

# **Membership Survey Report: Impact in Practice in the Arts & Humanities**

February 2018

**The Arts and Humanities Research Impact Network Group (A&H RING)** is a forum for co-creation, sharing and debating best practice of impact in the arts and humanities.

It serves the diverse community of academics (post-doc to senior lecturers), professional services (impact officers, managers and research managers) and practitioners in independent research organisations who are practising research impact in the arts and humanities. The A&H RING serves as a point of contact and a voice for this community. There are currently 87 members.

The A&H RING was conceived by Dr Jessica Lutkin (University of Reading, Research Impact Officer for Heritage & Creativity) and Dr Sara Helen Binney (University of East Anglia, Research Associate).

**This document summarises a survey with the aim of establishing current understanding and perspectives of impact among the A&H RING membership.**

**This baseline will provide a platform from which to develop the A&H RING to meet the needs of its membership and provide them with a voice in the fast-evolving area of research impact.**

**Thank you to all the respondents.**

### **Key findings of the survey:**

- There is a broad range of impact practitioners within the arts and humanities at HEIs and IROs
- Impact knowledge varies between practitioners
- Definitions of research impact are diverse and wide ranging
- Impact is undertaken for many different reasons, but is becoming a significant feature of many academic job descriptions
- There is recognition that research impact is an endeavour not beholden to the REF and there is a wider culture of research impact for many different reasons
- There is a strong desire for networking opportunities at HEIs, IROs and other relevant organisations
- There is a need for a directory of information specific to impact in the arts and humanities
- There is a strong desire for training opportunities on impact in the arts and humanities to augment the training that is already available
- Impact is a good and enjoyable thing to engage with

### **Next steps:**

- Establish a working group to develop the A&H RING with representatives from all types of practitioners
- Hold an introductory networking event
- Establish a directory of support and information
- Increase awareness of the A&H RING as a focal point for arts and humanities impact practitioners

## **Introduction:**

Since the late 1990s 'impact' has developed from a scientific approach to analysing published research within academia to a widely accepted way to measure and evaluate the changes brought about by research beyond academia. This has been formalised by the Research Excellence Framework exercises, in 2014 and forthcoming in 2021. While literature, training and consultancies have developed to support the growing field of impact, much of this is directed at STEM and social sciences. The arts and humanities have relied on the literature and expertise developed from within these disciplines. However, fitting arts and humanities impact into existing impact frameworks and methods is problematic and there is a need for impact tools and methodology that are specific to this field.

The A&H RING launched an introductory survey in August 2017. The purpose of this survey was to assess the state of impact in the arts and humanities in light of the identified problem of STEM and social science-centric impact literacy and support.

The survey was circulated to post-graduates, PDRAs, ECRs and other academics who are developing their research impact, as well as impact officers in projects, departments or institutions. They were asked about the current level of support, advice and knowledge that is available for planning, doing, recording and evaluating good quality research impact in the arts and humanities.

The following document summarises the results of the survey and identifies the next steps for supporting and encouraging best practice in research impact in the arts and humanities.

### **Respondents:**

30 individuals responded to the survey. Of these, 27 are employed by universities, while the remaining three are employed by The National Archives (an Independent Research Organisation). The universities are:

York (4), Winchester (3), Royal Holloway (3), Reading (4), UEA (3), Southampton (2), Loughborough (1), Kent (1), Adelaide (1), Melbourne (1), Lincoln (1), Nottingham (1), Bath Spa (1) and Middlesex (1).

The current roles of the respondents range from PhD students to senior lecturers and managers: lecturer (junior and senior) (10), PhD student (4), professional services (impact and research) (7), PDRA (3), senior manager (2), research fellow (2), librarian (1), course organiser (1).

The majority (18) have their interest in history; three in literature, and the remainder in classics, modern languages, education, music, philosophy, theatre, media and culture, and one identifies as purely impact.

**There is a broad range of impact practitioners within the arts and humanities at HEIs and IROs.**

## **Impact knowledge and involvement:**

*In general, how knowledgeable do you feel about research impact?  
How do you define research impact in your field?*

Only two of the respondents have indicated that they are extremely knowledgeable about impact, and only one said they had no knowledge at all. In the main, respondents declare they have 'a little' impact knowledge, or are 'very knowledgeable'. This reflects a certain amount of confidence in impact knowledge, but there is clearly a need to improve the knowledge base.

The different offerings of definitions of impact show a great diversity in what this means to the individual (see appendix 1). There is disparity between the UK and Australia, where impact in Australia is still understood (at least by our respondents) as citations and financial partnerships. In the UK, key words stand out from the definitions, provided that do show common threads: change, public, non-academic and influence.

