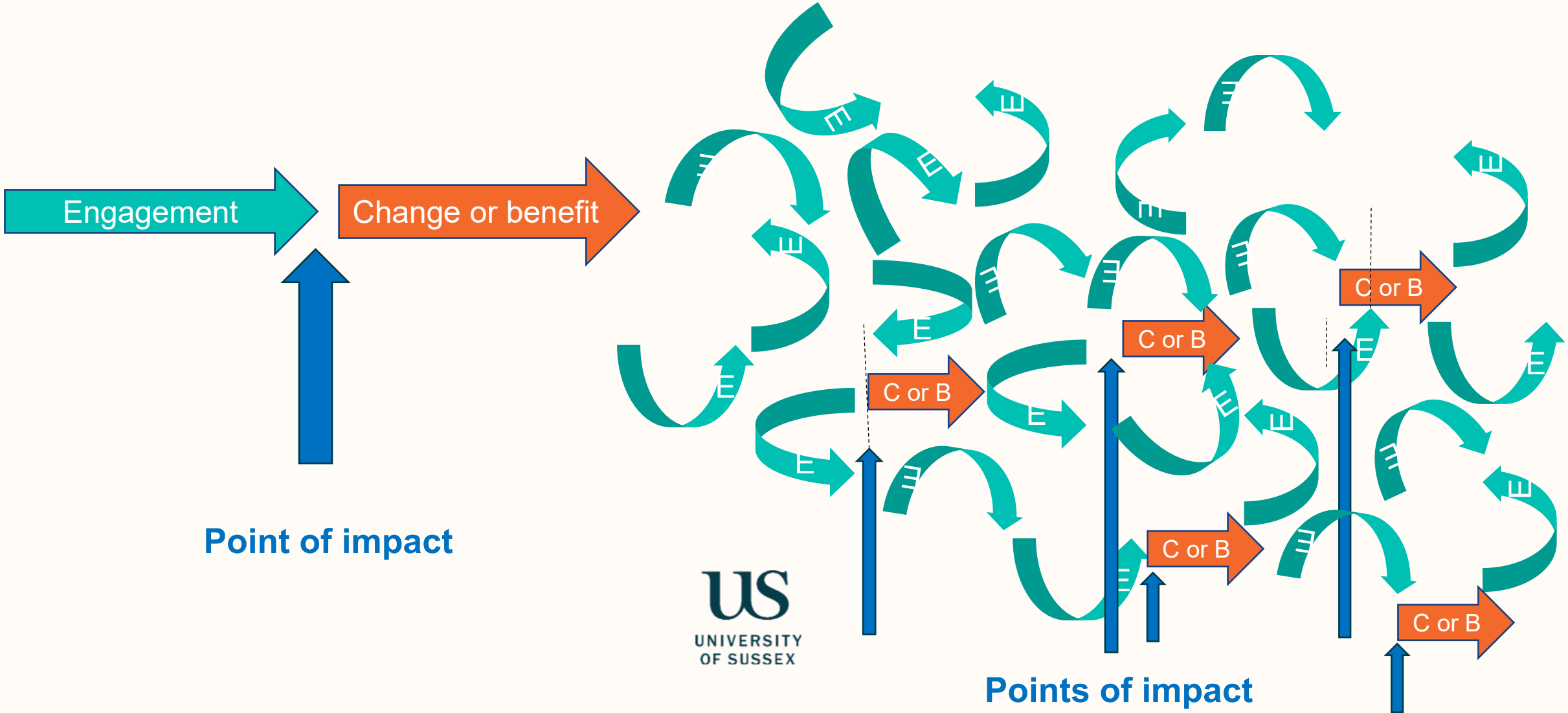
Pathways between engagement and impact



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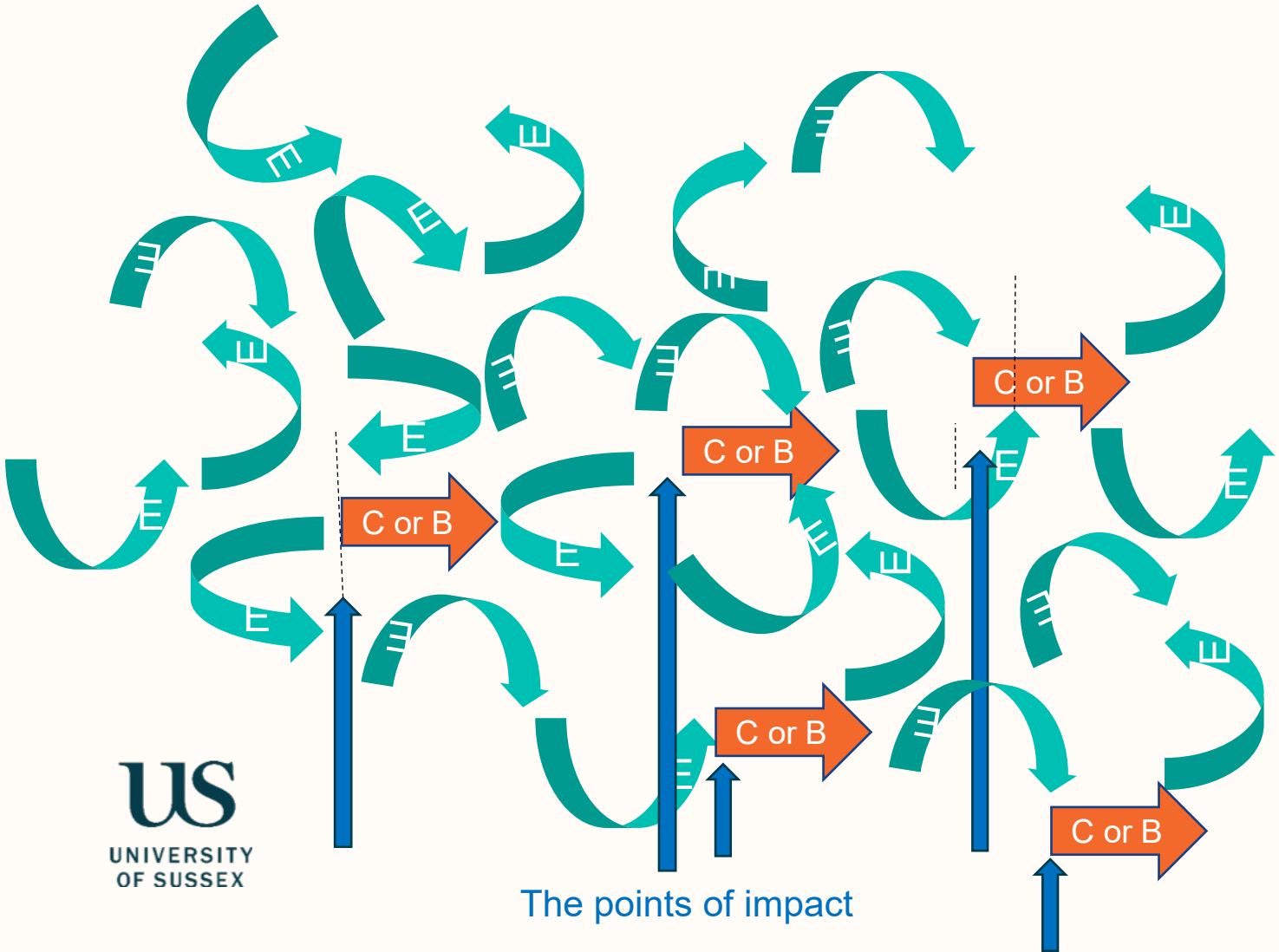
Difference between engagement and impact

Think about impact from the start of a project and throughout. Planning is crucial.

Work together with colleagues (School-based impact support, Knowledge Exchange and Impact Support Programme, Policy@Sussex, RQI team) to plan for different ways of making an impact.

Be mindful that impact is non-linear - may not materialise quickly, easily, directly or ever (largely out of our control!)



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The points of impact

Your 6-question impact plan

What **problem**(s) or **opportunity**/ies does/might your research address?

What potential new or improved **solution**(s)?

Who is **interested** and/or in position of **influence?** (map your '**stakeholders**')

Who/what benefits ('**beneficiaries**')? What are their **needs and challenges**? Could anyone/thing else be **inadvertently harmed**?

What **activities** are best suited to **engaging or collaborating** with these stakeholders and/or beneficiaries?

What **outcomes** could you achieve together? (think 'SMART', but stay adaptable!)

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Group discussion:

What is your current experience of (or aspiration for) making your research impactful?

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Why does research impact matter?

Why Research Impact Matters?

- Research is discovery of new knowledge
- What happens to the new knowledge and how far it travels
- What difference and change did it make?
- Why is the work you're doing important?

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Funder Perspective

Funders want to know the impact of their work.

