

*Follow that output..to its (public) outcome:* an institutional ethnography of making and materialising ‘research impact’

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**URGE Symposium, Monday 22nd April,  
2013**

iMpacT

# *Follow that output....*

- From RAE to REF
- Making sense of ‘impact’...sites of observation, making, materialising...
- The game....
- The players...
- The resisters...
- The stakes....

# From RAE to REF

- Impact is 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.  
*(REF2014 Assessment framework and guidance on submissions)*

# REF rules....

- 20% of assessment will be allocated to impact; made up of **cases** and **impact environment statement**
- 1 case per 10 staff submitted..
- It has to be from the unit of assessment..and not staff activity from a previous institution.
- Publications (outputs) can go back of 20 years but impact claimed can only be 2008-2013...
- Need to identify **outputs** that were the basis for creating **outcomes** (hence favours empirical research/current activity to access outcomes)...2\* threshold....

# **But what is impact excellence... and who decides?**

- **Reach** and **significance** are the two key code words for impact....but Hefce will not offer a reach and significance response but states that the panels will decide....(panels are made up of stakeholders...)

# **And, all claims must be auditable**

- In other words impact claims must be provable, evidence based and capable of being demonstrated in detail.....in effect asking academics to prove what they cannot prove....

# The main players in Bristol

- Public engagement and media people who are supposed to know how to sell our work to the public
- University ‘impact committee’
- Faculty Research Director
- School Impact Directors and Champions
- School Directors Public Engagement
- Selected academics with potential cases....

# An early Faculty meeting....

- **Objectives:**
  - ‡ To communicate about the impact agenda, especially in relation to the REF and the production of case studies
  - ‡ To identify areas of impactful research within the Faculty- ideally to include some areas of research that are currently less well known
  - ‡ To develop outlines of narratives that describe impactful research
  - ‡ To create a community of people who will cascade information about the impact agenda to their colleagues, and to advise on how best to prepare for the REF in this regard

# The game...gets going

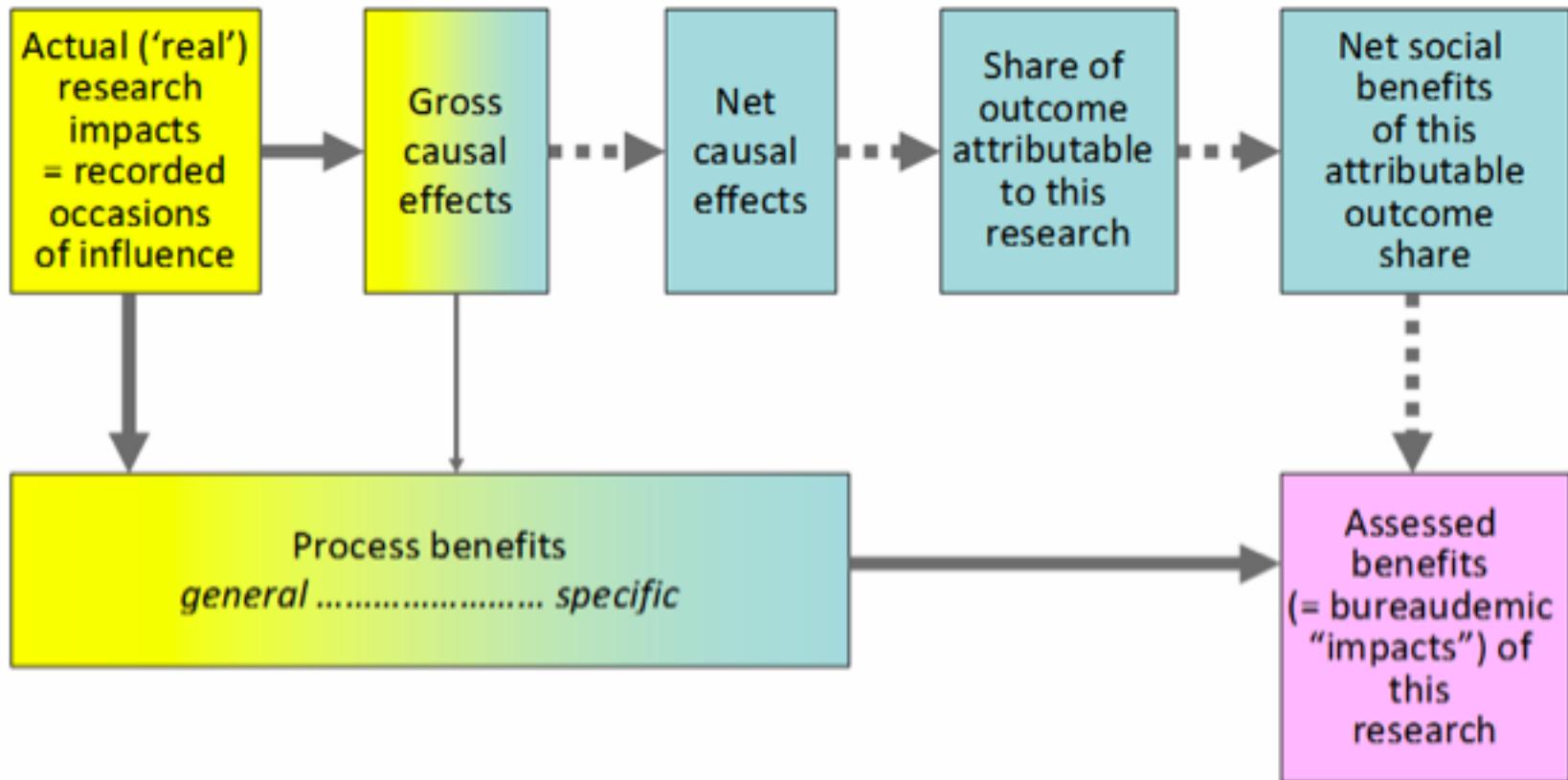
- Incentives to generate buy-in - such as Annual Impact Awards
- Impact funds to gather evidence of impact for likely candidates
- Exemplars arising out of trials
- Writing workshops...template practice...and re-practice..and re-practice....
- Departments critique each other; multiple rounds and feedback
- Impact case mentors across all of the university

