

Assessing the Impact of Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities: Perspectives from the UK

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Introduction

- ▶ Focus on impact of socio-economic sciences and humanities (SSH) from perspective of UK research councils
- ▶ Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)
- ▶ Parallel debates in US on 'relevance', and public engagement and outreach in Australia and New Zealand being recast as impact
- ▶ UK growing body of work on impact (of research grants; postgraduate research; corpus of work linked to impact case studies for the UK Research Excellence Framework, REF)

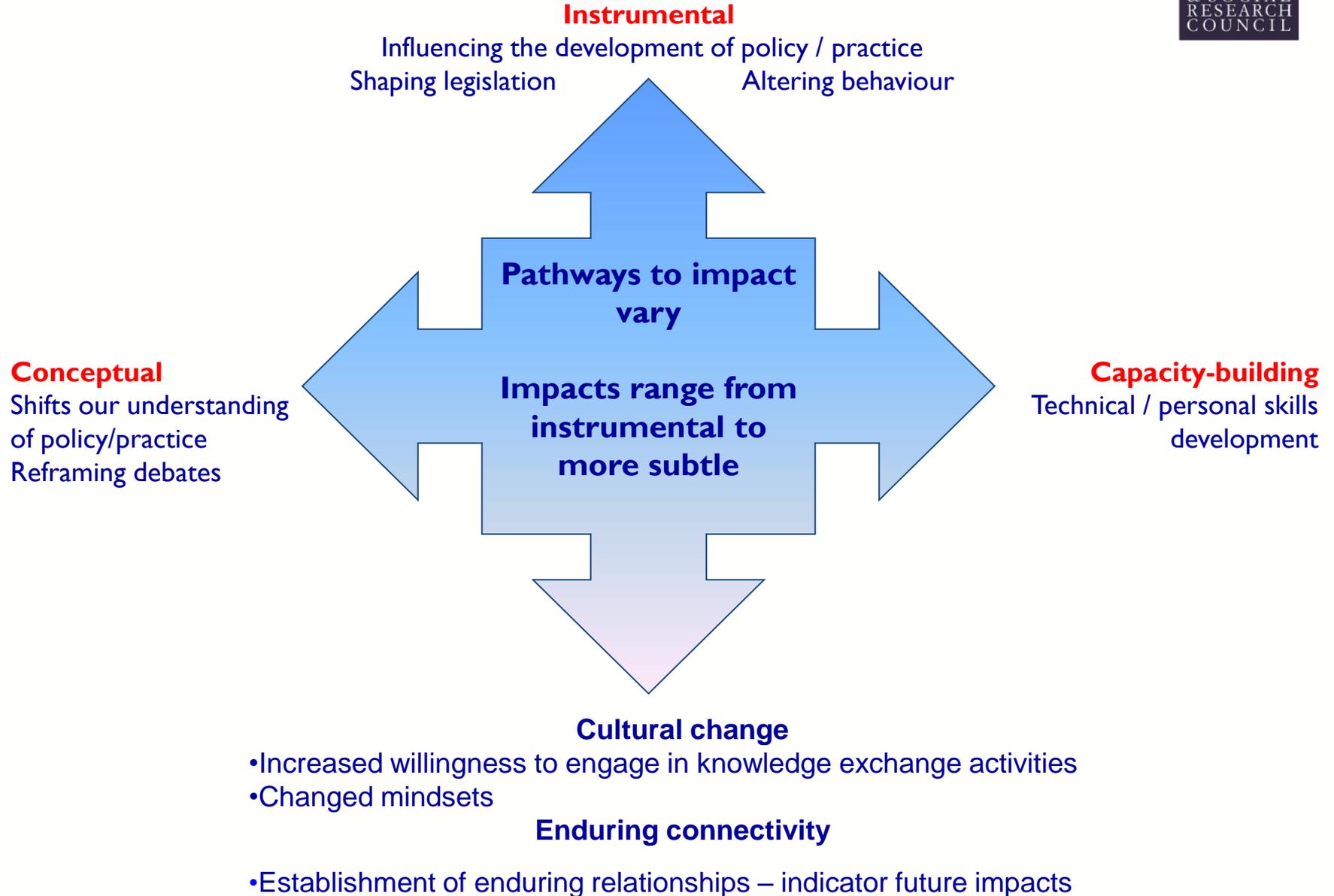
What is ESRC?