Economic and Social Research Council

‘We ask you to consider impact when you apply for ESRC funding. […] The resources you apply for in your plan to enable impact are a vital component of your overall research project’

wellcome

‘Research questions should generate knowledge that leads to a shift in understanding or delivers new insight into how human life and health work’

Arts and Humanities Research Council

‘Proposals must clearly demonstrate throughout how the potential impacts of the research within and beyond academia will be realised […] you should consider methods for communications, engagement and collaboration to increase the likelihood of achieving impacts’

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Funder Perspective

‘What’s the change you are focused on achieving and how is your organisation well placed to deliver it?’

‘How will this research contribute to the day no one does from their blood cancer, or it’s treatment?’

‘How will your project facilitate knowledge exchange with UK SME’s and increase growth for UK industry?’

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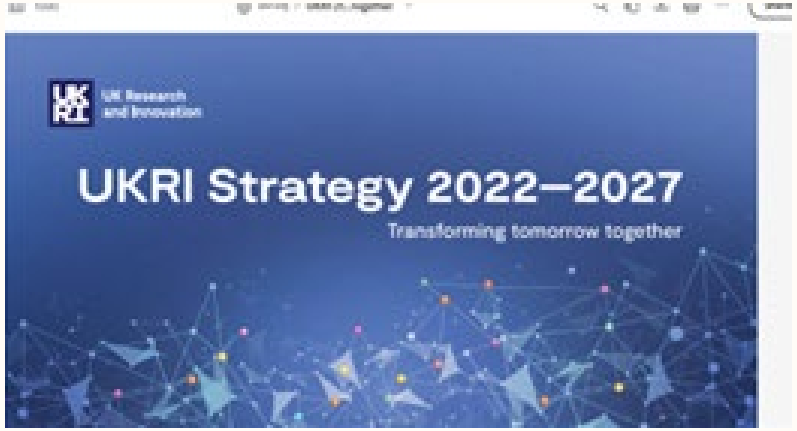
Know your funder (& what they want)



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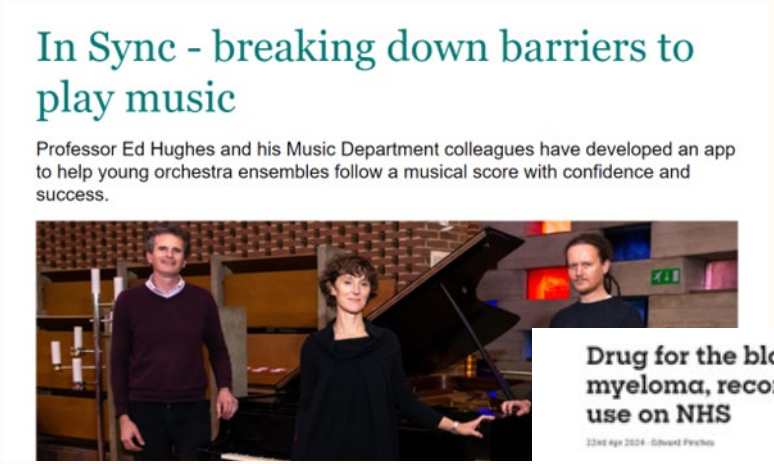
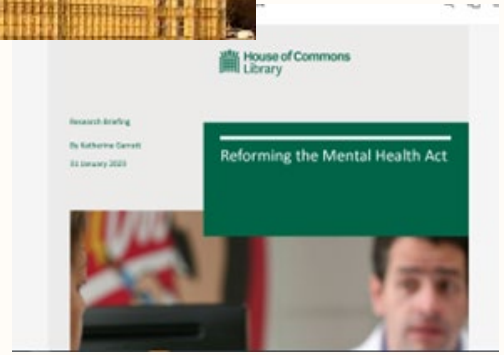
Wellcome's vision and strategy

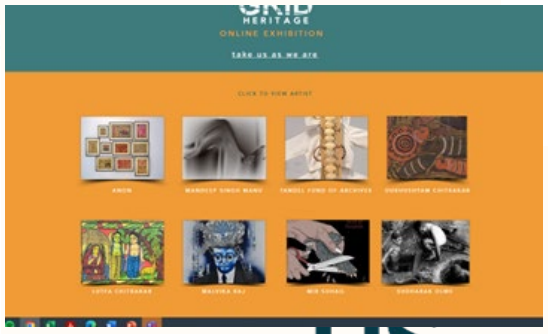
Wellcome supports science to solve the urgent health challenges facing everyone.
Science is essential to solving the world's health challenges. That's Wellcome's founding principle and it's as true today as ever. It's why we will always support bold research across a wide range of disciplines to discover more about life, health, and wellbeing.

In order to achieve our mission and take on the most urgent health issues, we support the scientific community so they can continue to make vital progress.
We do this by funding discovery research over a broad range of disciplines – including social sciences and the humanities – giving researchers the freedom to explore life, health, and wellbeing and seek insights that can inspire future improvements in health.
And we bring together expertise across science, innovation, and society to develop solutions to address the issues of three urgent health challenges: mental health, infectious diseases, and climate and health.

Impact for funders







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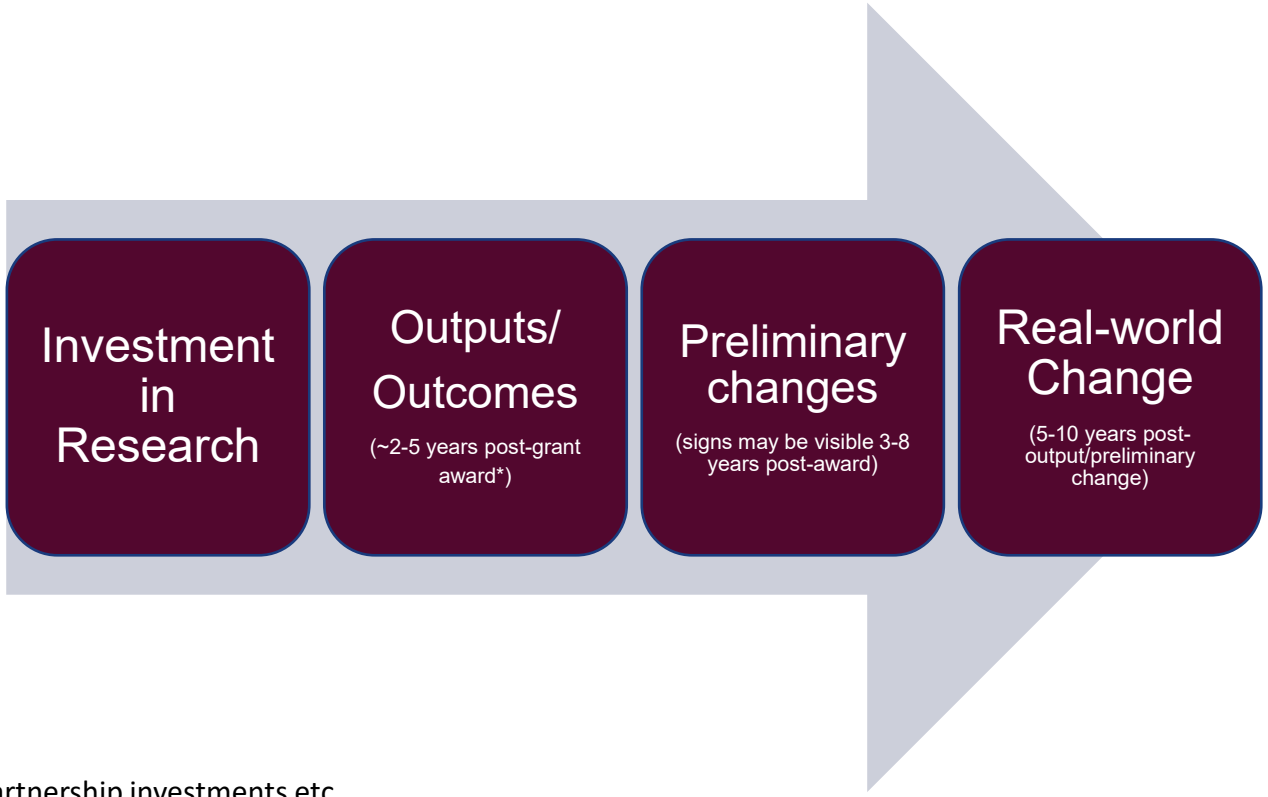
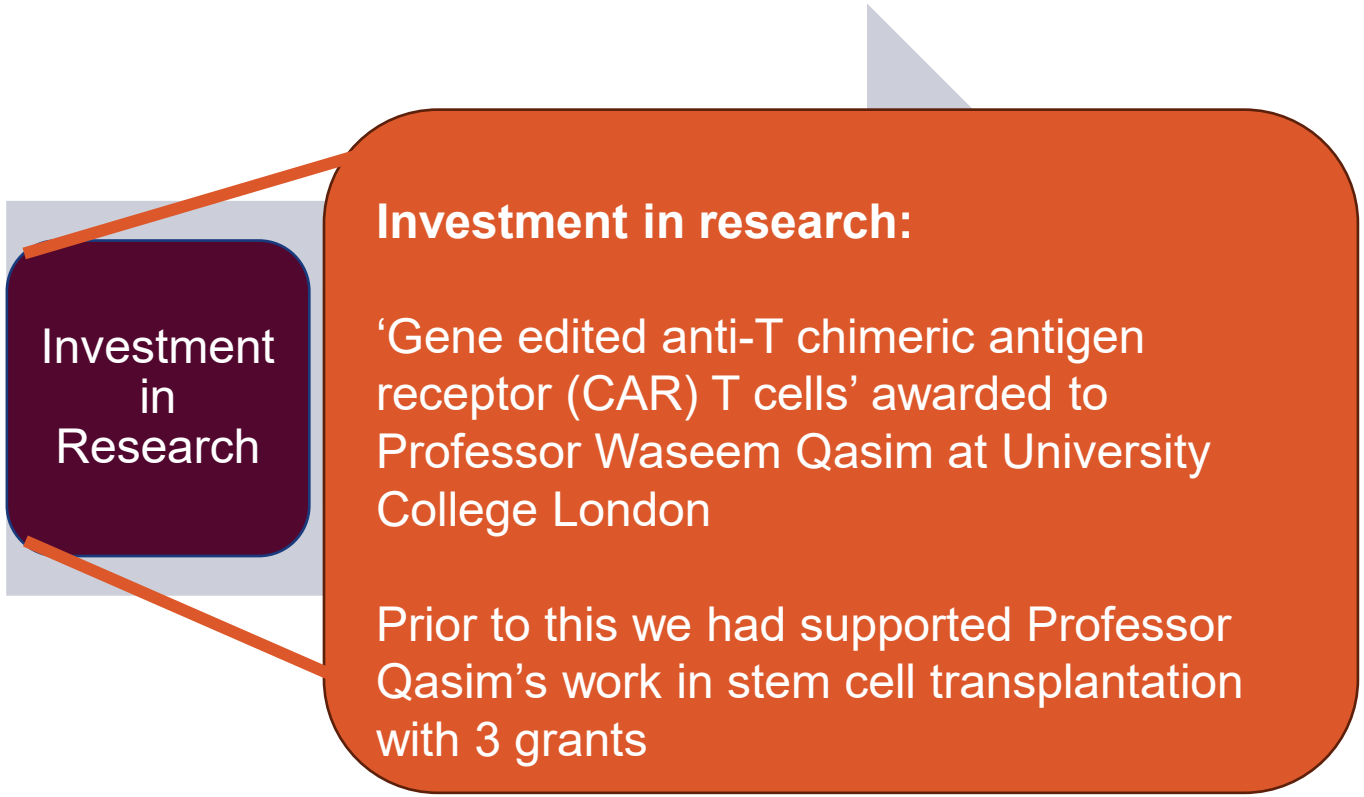


