

Engaging for Research Impact Strategy

Summary

1 Aim

This operational strategy will deliver the University's vision for impact as defined in the institutional and research strategies. This can be summarised by 'A university's purpose is to enable a better future for all in society.' This strategy will contribute to a research and impact culture that enables staff to step confidently into the world to make it a better place through their engaged research practice. It will build on our strengths as a community of researchers and educators, from our broad spectrum of disciplines, who collaboratively explore and address grand challenges. Our university will be known for its portfolio of local, regional and global impact.

2 Strategy

At Leeds:

1. We understand that **engagement** with stakeholders is necessary for research to have impact, which makes the University a trusted, respected and valued partner in society and benefits the research and the researcher ('research + engagement -> impact').
Goal: To embed engaged research as the cornerstone of impact
2. We go beyond the REF definition for **impact** and what we submit to REF is not our only impact. We mean effects of good engagement practice on the world and society, including impact emerging from a body of knowledge that may not be based entirely on Leeds research. We acknowledge that different stakeholders will have different views of what is positive and negative impact, and we respect individuals¹ values that underpin decisions of what constitutes 'good'.
Goal: To mobilise more researchers to practice engaged research by valuing all forms of impact that arise from research.
3. We take a **community**-centric view of our research and consideration for impact is inherently part of all research design, delivery and dissemination activities at all levels of the institution; from individual academics and researchers to the institution's whole research strategy, which we express in our 'engaged research' practice.
Goal: To grow and accelerate the impact from our engaged research and build on good engagement for impact practice.
4. We have a **culture** that values and recognises activities that lead to making a difference in the world through our research and we value and support our staff who pursue an outcomes-focussed and reflective engagement for impact practice.
Goal: To energise staff and increase their satisfaction about making a difference with their research.

3 What does success look like?

- Schools and institutes are regularly updating their portfolios of impacts at varying levels of maturity.

¹ all stakeholders, including the researcher(s)

- The impact portfolios are actively managed through strong and robust impact planning at individual, project and programme level.
- We recognise staff contributions to engaged research. We value REF and non-REF impact and encourage staff to pursue impact that aligns with their values. This will lead to renewed energy among staff and increased job motivation and satisfaction.
- Staff have the necessary skills, share good engagement practice and lead by example and are well supported by the institution (e.g. specialist impact expertise, resources, etc).
- The institution can demonstrate on many levels how it contributes to society and the world through its research.
- The institution is able to attract more research funding because research projects have a higher relevance through the ER practice.
- The institution can produce the next REF-impact submission in a confident manner and has broken the cycle of recovery after submission leading into heightened stress before the next.

4 High-level Objectives

4.1 Creating a Healthy Research Impact Culture

Embedding impact as part of ongoing engaged research as a managed process, including impact beyond the REF definition, reward and recognise impact-related activity in existing processes and create links to existing activity and other initiatives elsewhere, aim to break the cycle and adapt staff's perspectives on impact.

4.1.1 Active maintenance of an impact portfolio as part of School strategy

The impact portfolio at School level is actively managed by senior academics in the School and content is derived from the annual academic review meeting with members of staff. Through the annual review, plans are put in place to grow the impact throughout the year, year on year, cultivating projects at different stages. The role holder/s will have a clear and consistent description of their responsibilities and will be supported by an annual impact session with members of the University Impact Group (UIG) to advise and recommend on actions to grow the impact. The Impact portfolio will be held on a system that can connect to or is part of REF-supporting systems and hence close collaboration with IRIS/Symplectic stakeholders will be necessary.

4.1.2 Reward and recognise engaged research leading to impact

Recognising impact-related activity starts with a revised research impact definition, which will be reflected in the annual academic review meeting and also with a clear attribution in workload models. Some schools have already adapted workload models. Within promotion criteria, impact-related activity is recognised in 3 mandatory and up to 3 optional criteria (across all academic grades within the Research and Innovation pathway). Newly designed awards that celebrate the planning and activities for engagement across all types of stakeholders will be launched and offer an opportunity for organisational development. Together with the impact portfolios internal and external communication around research impact can increase and foster the positive discussion of impact in the academic discourse.

4.1.3 Create spaces for curiosity and creativity to foster an internal and external collaboration culture

Being creative means having the time and space to think of new ideas. It requires the confidence to try things out, take risks, make mistakes, ask questions and voice ideas. This means working in a culture where 'silly' questions are positively welcomed, and nobody is afraid of being ridiculed for sharing an idea. Even if ideas do not work, it could be the catalyst for an idea that does. The Cultural Institute, the Interdisciplinary Research Team and LSSI are already operating in this area (eg Crucible, Creative Labs,

IDR-team, Arts and Health network, coproduction network) both with internal-only and internal-and-external collaborators. These existing activities offer a wealth of learning including the forming of new partnerships and the development of those relationships, the training of researchers in different creative learning practises, the appreciation of the differences in creativity between different disciplines and the opportunities for cross-fertilisation of creative skills. The learning from these networks can be further embedded into the institution through the Engaged Research and Impact network Teams and capitalised on in the Frontiers Institute for example.

4.2 Coherent and Clear 'Cradle to Grave' Approach

We will deliver a series of interventions to develop a Cradle to Grave Approach (building on current investments) for designing, planning, delivering and evaluating impact (expanding literature and funder initiatives). This high-level objective includes:

4.2.1 Map the current support and associated roles and address any gaps

The university has a range of support for engagement and impact that is located at various levels of the organisation (centre, faculty, school, institutes/centres and research projects/programmes). Since the impact agenda was introduced (~2009) and has grown in importance this support has been developed through existing provision that has adapted its offer and new provision to address (often locally) perceived gaps. This activity will map that provision for two purposes. The first is to ensure that all researchers know of that support and how to access it and those who provide that support are also clear on the expertise available across the university. This clarity will enable the second purpose, which is to establish if and where the university has any gaps in that support.

4.2.2 Further develop the consistent approach, guidance and tools

As the focus on impact has grown and our support for it has expanded, a network of colleagues working in this space has developed which has shared practice. This has led to a good level of consistency of approach across these colleagues and hence the university. This package of work will refine and develop this approach, whilst fully appreciating areas and types of impact that will need to have a bespoke modification to the approach. This will establish an Impact Evaluation and Planning Framework that can be consistently applied when that is appropriate or adapted when that is necessary. The Framework will include tools to enable individual researchers and engagement platforms to evaluate partnerships to ensure they provide mutual benefit.