## Expert Support Team – Impact Case Study Review Checklist

Impact Case Study Information	
Unit of Assessment:	25 Education
Title of Case Study:	Improving schools' Policies and practices intended to raise the learning achievement of 'Black' pupils in England.
Case study commentary	
<b>Title</b> Please comment on the title of the case study in the box below. You should consider the following question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does the title adequately reflect the effect, change or benefit beyond academia which is described in the rest of the case study?</li></ul> <p><i>Good title, explains the impact</i></p>	
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> Please comment on section 1 of the case study in the box below. You should consider the following question: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does this section provide a succinct outline of the impact described in the case study? You may wish to comment if the text focuses primarily on the underpinning research rather than the impact claimed.</li></ul> <p><i>The impact has been very well explained and is general enough to want to read more detail. It may be helpful to expand upon how the research has shaped government policy.</i></p>	
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> Please comment on section 2 of the case study in the box below. You should consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does this section include dates of when the research was carried out?</li><li>• Does this section include the names of the key researchers and what positions they held at UoB at the time of the research?</li><li>• Does this section clearly describe the nature of the research insights or findings which relate to the impact claimed in the case study?</li></ul> <p><i>This is good and establishes the research and its setting very well and it clearly marks out what came from each research project. The names and UoB positions of all of the researchers at the time of the research must be added: it is not clear whether or not all of the researchers were based at the UoB. The dates for research D also need to be inserted.</i></p>	
<b>3. References to the research</b> Please comment on section 3 of the case study in the box below: <p><i>Excellent, although further bibliographic details are needed for research output 6.</i></p>	
<b>4. Details of the impact</b> Please comment on section 4 of the case study in the box below. You should consider the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does this section adequately explain how the research underpinned (made a distinct and material contribution to) the impact?</li><li>• Does the case study provide sufficient details of the beneficiaries – who or what community, constituency or organisation has benefitted, been affected or impacted on?</li><li>• Does the case study provide sufficient details of the nature of the impact – how they have</li></ul>	

# The incomprehension abounds....

- Academics find it difficult to get their head around the fact that their academic status and expertise over a corpus of work **is not** being judged..
- Academics find it difficult to think about who their publics are...
- Academics find it difficult to trace the life of an output to impact...
- Academics found it difficult to write for publics...
- Nevertheless find themselves spinning fairytales of influence....



**where to find impact...**

# The unlikely resisters

- University Impact Committee review of the first round in 2012....sighed when it found that areas like engineering think financial return for effort is not worth it....
- Less likely to be in arts, social sciences and humanities, as there is more at stake...despite some resistance from departments like philosophy

# The institutional stakes...

- *Financial return*...argues one 4\* impact case will generate £720,000 over 5 years...(but what of the transaction costs to get there)
- *Status*....will elevate some areas of research work where policy/practice element is high and limit the perceived value of other areas
- *Relationships with public*....likely to create more instrumental or calculative relationships as researchers chase evidence...
- *Forget about a politics (and ethics of knowledge)*....any impact will do...even negative.

# **Patrick Dunleavy...LSE**

- Don't let this reality gap in Hefce's approach put you off. Instead, take a deep breath, hold your nose tight and plunge into the process. You'll have to accept that you will be doing stuff that stinks a bit, and that your hands will get a bit dirty. Eschew false modesty and over-scrupulousness, whilst maintaining academic integrity.....

**....WE'LL KEEP YOU  
POSTED...ONCE WE COME UP FOR  
AIR....**