### **Impact knowledge varies between practitioners Definitions of research impact are diverse and wide ranging**

*What is your current interest in research impact?*

The most common response was that research impact is a requirement of a respondent's current role (34%), although there is also interest in research impact for career development (25%) and through a desire to raise their personal profile (16%). 18% of respondents have also indicated that they are working towards a REF2021 impact case study. Other reasons for interest include:

- Desire to raise the profile of research processes, outcomes, and subject(s) of study
- It's interesting
- To promote the use of archival based historical research in schools
- We are privileged and should make a positive contribution using our skills and knowledge
- It was part of my original application for the studentship I now have.

**Impact is undertaken for many different reasons, but is becoming a significant feature of many academic job descriptions**

### **Impact and the REF:**

*Thinking about the REF (Research Excellence Framework), which of the following statements do you agree with the most?*

Respondents were given four statements to choose from. The most popular statement was:

'Research impact is not about the REF, which is just one place where good research impact can be reported' (12 (40%) respondents)

The next statement in popularity was:

'Research impact is a label created by the REF for something that academics have always done – public engagement, dissemination, outreach, etc.' (9 (30%) respondents)

The two other statements were the least popular:

'As a result of the REF, research impact now has credibility' (4 (13%) respondents)

'There is no point in doing research impact work unless it is for REF2021' (1 (3%) respondent)

**There is recognition that research impact is an endeavour not beholden to the REF and there is a wider culture of research impact for many different reasons.**

### **Networking:**

*Would you like to meet other people doing research impact?  
If so, how would you like to meet people?*

25 respondents (83%) indicated they would like to meet other people doing research impact, and the remaining 5 that they may like to. One of the aims of the A&H RING is to provide networking opportunities, and there is a strong desire among the members of the network group for this to happen. Respondents were asked how they would like to meet, and there was overwhelming enthusiasm for all options, including workshops and seminars, symposia or conferences, general networking events in London and regional universities, online discussion boards and exchange visits. There were also requests for events to take place at locations other than universities, including at IROs, cultural sector institutions, government agencies and funding bodies.

**There is a strong desire for networking opportunities at HEIs, IROs and other relevant organisations.**



## **Information:**

*Where do you currently get information on research impact?*

Most people responded that they received information from their colleagues and from a person senior to them (for example a project PI or PhD supervisor).

15 indicated that they find information from within their institution

17 found information from external online sources. External online sources include Research Council websites, think tank websites (e.g. Wonkhe), social media and blogs, REF 2014 database, consultants and company websites, professional services support websites (see appendix 2). The full list is extensive and indicates that compiling a directory of useful online sources of information will be helpful to members of the A&H RING.

Only one indicated they have not received any information.

Respondents were also asked whether the information was specific to their discipline, to arts and humanities, to a field or discipline different to their own, or general. It was an even split between information specific to their own discipline and arts and humanities, and specific to a different field or discipline and general.

**There is a need for a directory of information specific to impact in the arts and humanities.**

## Training:

*Have you ever participated in research impact training?*

18 respondents have participated in research impact training. This training was either provided by their own institution or an external party. Two attended training provided by another institution.

External training was provided by companies (such as Fast Track Impact), higher education organisations (such as the Cultural Capital Exchange), public organisations (such as UK Parliament) and professional services organisations (such as ARMA).

*When did you participate in this training?*

*How useful did you find your training?*

The majority of this training has been undertaken recently (since the beginning of 2016/17 academic year and during the 2017 summer holiday period). On a sliding scale of 1 (not useful) to 5 (extremely useful) the majority rated their training 3-5. However, two rated their training as 1, and indicated that this was because it was focused on the social sciences and international development, and there was no cross over with the arts and humanities.

12 respondents have not participated in research impact training. Three have not sought out training, while five have indicated that there is no training on offer to them. One of the respondents indicated that their training was informal while working on a project, but that 'formal training keeping pace with funders' guidance and best practice would be great'.

*Would you like to have research impact training, be it for the first time or additional to any you have already participated in?*

The overwhelming majority, 77%, would like to have research impact training, and another 20% may consider it if it were offered, and would like it to be for the arts and humanities in general, and more subject specific training. The one who indicated they would not be interested in training said that this was because they do not have the time, and do not think it is worth the time.

**There is a strong desire for training opportunities on impact in the arts and humanities to augment the training that is already available.**

### **Final remarks and next steps:**

Respondents were asked how much they care about research impact. While a light-hearted question to end the survey, it was essential to gauge the current attitude towards research impact from members of the A&H RING. They were given options of statements that have been overheard during conversations about impact.

5 chose the statement 'I love it – live it, breathe it, eat it...!

11 chose the statement 'Actually, now I'm getting into it I really like it'.

10 chose the statement 'I do enjoy it, but it is not my priority'.