Investment in Research: grant funding, partnership investments etc.
Outputs/Outcomes: results, publications, conference abstracts etc.
Preliminary Changes: citations, patents, follow on grants etc. = predictors of real-world change
Real World Change: changes in policy, clinical guidelines/practice etc.
*dependent on grant duration



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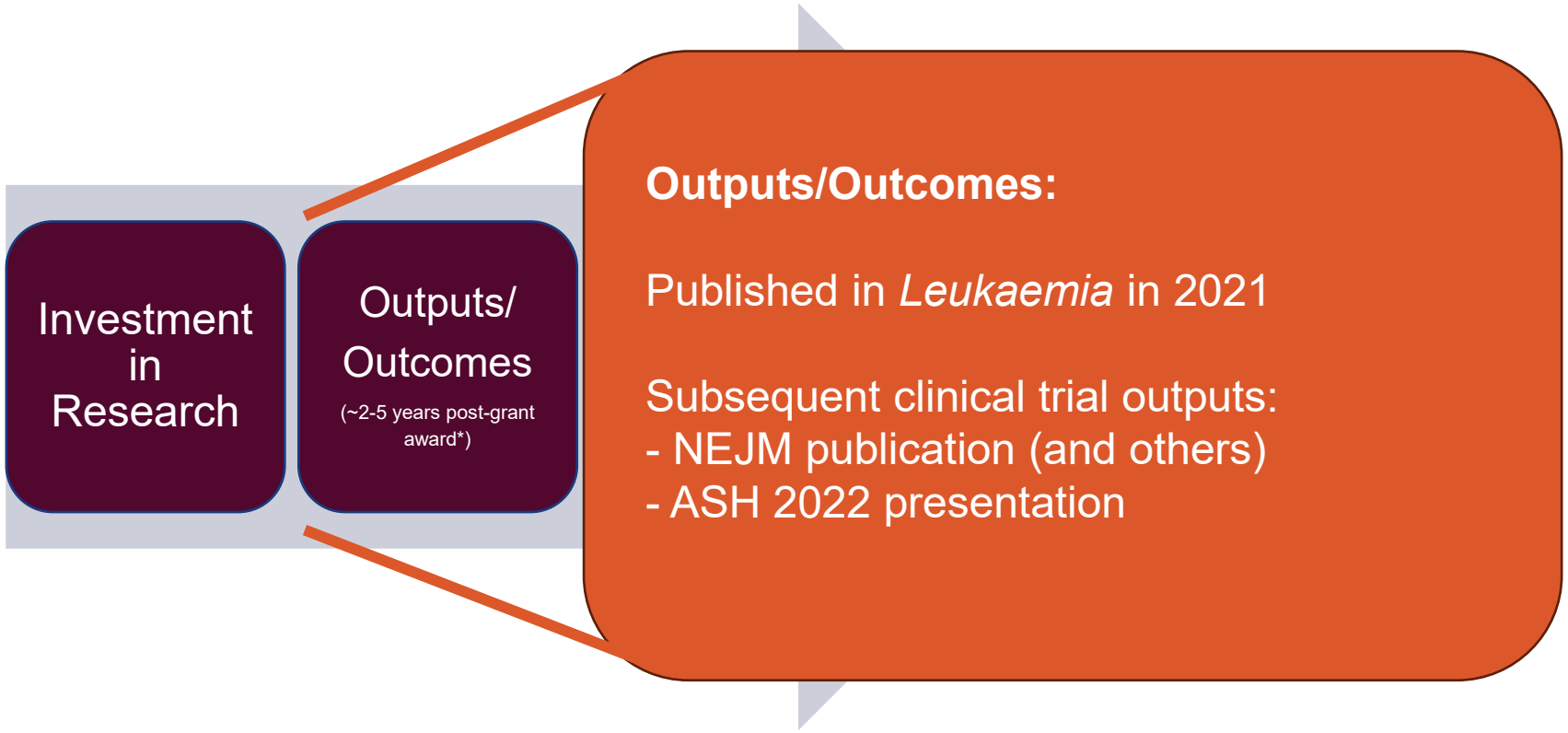

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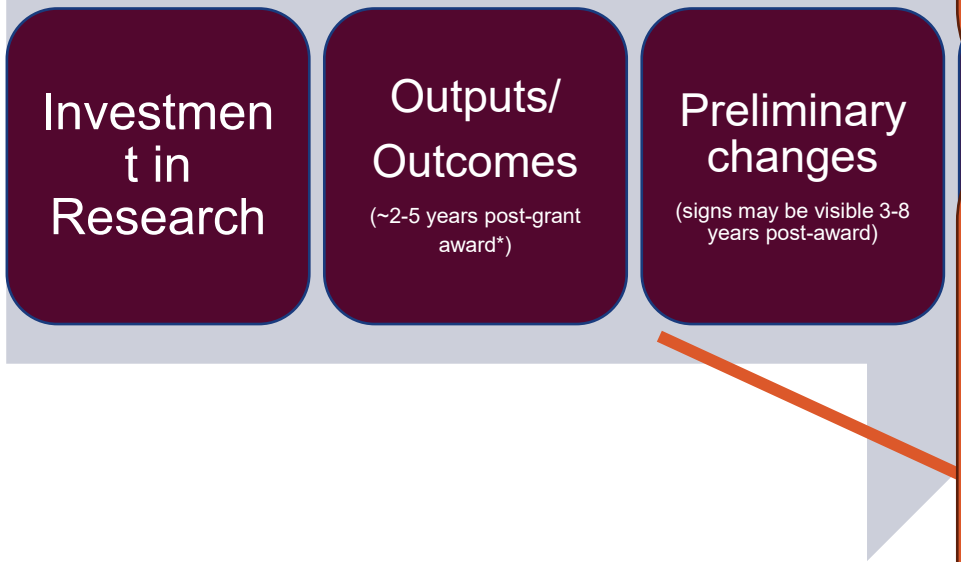
What this looks like in reality



Preliminary changes (1):

Follow-on grants – clinical trial funded by the MRC Developmental Pathway Funding Scheme

