

INVITATION TO TENDER:

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF RESEARCH IN THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Summary

The British Academy would like to commission research to deepen its understanding of the impact or wider benefit of research in the humanities and social sciences and the British Academy's role in supporting this.

In particular this commission will contribute to the Academy's higher education policy work in making the case for the value of the humanities and social sciences.

Background

The Academy believes that the impact case studies submitted to REF2014 revealed the substantial work that universities do to bring wider benefits to the economy, society and quality of life in the UK.

Further to the Stern review of the REF, the consultation on the second REF proposes that consistency is maintained where possible with the REF2014 impact assessment process. However, a number of significant changes to the assessment process are proposed, including suggestions to:

- Align the definition of academic and wider impact with that of the Research Councils UK definition
 - **“Academic impact:** the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory, application and academic practice.
 - **Wider impact:** an effect on, change to or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond academia.”
- Broaden and deepen the definition of impact
- Hone guidance on understanding the reach and significance of impact
- Include examples of impact arising from research activity and bodes of work as well as from specific research outputs

The Academy broadly supports these proposed changes to the Impact measure. The Academy believes impact is often achieved through a web of influence rather than a linear progression. 'Impact' as defined in REF2014 implied a 'but for' model of causation which is not applicable to the whole range of wider benefits of research, particularly in HSS. Research

that generates and critiques ideas can be long term and diffuse, and not conducive to demonstrating that an outcome happened 'because of' of a particular piece of research.

Since the introduction of Impact to REF2014, the weighting of this measure has remained constant for REF2021. The Academy believes that the impact agenda will continue to grow. Ensuring that this trend champions the humanities and social sciences will therefore be crucial and the Academy would like to be able to lead debate on the way in which impact in the humanities and social sciences can be evidenced and understood. For this reasons, we are interested in impact which was not captured by 2014 REF.

Aims and objectives

This work will aim to deepen understanding of the impact of research in the humanities and social sciences and what the British Academy might do to enable more of this.

It is expected that the research objectives would include:

- Exploration and analysis of any available literature;
- Analyses of REF2014 impact case studies;
- Qualitative investigation to understand the nature of impact within and between the humanities and social sciences and that not captured in REF2014.

The Academy has already used evidence from REF2014 Impact case studies in such publications as [Open for Business](#), where it is necessary to provide a strong narrative about the varied impacts of the humanities and social sciences alongside other discipline areas. The Academy would value a wider range of examples to draw on for this kind of purpose.

In addition, the Academy routinely undertakes work to monitor the health of its disciplines. For example, the Academy runs a '[Reflections](#)' series which has produced a report on Economics and is shortly due to publish a report on Archaeology. The Academy will draw on impact case studies from archaeology in this report.

The Academy recently completed a policy project on interdisciplinarity, resulting in the report '[Crossing Paths](#)'. This research often pointed to a link between interdisciplinarity and impact, when interdisciplinarity is understood in terms of a grand challenge or 'real world' problem that insights from multiple disciplines are brought together to tackle. Research from Kings College London¹ shows that just under two thirds of impact case studies submitted to REF2014 drew on interdisciplinary research.

The same research from Kings College London also shows that the British Academy as a research funder is an enabler of impact. The Academy would like to understand in more detail how it can enable further impact and would like a deep analysis into those case studies that mention the Academy explicitly.

Research questions and methodology

Research questions for this commission will include:

¹ <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/Analysis-of-REF-impact.pdf>

- What is the spread in types of impact from research across the humanities and social sciences?
- What is distinctive about the impact arising from research in these disciplines areas?
- What are the non-economic returns on research that are evidenced in REF2014 impact case studies? How are these articulated? How are these evidenced?
- What is the link between impact and public engagement?
- Is there a link between interdisciplinarity and impact? Is there a difference between impact that arises from interdisciplinary research and mono disciplinary research? What is the added value of research in the humanities and social sciences that arises from interdisciplinary research crossing these and other discipline areas?
- How might impact arising from a body of work in the humanities and social science be evidenced? How might it be evaluated?
- What role has the British Academy played in enabling impact? What types of impact has it enabled?
- What is the relationship between the reach and significance of impact? Must examples of quality impact have both?

We welcome proposals for how to approach this work. The Academy will assist, where possible, to ensure access to relevant data and contacts with key organisations and individuals.

Possible approaches

A combination of approaches might best to address all of the above questions and we would welcome an initial assessment of feasibility from tendering parties. Methods and sources might include:

- Qualitative and quantitative analysis of REF2014 impact case studies;
- Engagement with individual universities, HEFCE and organizations such as the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement;
- Existing reviews and analyses, for example the Kings College London analysis;
- Economic analyses;
- Desk research and interviews to identify and develop appropriate case studies.

This project might also assess where there are gaps in the evidence and propose work that could be undertaken to fill them.

Outputs

We expect outcomes from this project to include:

- A written report;
- Raw (if appropriate) and summary data underpinning the report;
- Data visualisations;

- Standalone case studies (if appropriate).

Time frames and next steps

Proposals for this work should include proposed methodology, all intended outputs, timelines and a breakdown of potential costs. Please also note any risks or difficulties that you foresee with this project, as well as any steps that might be taken to mitigate them.

We welcome tenders from a range of organisations and individuals, of no more than 2500 words, excluding CVs of the research team.

The budget for the research is up to £20,000, half payable on commission, and half on completion. The Academy will cover all costs related to design and print of any outputs.

The deadline for application is **midday on Friday 5th May 2017**.

For further information, or to express an intention to apply, email Jonathan Matthews, Policy Manager, j.matthews@britac.ac.uk