HDRUK
Health Data Research UK

Annual Outcome & Impact Assessment

Guidance for Researchers

Overview

Impact assessment is a complex topic, which tends to generate a lot of interest and pose some challenging questions. Whilst undertaking work on HDR UK's approach to impact and seeking feedback on HDR UK's first five years, a key message emerged from the HDR UK community with regard to research assessment: narratives supporting impact are crucial and provide much-needed nuance to complement quantitative assessments of impact such as those currently captured through ResearchFish and quarterly reporting.

HDR UK's Impact Committee comprised of Early Career Researchers from across roles, disciplines, and geographies are proudly leading HDR UK's transformational approach to impact assessment ensuring that the Institute captures, understands, communicates, and celebrates outcomes and impacts across its programmes. This approach is the outcome of collaborative co-design work carried out together with the Impact Committee and building on feedback from the HDR UK Board, the Senior Leadership Team, the Professional Leaders Group, the Science and Infrastructure Integration Group, a community representative working group, and more. In alignment with the initial decisions put forward for REF2028, the Impact Committee is committed to ensuring that:

- Impact is broad and holistic – and inclusive of the diversity of impacts beyond 'improved health' such as enabling infrastructure, thought leadership, and more

- Impact is decoupled from researchers – with a focus on team science and the many roles (both academic and beyond) that enable impact

- Research culture is captured and counted

In practice, this approach expects that programmes across the Institute prepare impact case studies for peer review each year. This process of assessing the outcome and impact of research at HDR UK provides accountability to the board and core funders, whilst strategically ensuring sustainability, inclusivity, and efficiency. What's more, the approach has been designed with benefits for the research community in-mind, including for example:

- Visibility to the Board and Core Funders – including deposition of all completed case studies in the MRC Case Study Databank.
- Automatic consideration for the Susannah Boddie Award for Impact of the Year and the HDR UK Team of the Year Award.
- Ease of reuse of impact narratives in websites, grant applications, CVs, and award applications
- Preparation, and practice for, other assessments such as REF2029 – particularly capturing and reporting of research culture.
- Support and training opportunities for all team members on impact and writing case studies

The guidance for researchers herein provides a summary of impact at HDR UK, an overview of the submission process with key dates, practical tips for writing an HDR UK Impact Case Study, and further supporting resources.

Impact at HDR UK

In late 2022, with buy-in from the community, HDR UK co-produced an [Institute-wide definition of impact and supporting framework](#). This framework brings together the broad range of activities through which HDR UK achieves its mission and is intended to guide the HDR UK community in identifying the potential outcomes and impacts of their work over the next five years.

Impact at HDR UK is defined as:

> *Evidence of better health research through the use of better data infrastructure with demonstrable positive effects on: health data science methods and technology; public trust; health and well-being; decision-making; and research culture and capacity.*

This definition is intended to cover HDR UK's potential impacts across time and programmes. Due to the long-term nature of delivering impactful change to people's lives (generally 10 to 20 years), it is likely this definition will be used in the short-term to measure our progress towards the potential of impact.

In line with HDR UK's ambitions to redesign research assessment, the framework captures the value of team science in producing impact – and the culture that enables this. Of note, the framework is not meant to constrain impacts and programmes may make impacts across several areas.

The Impact Framework aligns with HDR UK's strategic approach:

Impact area	Impact
Advancing methods and technology	• Provision of, improvement to, or extension of resources/services/infrastructure to enable research and innovation – such as faster and safer data access, widely adopted and fit for purpose standards, specifically curated data, software tools, etc. • Gains in productivity realised as a result of research/infrastructure-led changes in practice such as: easier access to data, improved analytic functionalities or coordinated activities • Facilitation of cross-sector partnerships and research networks

	• Innovative academic industry partnerships creating new activity (or relationship capital)
Forming public trust	• Involvement of patient and public advisors in research, decision-making and policy • Building patient and public trust in HDR UK and health data research • Improvements in legal frameworks, the regulatory environment or governance of health data • Better public understanding of the benefits of health data research
Improving health and well-being	• Translation of research and discoveries into interventions in health or social care • Reduction in death and disease • Improvement in people's quality of life • Responsiveness to emerging health needs • Reduction in health disparities and health data poverty
Informing decision making	• Thought leadership – for example, documented reports on behalf of the community • Influence of research evidence on policy debate and policy decisions - for example, citation in policy documents • Influence of research evidence on legislation, regulations or guidelines - including changes to clinical practice guidelines or information governance regulations • Research/infrastructure-led changes in practice that change health or social care, the patient experience, costs of treatment, etc.
Improving research culture and capacity	• Creation of a more positive culture including team science, open science, and support for all research outputs (including protocols, green papers, etc.) • Promotion of equality, diversity, and inclusion • Sharing networks for knowledge, skills, data, tools • Training and education across all career stages • Leveraged funding and onward mobility that drives sustainability (or human capital)

Writing an Impact Case Study

As part of HDR UK's updated approach to impact assessment, descriptions of impact are captured annually in case studies authored in a prescribed template. Each case study includes information about: the research underpinning the impact, the impact itself, the role of HDR UK, and the contributions to open science, knowledge exchange, and research culture.

Where a programme has yet to generate impact, we welcome demonstration of pathways to impact (ie 'potential impacts' or 'outcomes') using the same case study template. In this case, it must be made explicit that the impact is 'potential' as opposed to realised. Any risks or limitations to impact realisation should be outlined clearly.

The Case Study Template

All case studies submitted as part of the Impact Assessment must use the prescribed template. When drafting each section, it is advisable to consider the suggestions as outlined below to ensure the full picture of your impact is captured.