Initial publication cited 57 times

Commercialisation linked to the trial

Preliminary changes (2):

This is Alyssa

World-first patient to receive universal CAR-T therapy

Investment in Research: grant funding, partnership investments etc.
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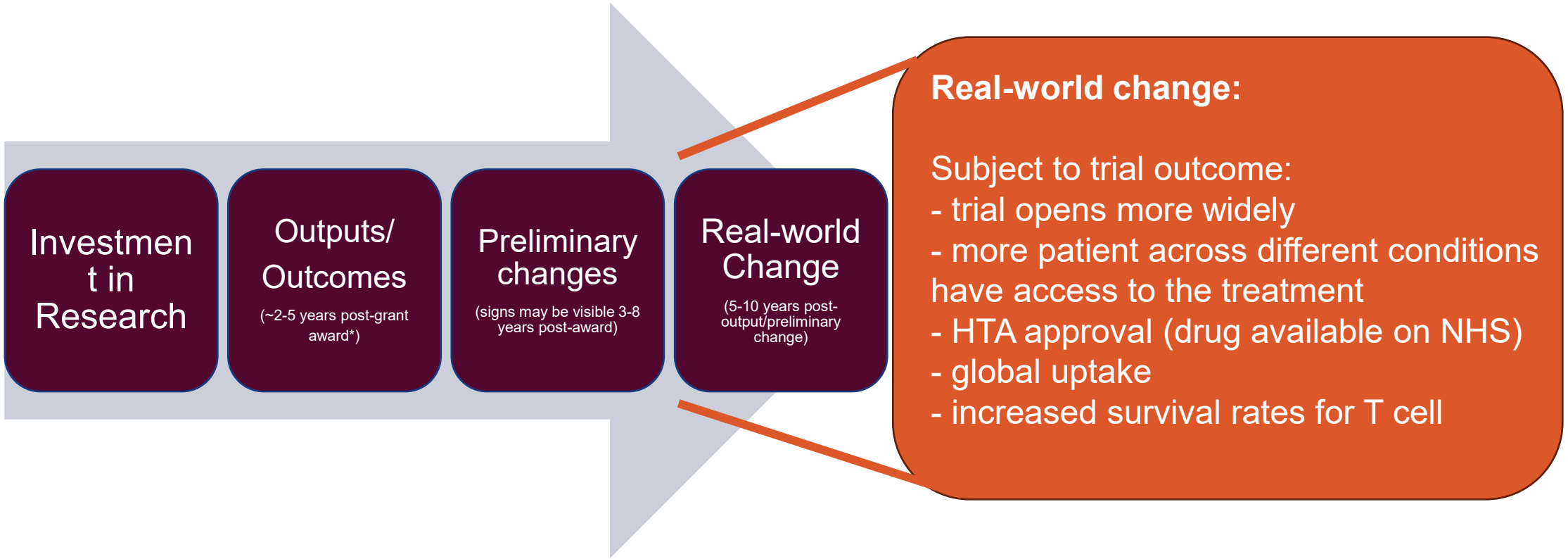

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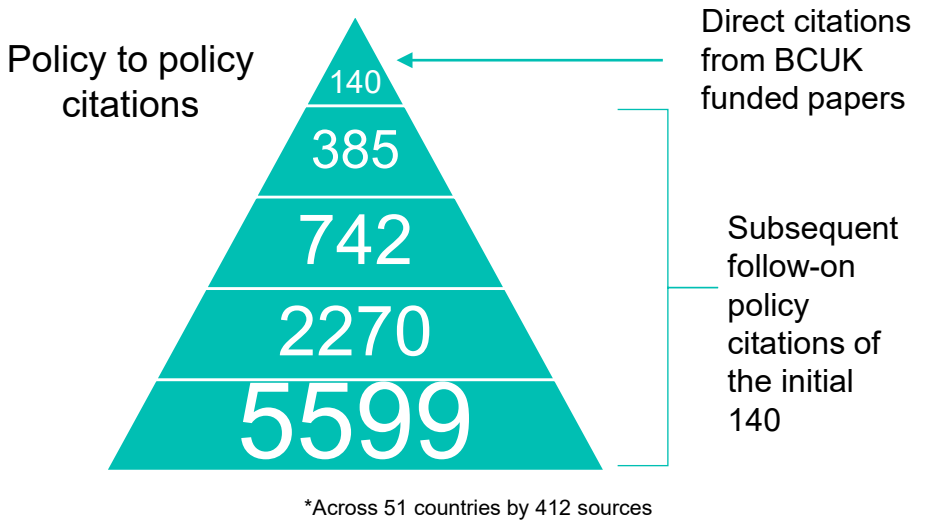
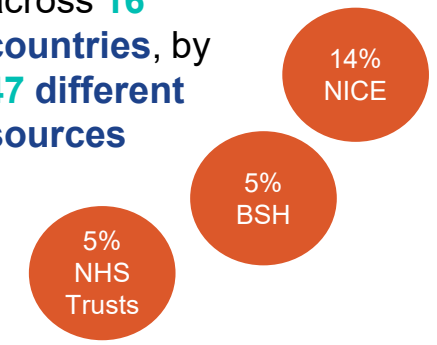
Global Citation Reporting



Our research has been cited in **140 policies or guidelines** across **16 countries**, by **47 different sources**

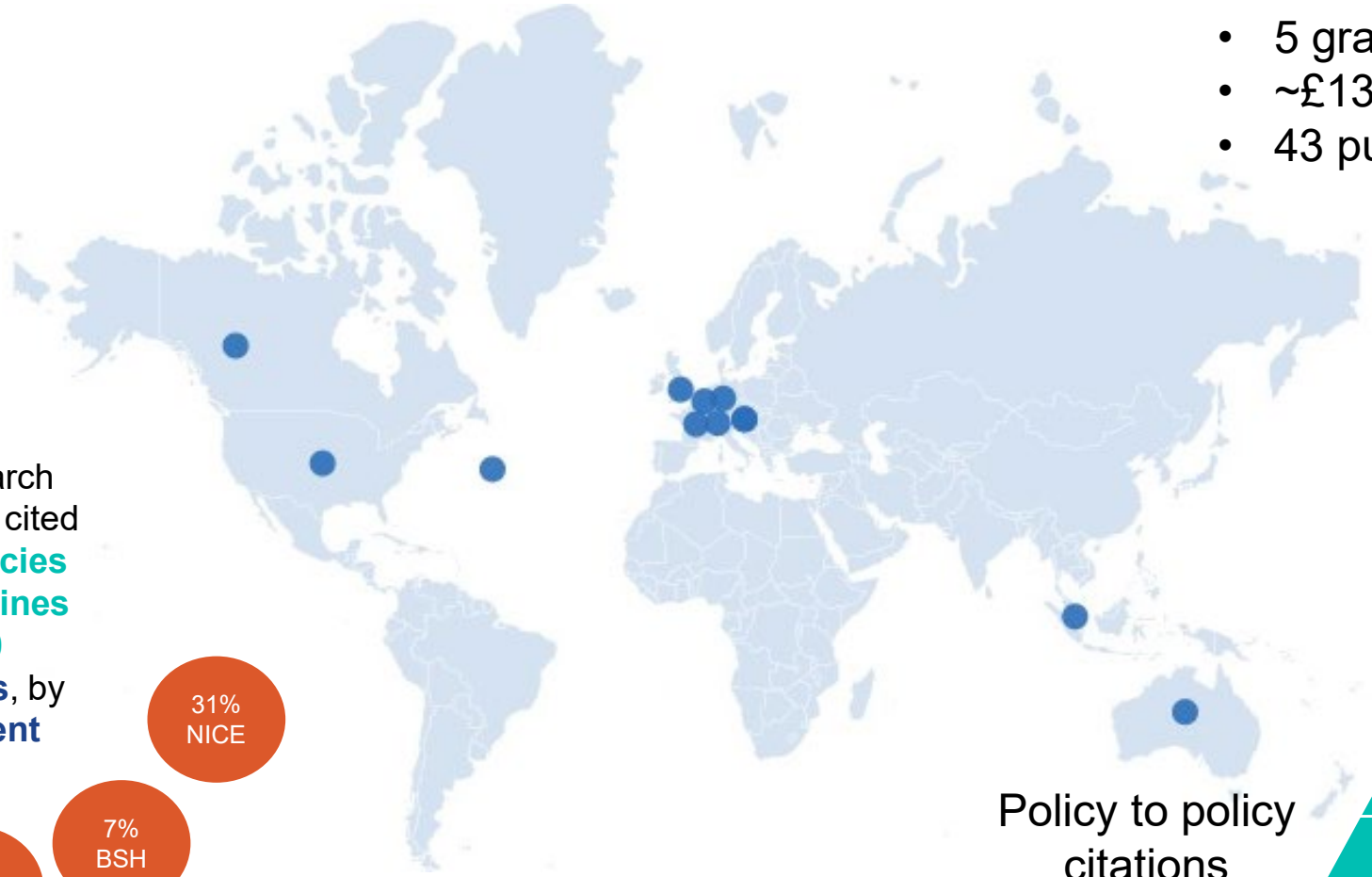


Top 5 cited papers (topic; no. of citations; citing source)		
COVID	10	The Royal Society of Canada; Publications Office of the European Union; The UK Government; Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre; United Nations; World Health Organization
Early-Stage Hodgkin Lymphoma (RAPID Study)	9	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Wissenschaftlichen Medizinischen Fachgesellschaften; British Society for Haematology; Leitlinienprogramm Onkologie
HMRN	8	BMJ Best Practice; British Society for Haematology; European Society for Medical Oncology; Government of Singapore; NICE; Santé Publique France
COVID	7	Federal Register Government of Spain; The UK Government; Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos
MPN	7	AIM Speciality Health; British Society for Haematology; Cancer Control Alberta; Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hämatologie und Medizinische Onkologie e. V.