- ▶ **Quality:** Excellent research, transparent peer review
- ▶ **Impact:** ESRC Royal Charter mandates us to “advance knowledge... which meet[s] the needs of users and beneficiaries, thereby contributing to the economic competitiveness of Our United Kingdom, the effectiveness of public services and quality of life”
- ▶ For ESRC-funded research, scientific excellence and impact linked

What do we mean “impact”

“The demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy”

- ▶ Academic impact a taken PLUS (where appropriate)
- ▶ Economic and societal impact, which can be categorised as:
 - ▶ Instrumental
 - ▶ Conceptual and/or
 - ▶ Capacity building (Nutley et al, 2007)



Instrumental Impact Case Study

Influencing policy,
practice, legislation

Dr Teela Sanders, Leeds
University

Underpinning research
ESRC funded study,
largest to date of erotic
dancing industry in UK

- ▶ Sector hard to regulate
- ▶ Developed good practice procedures, worked with a number of local authorities
- ▶ Licensing, safety and working conditions
- ▶ Worked with stakeholders from regulatory and support services

Capacity Building Impact Case Study

- ▶ Professor Cathy Nutbrown, Sheffield University
- ▶ Specialist in early childhood education, family literacy
- ▶ In addition to academic impact, in 2013 recognised for Outstanding Impact on Society by ESRC

Capacity building amongst professionals

- ▶ Worked with 22 early-years practitioners in workshops to raise children's literacy achievements
- ▶ The 22 then shared their work with fellow practitioners, resulting in 300 practitioners getting involved, between them reaching 6,000 families

Conceptual Impact Case Study

- ▶ **Reframing poverty debate**
- ▶ MiSoC used longitudinal BHPS data to develop a better understanding of the factors influencing poverty.



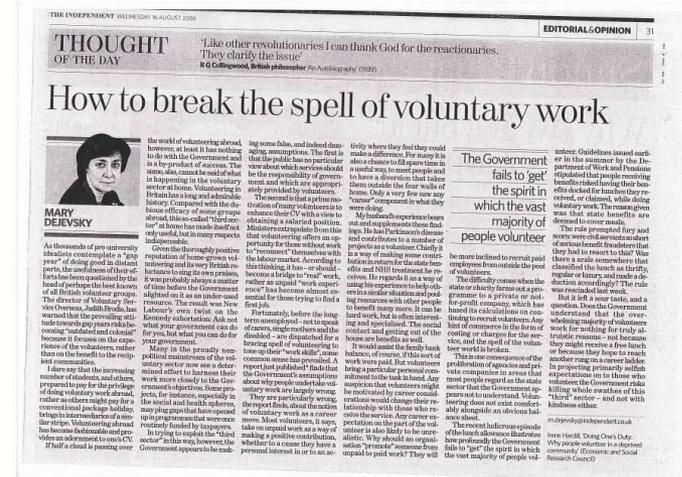
- ▶ Government aims to reduce poverty, but who is poor and why?
- ▶ Research uncovered that households move in and out of “poverty” ; there is much movement, great fluidity.
- ▶ Understanding this has changed how living standards are measured.
- ▶ Also uncovered the importance of secure jobs...

What Works

- ▶ 'Pathways' to Impact and Impact Toolkit
- ▶ Established relationships and networks with users
- ▶ Involvement of users at all stages of the research
- ▶ Well-planned user engagement and knowledge exchange strategies, using targeted and accessible formats
- ▶ Understanding of policy/ practice contexts and timescales
- ▶ Portfolios of research that build reputations with users
- ▶ Good management and infrastructural support
- ▶ The involvement of intermediaries and knowledge brokers as translators, amplifiers, network providers
- ▶ What Works national network of evidence centres

Impact case study – volunteering and community building

- ▶ Volunteering and employability
- ▶ Volunteering to make a difference in the community
- ▶ Findings used by fieldwork organisations; fed into guidance booklet for Disability Rights Commission; national launch of volunteering toolkit



Conclusion

- ▶ Impact multi-dimensional, scientific excellence is essential, as well as bringing about and evidencing wider impact on economy and society – where relevant
- ▶ UK research councils – quality, impact and independence – so impact can include delivering ‘uncomfortable’ messages!
- ▶ Impact as Odyssey (Conlon et al, 2014) Odysseus’s journey was long, but prudence and cunning reaped rewards...impact linked to astute judgment of research contexts in which academics and our partners are embedded

- ▶ For more information about Impact, Knowledge Exchange and ESRC
- ▶ please contact
- ▶ ESRCKnowledgeExchange@esrc.ac.uk

References

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