In general, case studies should be written using accessible language and avoid technical jargon. Use of acronyms and/or abbreviations should be defined and limited. Information should not be repeated in the case study.

We do not expect that case studies be unique and encourage you to draw on available text (or 'recycle'), where copyright allows. In each section, should the required information already be available elsewhere, please do not duplicate work. In these cases, please provide enough information for HDR UK to access and retrieve.

Title

- The title should express the impact of your work – rather than describe the work itself.
- Consider how your case study would be communicated as an accurate (not overinflated!) media headline how this would translate to as wide an audience as possible.

Summary of the Impact

- The summary should clearly and coherently describe the relationship between the research, the outcome or impact, and the nature of the benefits arising (whether potential or realised).
- Focus on 'added value' and 'benefit'.
- Clearly align the impact to the Impact Framework.

Underpinning Research

- Describe the research undertaken, including the timeframe.
- Demonstrate the quality and integrity of the research – including good practices such as those outlined in the HDR UK Good Research Practice Policy.
- Outline the key research insights, outputs, or findings that underpinned the outcome or impact.
- Include any details of public and patient involvement and engagement (PPIE) in the design of the study and any changes made as a result of these activities; HDR UK expects research to involve and engage patients/service users, carers and the public at each appropriate stage of the research life cycle.
- Include any details of diversity and inclusion embedded in the research design and methodology, for example to: reduce bias and exacerbation of health inequalities, understand/record/report potential limitations within the data, improve generalisability, etc.

Description of the Impact

- Provide a narrative, with supporting evidence (e.g. policy documents, news articles, etc), to explain the nature and extent of the impact (including how the research made a distinct contribution).
- Provide context so that the impact of the work can be gauged against a relative baseline.
- Be sure to describe the 'what, who, when and where'.
- Consider how this impact applies to/benefits diverse groups.
- Use relevant, meaningful, and contextualised indicators to support your case study; consider principles (and measures) developed by Forum for Responsible Research Metrics.
- Remember that indicators are not a substitute for a clear narrative.
- Consider the counterfactual: What happened that would not have occurred in the absence of this work? And/or how would it have happened differently?

Role of HDR UK

- Be clear about the role of HDR UK in your work and how HDR UK has contributed to the overall outcome or impact.; the extent of the HDR UK contribution should be well-defined and clearly demonstrate the value of HDR UK.
- Detail any integration(s) with other HDR UK programmes, activities, tools, and/or technology – and the differences these affected.
- HDR UK's role may range from pump-prime funding, direct support for an essential post, training provision, adoption of HDR UK-led outputs, through to matchmaking, and more.
- Consider the counterfactual: What happened that would not have occurred in the absence of HDR UK? And/or how would it have happened differently?

Contribution to Open Science and Knowledge Exchange

- Provide an evidence-based description of the wider contribution (or 'legacy') of the outcome or impact to health data research including details of open science practices and knowledge exchange; where open science and knowledge exchange, viewed holistically, refer to the wide dissemination of knowledge as soon as it is available by embracing and promoting practices that make research more open, collaborative, and responsive.
- Highlight any practices employed that are supporting reproducibility and reuse – such as (but not limited to) pre-registration, use of reporting guidelines, FAIR data, open-source software, registered reports, etc.
- Highlight any practices employed that are supporting knowledge exchange – such as (but not limited to) education, training, outreach, engagement, etc.
- Consider how open science and knowledge exchange benefitted delivery of the outcome or impact and/or will improve future initiatives.

Contribution to Research Culture

- Provide a description of how the programme/project/team behind this impact supports a healthy research culture and environment; where "research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes and norms of our research communities" (as initially defined by the Royal Society and adopted by UKRI).

- This description may include, but is not limited to, how the programme/project/team behind this impact champion the principles, as they apply, of:

  o The Declaration on Research Assessment

  o Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment: COARA

  o Technician Commitment

  o Concordat to Support Research Integrity

  o Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers

- Highlight efforts, within or beyond the immediate programme/project/team, toward: creating a collegiate research environment; personal development, reward and recognition; responsible research and innovation; and equality diversity and inclusion in research.

- Where opportunities to improve research culture are limited by your role, location, and/or other factors, please make a brief mention such that this can be taken into account and more fairly assessed.

- Consider how a healthy research culture benefitted delivery of impact and/or will improve future initiatives.

Case Study Examples

HDR UK Case Studies- A sample of case studies from HDR UK researchers and featured on the HDR UK website.

UK REF Case Studies – This database more than 6,000 impact case studies collected as part of the most recent REF. You can use the search function or filter by Unit of Assessment to find case studies in areas similar to your own.

Timeline

DATE	ACTIVITY
UNTIL 12 MARCH	Draft case study template and guidance available for review
21 MARCH	Case study template and accompanying guidance available on website
MID APRIL	Case study template and guidance circulated to all programme leads
MID APRIL- 24 JUNE	Case study submission window; various support activities
24 JUNE	Deadline for all case studies to be returned to HDR UK

Further Information and Support

HDR UK are committed to supporting the community throughout this process via webinars and drop in sessions.

DATE	EVENT	
27 MARCH	An Introduction to Impact at HDR UK	Register
23 APRIL	Tips for Writing an HDR UK Impact Case Study	Register
10 MAY	Writing an HDR UK Impact Case Study: Drop-in	*No registration required*
20 JUNE	Writing an HDR UK Impact Case Study: Drop-in	*No registration required*

Should you have any immediate questions, please see the FAQs and/or contact impact@hdruk.ac.uk.

This guidance and case study template benefits from, acknowledges, and builds on impact assessment work including: The Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, UCD Research Impact Toolkit, The Hidden Ref, and The Research Excellence Framework.