Case study

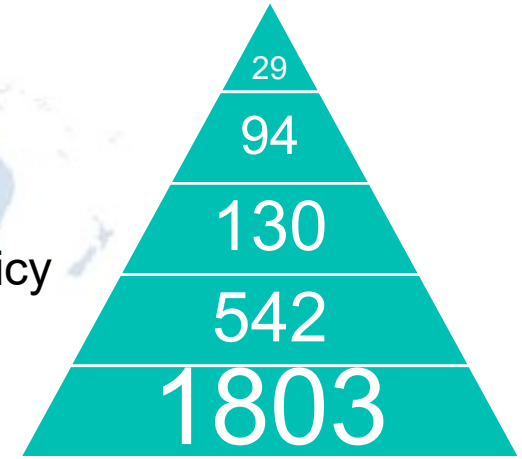
Professor Eve Roman, University of York

- 5 grants
- ~£13M funding
- 43 publications



Her research has been cited in **29 policies or guidelines** across **10 countries**, by **16 different sources**

Policy to policy citations



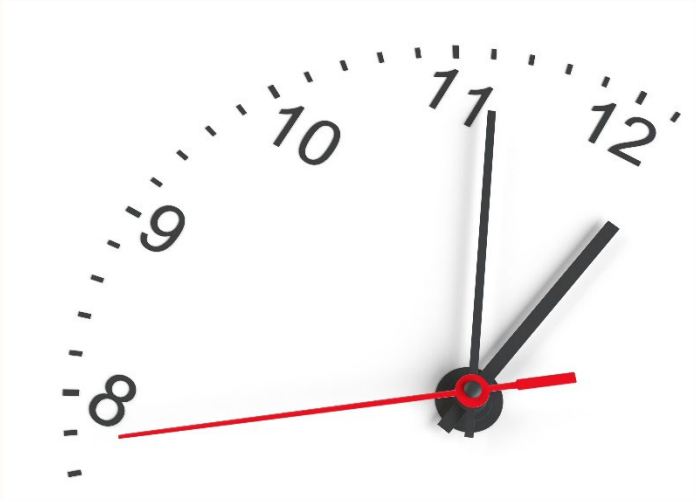
*Across 51 countries by 412 sources

Advice for Research funding applications

Start Early

Think about “what could this lead to”? at an early stage.

Incorporate the potential, or its pathway into your drafting.



You may need to engage beneficiaries or partners; and write this in!

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Advice for Research funding applications

Get advice

Speak about your ideas about your potential impact with a variety of colleagues:

- Research Staff in your school
- Peers
- Colleagues
- Research Development Managers
- Research Quality Impact team

Different perspectives can help you develop your ideas.

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Research Impact Resources

- RQI advice: Embedding impact in research projects
- Top tips for writing a grant application UKRI Blog
- TOP TIPS University of Oxford webpage
- National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement
- Look in the Sussex Successful Application Library

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What does Impact do for YOU?

- It can foster relationships and collaborations both with academic colleagues and external partners.
- Impact can feed back into your research, generate new collaborations and new ideas.
- The chance to see how your research makes a difference.
- Asset to career development, increasingly included in recruitment and promotion criteria.

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What is the REF?

- REF = Research Excellence Framework;
- UK's national exercise of research assessment, determining allocation of mainstream QR to HEIs and producing reputational indicators of research quality;
- All research-active UK HEIs make a submission;
- A peer-review exercise conducted by discipline-based panels, mostly made up of academics (plus some industry-based impact assessors);
- Most recent REF was REF2021 (results were published May 2022). Next REF will be 2029.

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Research impact in the REF

REF definition:

‘the effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, **beyond academia**.’

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How is impact assessed by the REF?

Impact is assessed by impact case studies which articulate a narrative of the link between the impact and underpinning research.

It must be based on research conducted at the submitting institution. The research can be from a longer period than the eligibility period for outputs in REF, though the impact must have been achieved within the REF period, e.g. research since 2000 in REF2021, though impact must have been achieved between 2013 and 2020.

Still waiting for full details on the next REF, but it is likely not going to change in terms of format.

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The impact case study

Summary of impact

- This is a short but clear description of beneficiaries and the benefit of your impact.

Underpinning research

- This is a narrative of the research that underpins your impact.

A detailed description of the impact

- This is the main narrative where you will detail the reach and significance of the impact created.

Details of the evidence supporting the impact

- This might include outcomes data, testimonials, formal records, published documents, survey feedback, public acknowledgements, etc.

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How is impact assessed?

The **significance** and **reach** of the impact is assessed in the REF.

REF should not be your (or our) end goal.

It should be about making a difference, however big or small.

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Regionality & Impact

The case for consortia

Phil Ward
Director of Eastern Arc

University of Sussex Impact Days
19 June 2024

EASTERN ARC
Academic Research Consortium
East Anglia
Essex
Kent
Sussex
Walsall
Birmingham
Leicester
Peterborough
King's Lynn
Norwich
Coventry
Ely
Northampton
Bedford
Cambridge
Luton
Oxford
Colchester
Chelmsford
LONDON
Reading
Guildford
Southampton
Isle of Wight
Margate
Ramsgate
Folkestone
Calais
Dunkirk
Ostend
Zeebrugge
Flushing
Middelburg
Ghent
Train ferry
Hook of Holland
THE HAG
20 mi

12+ UK Regional Consortia

- Yorkshire Universities (1987)
- White Rose Consortium (1997)
- Scottish Research Pooling Initiative (2004)
- N8 (2007)
- Midlands Innovation (formerly M5) (2012)
- GW4 (2013)
- Northern Health Sciences Alliance (2013)
- Eastern Arc (2013)
- Science and Engineering South Consortium (2013)
- Midlands Enterprise Universities (2016)
- West Midlands Combined Universities (not specified)
- Oxford-Cambridge Arc Universities Group (not specified)
- London Higher (not specified)

Past

Background

- 1999: RDAs and HERAs
  - Some funding to support regional focus
- 2003: White paper on the future of HE
  - ‘To encourage the formation of consortia, provide extra funding for research in larger, better managed research units, and develop criteria to judge the strength of collaborative work’
- 2009-12: The establishment of DTCs
- 2010: The Wakeham Review of fEC and efficiency
  - Push for equipment-sharing

Present

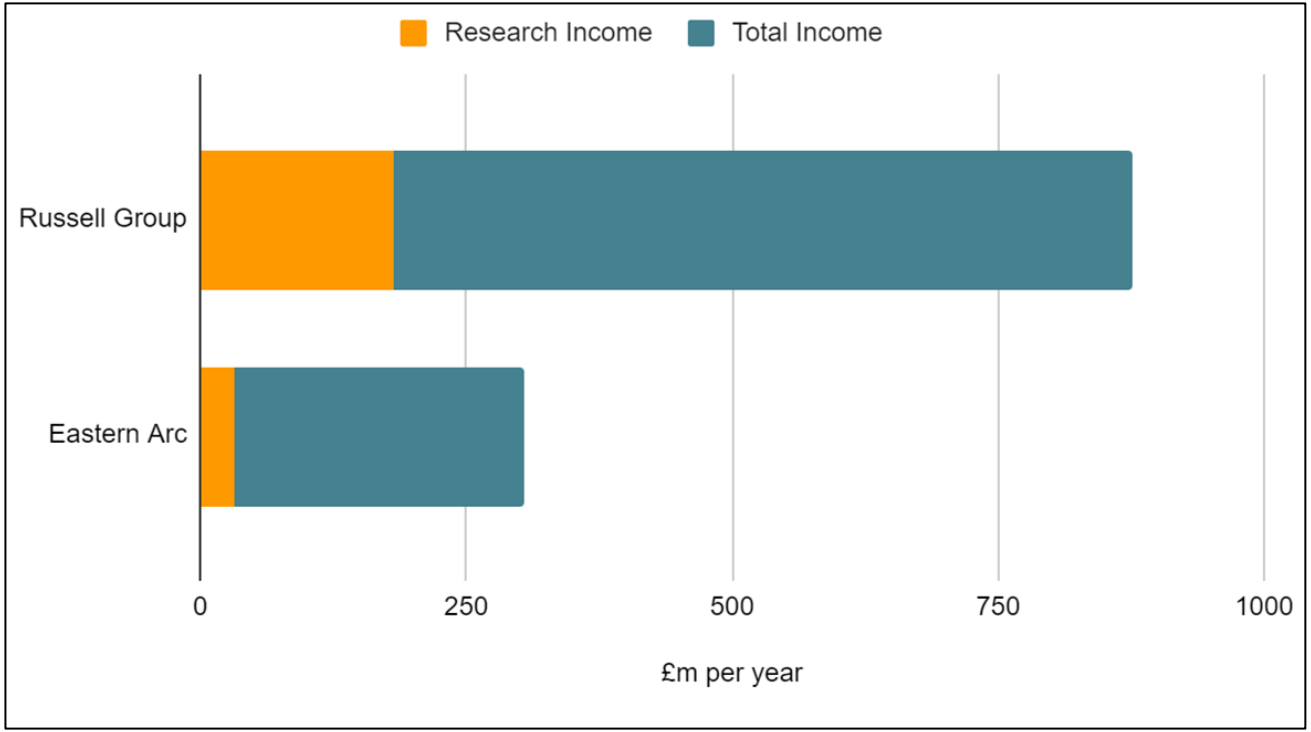
EASTERN ARC Academic Research Consortium