1 chose the statement 'I tolerate it'.

No one chose the negative responses, which ranged from 'I have to do it to tick a box for my role – I wouldn't bother otherwise' to 'I hate it and would like it to stop'.

A significant final comment was made by one of the respondents who is a PhD student, and early in their career. They have highlighted a problem that has come to our attention anecdotally so far, but this is probably the tip of the iceberg:

*'I think that there is too much pressure on PhD students to deliver on these things quickly in the 3 to 6 months we get for these kinds of projects. I also don't think that there is enough support. My placement was one I defined and sought out myself. When there have been a few issues, my funding body's response has been 'oh dear'. I'm at a very early stage of my research and career, and I feel that I am doing a lot that is really outside my comfort zone and would not be expected of someone until they were an established early career researcher or lecturer. I'm very glad of the opportunity but just feel more support is needed.'*

**As a result of these findings the A&H RING will undertake the following steps to develop the network and its support to arts and humanities research impact practitioners:**

- **Establish a working group to develop the A&H RING with representatives from all types of practitioners**
- **Hold an introductory networking event**
- **Establish a directory of support and information**
- **Increase awareness of the A&H RING as a focal point for arts and humanities impact practitioners**

## Appendix 1

### How do you define research impact in your field?

- Widening of awareness of research
- Making research applicable outside of an academic setting and having a measurable change in how people think about something. Impact projects can come in many different forms, including (but not limited to) digital/online projects, exhibitions, TV/radio, public policy. For example, I've developed school resources (videos and lesson plans) for AQAs Power and the People GCSE based on my research into the Pilgrimage of Grace and Louth.
- I wish I knew. Having an effect on policy (be that governmental, heritage, etc); public engagement; outreach.
- Translating the outcomes of academic research to have impact (economic, social, creative) for non-academic audiences.
- Broadening the experiences and knowledge of the wider public
- Being interdisciplinary in nature, a good impact will have to equal to my research being understood by humanists and beings from computing, alike.
- Work that has the demonstrated potential to engage and influence the general public/government/education
- Me personally? In Oz, it's basically measured in \$\$ from linkage partners, consultancy etc I define it as scholarship that changes how we think about the world.
- Using the research to make a difference in how things are done, ideally in the world outside academia. Working together with others to co-create something useful.
- The influence or effect your research has outside the academic context, e.g. on policy makers, individuals, and non-academic institutions.
- The ability to make a measurable contribution to public debates on society, culture, politics and the economy and enhance public understanding and appreciation of the past.
- The translation of academic research for the use in schools and by the wider non-academic community
- communicating to as many people as possible as clearly as possible with a story that appeals to your audience - whether it be in print or through verbal presentation. You need something between 'A little' & 'Very' above.
- Affecting change in thought or action
- Communicating research to implement change and influence society.
- The outcomes resulting from a reader consulting a special collections item, which can be physical or online. These outcomes could be a research publication, a conference paper, an outreach project, a student essay, an artwork, etc.
- A contribution to, influence on, or benefit for society beyond academia

- Research bringing about change outside academia, for the benefit of others.
- Developing wider academic and public understanding of Gulag camps
- The measurable difference made by the project and its outputs to the level of public knowledge and awareness of the research area/field/subject/period
- Whether the research becomes accepted as a definitive study or effects thinking and processes beyond my institution.
- Slow. Studying the Middle Ages leaves a lot of people feeling we have little relevance to the outside world and that it is somewhat inaccessible to those without a knowledge of Latin. But I think that there are some really wonderful Medieval Impact projects which are beginning to change that perception.
- Mostly benefits or contributions of research to activities and challenges outside academia. But sometimes the route to this has to be through academic impact so that counts too but isn't the ultimate form of impact.
- The transmission of research to non-academic audiences and the value of research to the wider community.
- Public engagement and dissemination of research.
- Using research to underpin a shift or change (or no action where action was planned) in the non-academic world.
- Changes in or influences on behaviour, ideas and experience from research in art and media practice.

## Appendix 2

### Website resources identified by respondents:

RCUK (<http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/innovation/>)  
REF2014 submissions (<http://impact.ref.ac.uk/CaseStudies/>)  
Researcher blogs  
HEFCE blog (<http://blog.hefce.ac.uk/>)  
Professional publications (e.g. <http://connect.ala.org/node/267306>)  
Fast Track Impact (<http://www.fasttrackimpact.com/>)  
LSE impact blog (<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/>)  
ARMA (<https://arma.ac.uk/>)  
Times Higher Education (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/>)  
Wonkhe (<http://wonkhe.com/>)  
Research Professional (<http://info.researchprofessional.com/>)  
Vertigo Ventures (<http://www.vertigoventures.com/>)  
Horizon 2020 (<https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/>)