The Impact of Impact

Humanities Research and Global Challenges
Impact and the Humanities

• Required by both funders and the Research Excellence Framework (REF)
• Uneasy fit with the Humanities – traditionally they do not involve end-users and the model of work tends to be linear and not collaborative.
Potential of impact

• Impact has been a requirement since 2008
• Definition of impact is wide-ranging
• For example: "generating new ways of thinking that influence creative practice" and "enhanced cultural understanding".
How has the introduction of impact has influenced Humanities research in the UK?

- Methodology, project design, evaluation and forms of knowledge.
- Responses to GCRF
Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF)

- Flagship scheme by the UK government
- Support research that will have a positive impact on low and middle income countries around the world
- AHRC has funded c. 100 projects through the GCRF scheme
Data analysis

- Project abstracts and planned impact statements
- Questions concerning:
  - Aims to change policy or professional practice
  - Public engagement activities
  - Feedback from the project used
Practical change

Did the project aim to effect change in public policy or professional practice, and what was the role of humanities knowledge in this process?

Aims for policy change
- Policy change
- No policy change

Changes to professional practice
- Changes professional practice
- No changes to professional practice

Humanities knowledge inserted
- Hums knowledge
- No hums knowledge
Inserting humanities research into policy or professional practice?

- Goes against the traditional ways of understanding humanities research.
- Changes the valorization of humanities in terms of both disciplinary self-assessment and traditions of knowledge production.
Public Engagement:
Did the project include public engagement activities, either with the local community or the wider world?

Public engagement

- Public engagement
- No public engagement

Community engagement

- Local community engagement
- No local community engagement
Sharing knowledge in the humanities

• Public engagement is common in the humanities
• Expectation that knowledge concerning culture will be of interest, as well as easily intelligible to non-academics.
Delivery mechanisms

- Project designs include activities that bring the research to the local community/targeted stakeholders.
- Unusual in humanities research, because it creates a specific new audience for the work that is non-academic, and because it makes the process of research more collaborative and less linear.
Feedback from impact:
Was information collected from the impact activities fed back into the project, or the discipline?

Feedback into project
- Fed back into project
- Did not feed back into project

Feedback into discipline
- Fed back into the discipline
- Did not feed back into the discipline
Role of feedback in the humanities

• Traditionally, humanities research is not tested out on real live humans.
• The model of knowledge production tends not to include feedback from external stakeholders.
Productive interactions

• The requirement for impact means that humanities researchers also have to bring their research to potential end-users.
• This encounter in itself creates more cultural engagement, which therefore produces more subject matter for humanities research.
• There is potential here to expand the traditional practice of humanities research from simply collecting and analysing information to a practice which also includes using knowledge.
Empowering Women, Enhancing Heritage, and Increasing Chicken Production in Ethiopia

(University of Nottingham)

• **Project:** examine the cultural history of chicken husbandry in Ethiopia from a multidisciplinary perspective, including agricultural developments and the about gendered culture of work.

• **Aims:** to provide information that can be used by practitioners and policy-makers to improve current practices, based on historicised evidence of poultry production, which has the potential to improve productivity as well as working practices.
Empowering Women, Enhancing Heritage, and Increasing Chicken Production in Ethiopia
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• Mechanisms for policy and practitioner developments: policy briefings; educational resources; museum tools created through joint practices; knowledge exchange events; stakeholder journals.

• Engagement activities: Schools events, permanent exhibition at the National Museum of Ethiopia
Humanities research in poultry farming?

- Historical information inserted into policy and practitioner briefings, and turned into usable data.
- There are mechanisms for new cultural productions, based on the research here performed and co-produced with local stakeholders.
New models for humanities research?

• These projects offer models for doing things differently – for embedding impact into the research design of the given project, but also using impact to feed back into the wider disciplinary context, and suggesting new forms of knowledge production within the humanities.
Questions arising?

• Many benefits to Humanities research from embedding impact – but also obstacles.
• The main being that researchers are used to doing things in a certain way and don’t like to change.
Impact of impact?

- What is the impact of impact in your higher education sectors and the disciplines you work in?
- Does it have the potential to change how the discipline works, and can the needs of the discipline change how we think about impact?