Current context

Three recurring themes

- Interdisciplinary research in specific areas
  - Industrial Strategy: four ‘grand challenges’
  - Innovation Strategy: seven ‘technology families’
  - Science and Technology Framework: five ‘critical technologies’
  - Life Sciences Vision: seven ‘great healthcare challenges’
  - UKRI Strategy: five ‘strategic themes’
- Innovation
  - Essential for meeting the 2.4% target
- Levelling up and the place agenda
  - Present in most of the policies

Research and total income



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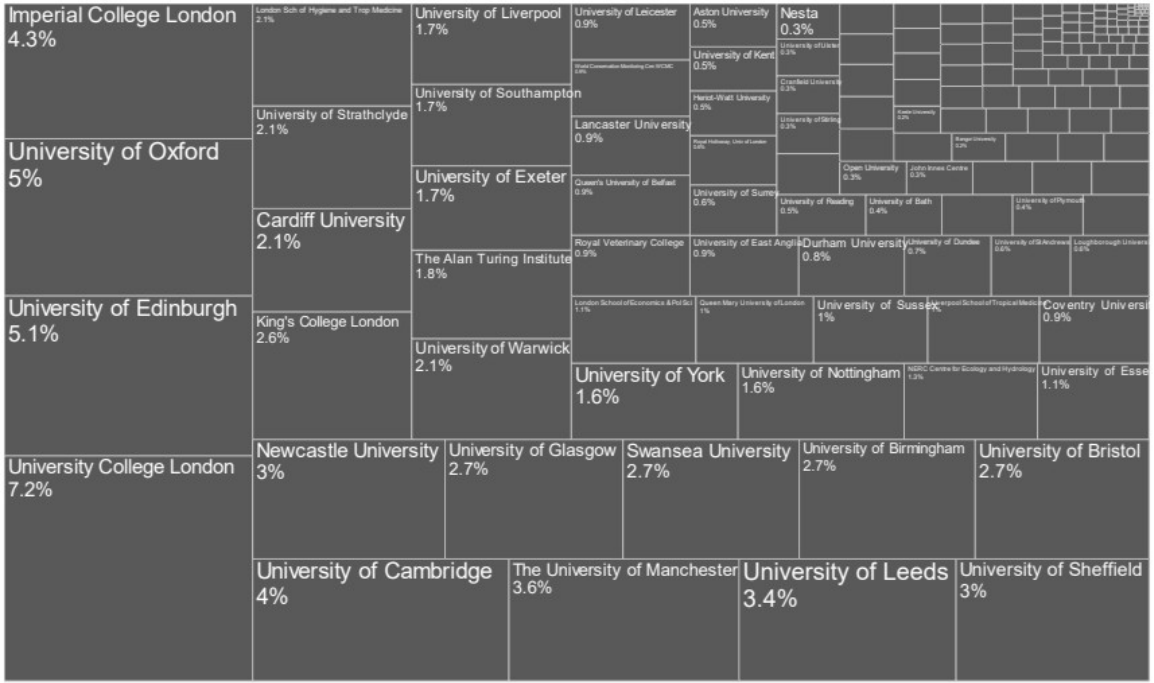
The HE context



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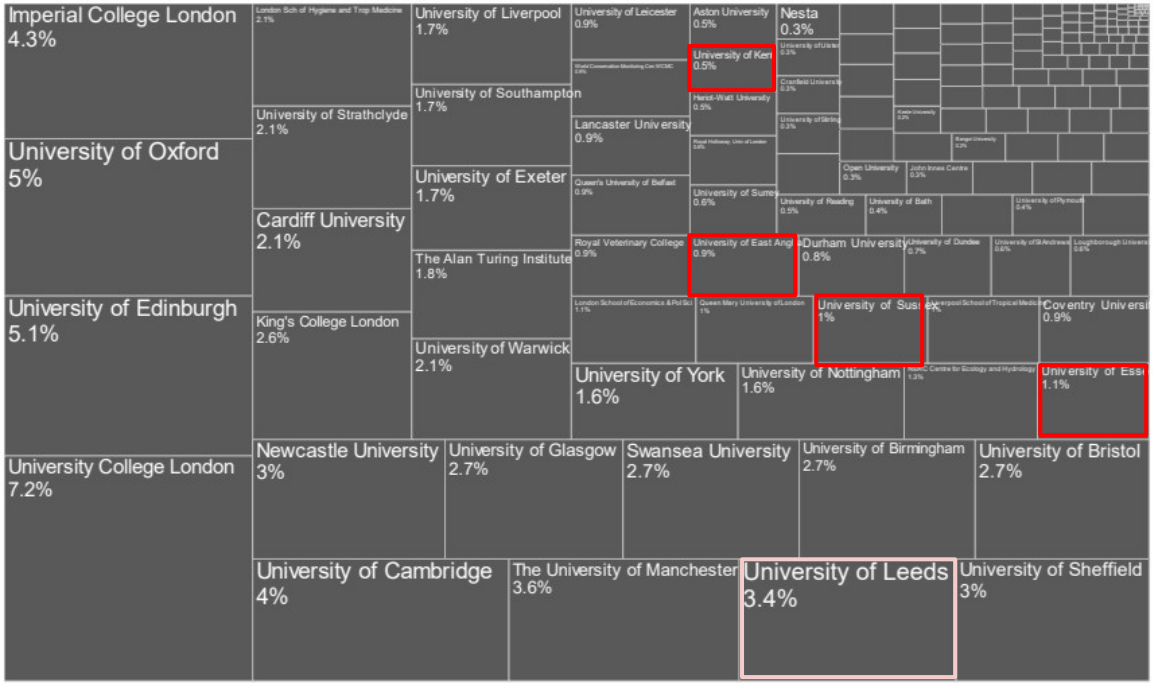
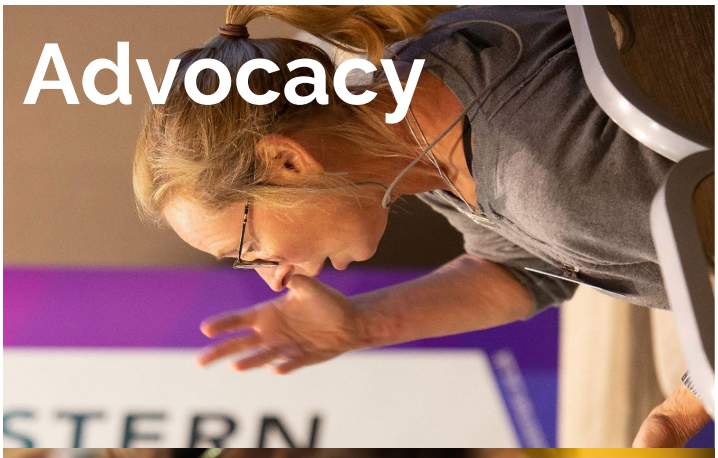
UKRI funding per institution





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Collaboration

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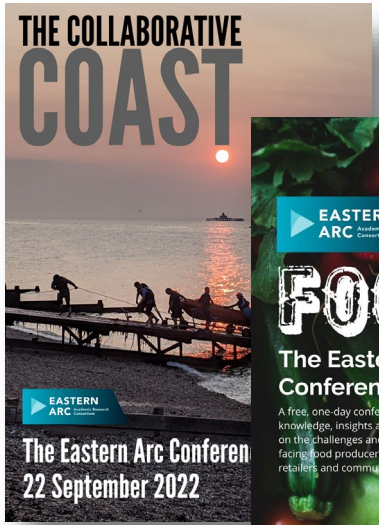

