

# UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE: IMPEDING OR FACILITATING CREATIVITY?

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## **The Impact Agenda in Research Governance**

Mike Power, LSE

Rank 2014	Institution	GPA
1	Institute of Cancer Research	3.87
2	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	3.74
3	Imperial College London	3.68
4	St George's, University of London	3.64
5	Cardiff University	3.61
6	Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	3.57
7	University College London	3.54
8	King's College London	3.52
9	University of Oxford	3.51
=10	University of Bristol	3.50
=10	London School of Economics	3.50

Original data from Hefce; GPA calculation by *Times Higher Education*

**REF2014**  
Research Excellence Framework

The research of **154**  
UK universities was assessed



They made **1,911** submissions including:

- **52,061** academic staff
- **191,150** research outputs
- **6,975** impact case studies

The **overall quality** of submissions was judged,  
on average to be:

- ★★★★★ **30%** world-leading (4\*)
- ★★★★ **46%** internationally excellent (3\*)
- ★★★ **20%** recognised internationally (2\*)
- ★ **3%** recognised nationally (1\*)

# “Impact” as a performance value

- Longstanding policy interest in **outcomes**; How to link university research to economy
- Rise of ‘impact’, ‘impactfulness’ as performance **value/logic** in different fields
- UK “**Worry Report**” 2006: pressure to **measure** impact of research **outside** academy
- UK Research Evaluation Exercise (2014); 20% funding for **impact**; “**beneficial** impact” but can be wide, not just economic
- Initial resistance/scepticism: impact as new kind of norm for organizations (LSE 1 study per 10 staff)
- 4\* ICS worth £120K per annum!

## RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK 2014: INSTITUTIONS RANKED BY SUBJECT

Overall							Output			Impact		
2014 rank order by GPA	2008 GPA	Institution	Total number of FTE staff submitted	% of 4* research activity	GPA	Research power	Institution	% of 4* research activity	GPA	Institution	% of 4* research activity	GPA
<b>32 Philosophy</b>												
1	2.95	Oxford	72	51	3.31	237	Warwick	38	3.28	Birmingham	80	3.80
2	2.35	Birmingham	14	49	3.30	46	Sheffield	35	3.19	Keele	80	3.80
3	3.05	King's College London	24	44	3.23	78	Oxford	41	3.17	Cambridge B: History and Philosophy of science	74	3.74
4	2.65	Warwick	19	34	3.22	61	Edinburgh	29	3.12	UCL	80	3.70
-5	3.15	St Andrews	23	39	3.21	73	Essex	29	3.11	Cardiff	70	3.70
-5	2.95	LSE	17	38	3.21	53	Birkbeck	38	3.10	Queen's Belfast	60	3.60
-7	3.15	UCL	24	46	3.20	77	Birmingham	37	3.09	King's College London	63	3.50
-7	2.80	Edinburgh	24	37	3.20	76	Southampton	26	3.09	UEA	50	3.50
-9	2.95	Cambridge B: History and Philosophy of science	35	41	3.19	112	King's College London	34	3.07	St Andrews	53	3.43
-9	2.90	Essex	10	34	3.19	30	St Andrews	27	3.03	Oxford	60	3.40

# Accounting for impact

- Underlying causal model: “**pathways to impact**”:
- research → “engagement” → impact on ‘users
- Metrics ambition but ICS as **narrative** accounting form
- ICS **template** production – Regulator/Universities pilot studies
- Making up more specific **rules** (Not all staff; **time-window**, boundary issues, research quality thresholds etc)
- **Pluralism** of kinds of impact and related evidence forms e.g.

Include evidence of the **reach of the impact**. This should extend beyond simply providing the numbers of people engaged and may also, for example, include:

- information about the types of audience
- whether there was secondary reach, for example from follow-up activity or media coverage
- other **quantitative indicators** such as evidence of sales, downloads of linked resources, and/or access to web content.

c. Include evidence of the **significance of the impact**. This should include a description of the social, cultural or other significance of the research insights with which the public have

engaged. Examples of the evidence that might be provided for this include:

- evaluation data
- critical external reviews of the engagement activity
- evidence of third party involvement, for example how collaborators have modified their practices
- **user feedback or testimony**
- evidence of sustainability through, for example, a sustained or ongoing engagement with a group, a significant increase in participation in events or programmes or use of resources

# Evidence of impact: “solicited testimony”

- **UNI**: operational challenges in creating and writing ICS; populating template
- “what impact is NOT”; “ what has **changed** as a result of my research?”
- Problem of causal **attribution** vs complexity
- traces of impact lie **outside** organization; costly to collect.
- emergence of ‘**solicited testimony**’; low cost evidence form
- Some concerns at UNI about overuse of this evidence form
- = traces of impact actively constructed by researcher



# Discussion: creativity?

- What is creativity, innovation; we should avoid over-romanticising?
- UK REF Recalibrating balance of two logics: autonomous **curiosity**; and **use-value**; exposed different distributions of this logic across HE field; for some it is an opportunity
- Key question: what organizational and behavioural changes does the Impact Agenda bring about?
- 4 themes: ‘impact creep’; ‘impact auditability’; quantifying qualities; academic misconduct

# Discussion: “impact creep”?

- Infrastructure; embedding value of impact; Support for evidence collection; traces of impact.
- ‘solicitation’ of impact as new academic habit! Distraction?
- 2014: impact was *ex post* outcome; becoming *ex ante* target: e.g. Grant applications: prospective impact: impact even precedes research?
- Rankings and reactivity: impact financial consequences; acquires attention;
- In conversation: “Hey that’s impact”. New discourse; ironic?
- ‘users’ as impactees also being constructed; made into good users of research?

# Discussion: impact auditability?

- Attraction of solicited testimony = creating **traces** of impact - interiorise external sources
- But hard to evaluate?
- ‘it was hard to assess the significance of an impact where the evidence was ‘nuanced’ and in the form of corroborating testimonials’
- The ICS field shows the face of real audit society: **not an auditable society; or one full of confident auditors/evaluators but organized by a ‘logic’ of auditability:**
  - Production of precise traces of impact (cf Wise ‘values of precision
  - Effortful production of evaluations as metrics (GPAs) which can be compared

# Discussion: quantifying qualities?

- Impact agenda in UK **non-quantitative** in spirit; not the usual story of ‘tyranny of numbers’
- *At what point in evaluation systems are qualities transformed into quantities?*
- The ICS not itself metrics-based but is a ‘mediating instrument’ which ‘feeds’ GPAs and rankings
- ICS as qualitative pre-reduction; we tend to focus on metrics themselves and not their qualitative pre-conditions of the possibility of grading.
- Pre-reduction and simplification: journalists replace academics as authors; marketing?

# Discussion: academic misconduct

- Impact agenda as natural extension and next episode of the rationalization and managerial control of academic work? OR
- Legitimate policy demand of states and taxpayers: willing to take a bet on most research funding but some accountability
- But have new kinds of academic ‘misconduct’, ‘deviance’ been created by the emphasis on impact?
  - being an intellectual? Doing research ‘for its own sake’? Writing long books? editing collections? Being too much of an academic citizen? Not publishing in the ‘best’ journals
  - **Trusting** in ones teaching and research impact, rather than proving it

THANK YOU