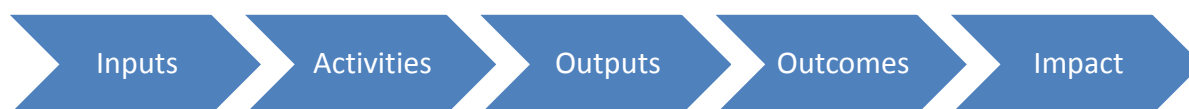


Assessing Research Impact: A Model for Otago Polytechnic



Need: Otago Polytechnic decided to introduce impact assessment, for a number of reasons:

- We are very conscious of international trends towards the introduction of impact assessment for tertiary education organisations, especially the Research Excellence Framework 2014 (REF2014) in the United Kingdom and the pilot Excellence in Innovation for Australia programme in 2012. The indications are that New Zealand will sooner or later follow suit, for example comments made publicly by Sir Peter Gluckman, New Zealand’s participation in impact assessment work by the Small Advanced Economies Initiative, moves by MBIE to develop an impact assessment methodology, and the likely introduction of impact beyond academia as part of the Research Contribution for the 2018 PBRF assessment round.
- Funding agencies, including MBIE, are starting to ask what impact is expected and how we would achieve that.
- The Tertiary Education Commission expects all tertiary education organisations “to work more closely with industry to improve the relevance of research and achieve greater transfer of knowledge, ideas and expertise to industry and wider society” to increase impact on innovation: Priority 5 of the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014 – 2019. Estimating and publicly reporting on our impact (both in the aggregate and individual stories) will help us grow knowledge transfer activities.
- We want to encourage our researchers, to see and value the impact they have as well as valuing the quality of their research.
- We want to help our researchers identify impacts beyond academia to include in their Evidence Portfolios for the 2018 PBRF round.
- We want to develop best practice, to become more effective at increasing positive impact.

Solution: The key features of our impact assessment process are:

- We are considering four types of non-academic impact - environmental, economic, social and cultural - to be consistent with the types of non-academic impact identified for the PBRF Research Contribution component.
- We are working with the definition of impact from REF2014 and the Excellence in Innovation trial in Australia: “Impact’ is any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.” It is not a measure of excellence or quality.
- We decided that our assessment would be prospective, not retrospective. This ensures we can gather baseline data for comparison. A prospective approach also encourages researchers to consider at the outset how impact could be maximised, and generates information about impact relevant for a funding application.
- In deciding how much detail to record, we needed a process that was as simple as possible (best use of researchers’ time) without compromising accuracy of the assessment. For each research project, we would identify up to three impacts.



- For each anticipated impact, we would identify up to three indicators of success, preferably direct but also indirect, eg indicators of reach or uptake.
- We chose a three step process, although the third step can be repeated:
 1. At the outset of research, identify the likely impacts and their indicators of success, and gather baseline data.
 2. At the end of research, update this information, indicate when the impacts are likely to be achieved, and estimate the significance, reach and likelihood of the anticipated impacts and Otago Polytechnic's contribution to them.
 3. After the period of time in which the impacts are likely to be achieved has elapsed, review the estimate of impacts.
- The process, including the language we used, needed to be relevant to every discipline.
- We decided to include senior students' research as well as staff research.

How we did it:

1. The first phase was background research. As well as published articles and the book "Achieving Impact in Research" (ed Denicolo, 2014), we considered examples such as CSIRO in Australia, NZIER's "Research Impact Evaluation" report for Nga Pae o te Maramatanga in September 2014, and Motu's "A Framework for Evaluating the Beneficial Impact on New Zealand of MBIE Contestable Research Funding" in March 2014.
2. Overlapping with the first phase, we began to develop a process that would be suitable for our researchers and organisational needs. We consulted staff during this phase.
3. Once we were comfortable with our process, we developed an online tool in-house. We needed a new online tool that would record research projects, rather than research outputs.
4. We have also developed a training resource to help researchers to understand impact and indicators and to plan public engagement to achieve impact. This is a simple Moodle course. We identified four basic pathways to impact.
5. We will provide additional support to researchers for example access to a range of support people who can help identify impacts and indicators of success, advise on pathways to impact, and implement public engagement strategies.

Implementation: By the end of 2015 the new research database incorporating impact assessment will be live and available for staff and students.

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