Advocacy

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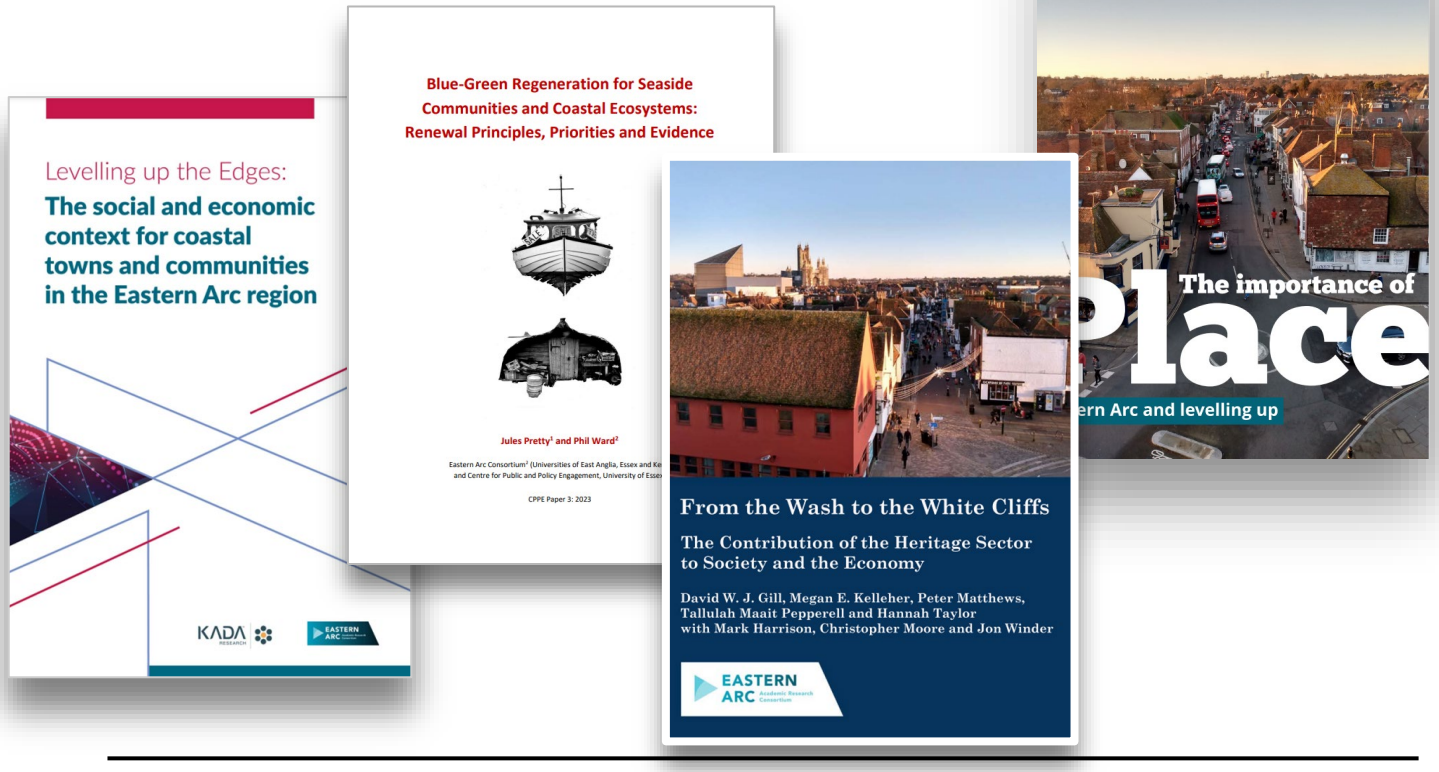

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Heritage & Culture Network

Norfolk County Council

ESSEX RECORD OFFICE

RSA

EST UARY

Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape

Dedham Vale National Landscape & Stour Valley

Essex County Council

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

Tendring District Council

FIRST LIGHT FESTIVAL

west sussex county council

Metal

CREATIVE ESTUARY

THE FRY ART GALLERY

Thames Estuary

Colchester Borough Council

original projects

Kent County Council kent.gov.uk

Turner Contemporary

Southend-on-Sea City Council

WYSING ARTS CENTRE

Suffolk County Council

creative ARTS EAST

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Leading to significant funding

- EIRA (Research England)
  - £4.7m for knowledge exchange with regional businesses
- T-PIKE (EPSRC)
  - £1.5m to develop framework for technicians to engage with industry and get innovation skills training
- ARISE (ESRC, Nerc, AHRC, Defra)
  - £2.9m to develop policy interventions to support resilient coastal communities
- Submitted/in development
  - Heritage hub (£1m), AI and Place (£1m), shared tech transfer (£0.5m), Digital RTPs (£2m), Place-based IAA (£2.5m)

Future

UKRI Strategy 2022-27

- Themes
  - Building a green future
  - Securing better health, ageing and wellbeing
  - Tackling infections
  - Building a secure and resilient world
  - Creating opportunities, improving outcomes
- Place
  - Support for ‘the development of evidence to inform local, regional and national policies and interventions to address regional disparities and enhance place-based livelihoods and economies.’ ‘Engaging with place-based actors and communities to help shape our work’.’

Labour's plans

- Similar focus to Tories on innovation and levelling up
  - 'Our cities, towns and regions will be empowered to encourage the innovative research'
- 'Clusters'
  - 'Clusters bring together all the ingredients of growth into a single geography with a single purpose'
- More regional funding
  - 'Supporting innovation with a radically reformed suite of place-based innovation-led R&D programmes that brings together regional and local growth actors to target this effectively'

The need to make our case

‘The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) will aim to invest at least 55% of its total domestic R&D funding outside the Greater South East by 2024-25.’

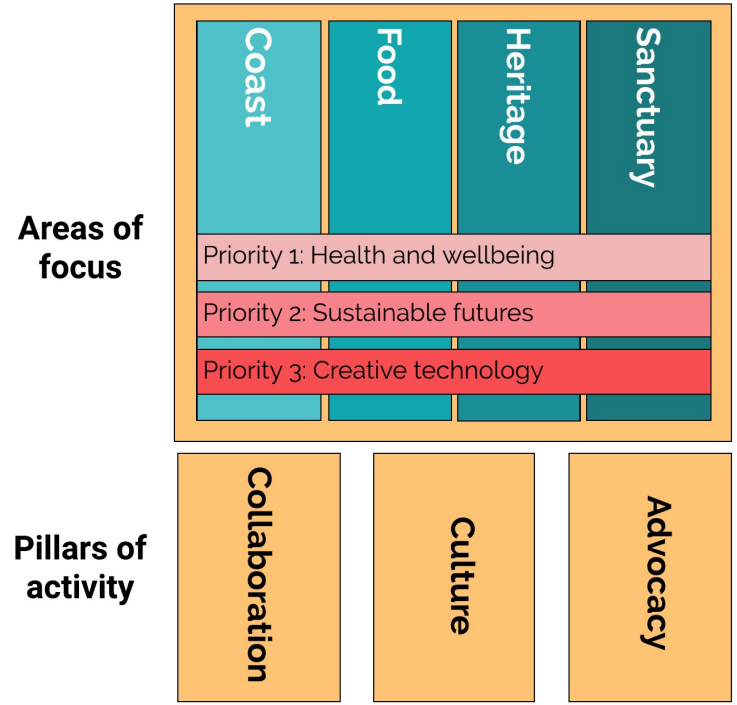
‘There should be a renewed focus on driving up R&D outside London and the South East to drive up innovation and regional productivity across England’

Eastern Arc Strategy 2025-30

- **Vision:** to collaborate to deliver real, tangible and positive change in four areas that both define our region and impact the world
- **Mission:** to develop and galvanise intersectoral networks that will enable shared understanding and lead to joint ventures, adding value through collaboration, culture and advocacy.

EASTERN ARC Academic Research Consortium

Eastern Arc Strategy 2025-30



The case for consortia

- A regional focus will continue to grow in importance, whichever party is in power
  - However, there's a real danger of GSE (and our universities) being disadvantaged in the national narrative
- Huge need and opportunity to work across our region
  - To share our knowledge
  - To increase our reach
  - To increase our profile and amplify our voice
  - To increase our critical mass and thereby our competitiveness
  - To increase our impact

Links

- Contact me: p.ward@easternarc.ac.uk
- Background:
  - *New Regionalisation of UK Higher Education*
  - Regional Consortia
- Collaboration
  - Resources from Collaborative Coast and Food in a Time of Crisis
  - Imaging Platform Alliance (IPA)
- Advocacy
  - Position Papers
  - Coastal Manifesto
- Updates: News

What is the AHRC IAA?

- Funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- Awarded to 32 UK universities; Sussex is in the ‘South and East Cluster’ with Brighton, Reading, Kent, Southampton and UCA
- £600,000 over four years (April 2022 – March 2026)
- **How is it helping?** By augmenting opportunities for impact activity developed from Sussex research within the AHRC remit (benefitting researchers across the University), through:
  - Expert specialist advice and seed funding to researchers for activities that engage external partners or audiences, with the potential for impactful outcomes
  - Focussed training and events to improve researchers' impact literacy
  - A post-doc IAA Impact Fellow project and other strategic relationship-building initiatives

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What has it funded so far?

Seed-funding

16 ‘Fast Track’ projects (~£3k)

19 ‘Impact Builder’ projects (~£10k)

14 ‘Engagement Opportunity’ activities (up to £1k)

2 Strategic ‘Cluster’ projects

applicants based in…

37 MAH

4 Global Studies

3 LPS

1 BSMS

1 LifeSci

1 Business School

4 across 2+ Schools

Training

- Policy engagement for arts & humanities researchers
- Pathways to arts & humanities impact
- Inclusive engagement in arts & humanities research
- Integrating impact into funding bids

Events

- Biannual meetings of the newly-established MAH Impact Advisory Board
- AHRC IAA South & East Cluster Regional Research Impact Networking event, hosted at Sussex (8 May 2024)

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Today's panel & session format

Panel members:

Dr Katy Mack - AHRC IAA Impact Fellow (Media, Arts & Humanities)

Dr Emily Robinson - Reader in British Studies (Law, Politics & Sociology)

Dr Sarah Scuzzarello - Senior Lecturer in Geography (Global Studies)

And Chair: Dr Piotr Cieplak - Senior Lecturer in Filmmaking (Media, Arts & Humanities)

Part 1: 5-minute presentations from panel members on their AHRC IAA projects

Part 2: 30-minute panel discussion and audience Q&A

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Find out more

AHRC IAA Programme Consultant: Katherine Blackadder (MAH)

Email the **AHRC IAA team inbox**: ahrciaa@sussex.ac.uk

And/or the contact for your School, listed on the IAA webpage below.

For **more information** about the AHRC IAA, including funding calls, eligibility and FAQs, visit:

https://www.sussex.ac.uk/research/centres/media-arts-humanities-institute/resources/engagement/impact or scan QR code →

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Sussex Impact Days 2024
REF2029
What we know so far

Introduction: The REF and why it is important

- The UK's national system of research assessment;
- Determines the allocation of quality-related (QR) block grants to universities;
- Of considerable financial and reputational significance for universities;
- A competitive exercise, where universities maximise the quality of their submissions;
- A peer review exercise, based fundamentally on the quality and impact of research;
- Made up of submissions divided into discipline-based Units of Assessment (UoAs);
- Each UoA submission covers three areas: Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding; Engagement and Impact; People, Culture and Environment;
- Last REF was REF2021 and Sussex mostly did well – we are seeking to at least maintain our performance and hopefully improve it, especially in particular areas.

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What we know so far about changes for REF2029

- First announcements were made in June 2023; final guidance expected in late 2025- early 2026;
- Names and weighting of submission sections (to be confirmed)
  - Outputs becomes ‘Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding’. From 60% (2021) to 50% (REF2029);
  - Impact becomes ‘Engagement and Impact’. Retains same weighting at 25%;
  - Environment becomes ‘People, Culture and Environment’. Increases from 15% (2021) to 25% (REF2029).
- Relationship between staff and outputs.
  - Further breaking the relationship between individuals and outputs
  - Using HESA staff returns to determine the volume of outputs required;
  - Removal of minimum and maximum requirements for individual staff (to be confirmed);
  - Eligibility: Outputs from anyone employed on a REF-eligible contract on, min. 0.2 FTE for at least 6 months, can be submitted.
- Changes to content
  - New unit-level narratives for Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding and for Engagement and Impact
  - Minimum of one case study for Engagement and Impact (rather than two in REF2021)
  - No quality threshold for underpinning research in impact case studies.
  - People, Culture and Environment will involve a ‘basket of indicators’

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...and the key things staying the same

- Unit of Assessment (UoA) structure remains unchanged;
- Volume requirements remaining fairly similar – it's still about quality over quantity;
- No big expansion in the use of metrics;
- Assessment scale (1* - 4*) will remain the same;
- Individual output grades will not be made public;
- An Open Access policy will be retained – but revised and expanded.

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Sussex management and governance of REF

- Sussex's REF preparations are governed by a Code of Practice agreed with Research England.
- Decisions on REF are ultimately the prerogative of the Vice-Chancellor and University Executive Team. UET delegate routine handling of REF matters to a REF Steering Group chaired by the DPVC (Research).
- A local academic REF UoA Lead monitors the emerging REF profile within their department or area, and helps to support its development. The UoA Lead is often supported by an Impact Lead who performs a similar role specifically for impact, and by Professional Services colleagues supporting REF in the School.
- Selection of outputs and impact case studies is an institutional decision rather than an individual one. Sometimes individual authors are asked for their opinion, but whether and when to do so is a local decision. Outputs, impact and other activities can be submitted even if the staff who led them have left.
- A central Research Information, Quality and Impact (RIQI) Team co-ordinates REF planning across Sussex, working with the PVC (Research and Enterprise), Deputy PVC (Research), and in partnership with Heads of School, DRKEs and UoA Leads.
- There is a series of University-wide reviews of our potential submission quality, where all or a sample of the available outputs, emerging impact case studies and data on the research environment are reviewed.

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Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding: What this section includes

- Most REF outputs are peer-reviewed publications
  - Other types, including patents, exhibitions, software, media are eligible
  - Journal articles are standard for most disciplines, but in some, monographs are common
- REF2021's Outputs section has been renamed to Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding
  - Will include a new contextual narrative for the unit
- Outputs are assessed within Unit of Assessment sub-panels led by 4 Main Panels
  - Cross-referral between UoAs is possible
- Sub-panels are required to assess the content of each output and only limited contextual use of metrics is permitted

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Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding: What this section includes

- REF are proposing to remove the minimum output requirement for individual staff members for REF2029
- Eligible outputs may be solo- or co-authored
  - Each output can usually only be submitted once within a given UoA, but an output can be submitted in multiple UoAs where co-authors span more than one Unit
- An Open Access policy will apply in REF2029; this is currently under consultation
  - The policy will apply to journal articles, some conference proceedings and (likely) monographs
- Individual output grades are never made public and cannot be deduced.
  - Only aggregate grades for whole unit are released

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Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding: How we are preparing at Sussex

- Learning lessons from REF2021 and sharing good practice
  - Reflecting on internal processes, identifying areas for improvement
- Sussex provides workshops, internal peer review, mentoring opportunities for authors
- Continuous output review processes led locally by UoA Leads
  - UoAs can work with External Research Advisors
- Local processes feed into central reviews
- Introduction of assessment area of Elements system to manage the assessments and ultimately select outputs

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Engagement and Impact: What this section includes

In the REF, eligible impact is –

- Any change or benefit that arises as a result of academic research but takes place beyond it;
- Distinct from academic impact (i.e. it's not about having a 'high-impact paper');
- An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia;
- Articulated in a narrative that conveys the links between the impact and underpinning research;
- Based on research conducted at the submitting institution.

Engagement and impact are submitted to the REF as a number of impact case studies (the number determined by the volume of staff in the unit) and a unit-level narrative.

- Unit-level narrative introduced to review a broader range of engagement and impact in a submitting UoA outside of the chosen case studies.

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Engagement and impact: How we are preparing at Sussex

- Learning lessons from REF2021 and sharing good practice;
- Workshops and training, Impact Days (18-19 June 2024);
- Reward and recognition via Research Impact Awards;
- Internal impact funding through AHRC Impact Acceleration Account;
- Recent investments in staff to support impact;
- RIMs working with Impact Leads and local PS support, monitoring profile of emerging impact case studies
- Review processes led locally by UoA and Impact Leads, with External Research Advisor input;
- Local processes feed into central reviews;
- Use of Elements to manage impact records and ultimately select potential case studies.

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People, Culture and Environment: What this section includes

In the REF, the (research) environment is –

- All of the human, technical and physical infrastructure and activities, large and small, that help to make research in universities happen and to effectively share it;
- Assessed through a mix of narrative and data (one per UoA, and one at institutional level);
- For REF2029, to be incorporated into a renamed ‘People, Culture and Environment’ section, putting increased emphasis on the sustainability of research cultures and support for personal development;
- Covers postgraduate researchers as well as staff.

In REF2029, the People, Culture and Environment section will include a ‘basket of indicators’ and a narrative element. A pilot exercise will take place in the second half of 2024.

- Sussex applying to participate in the pilot and engaging in sector-level discussions over the indicators to use.

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