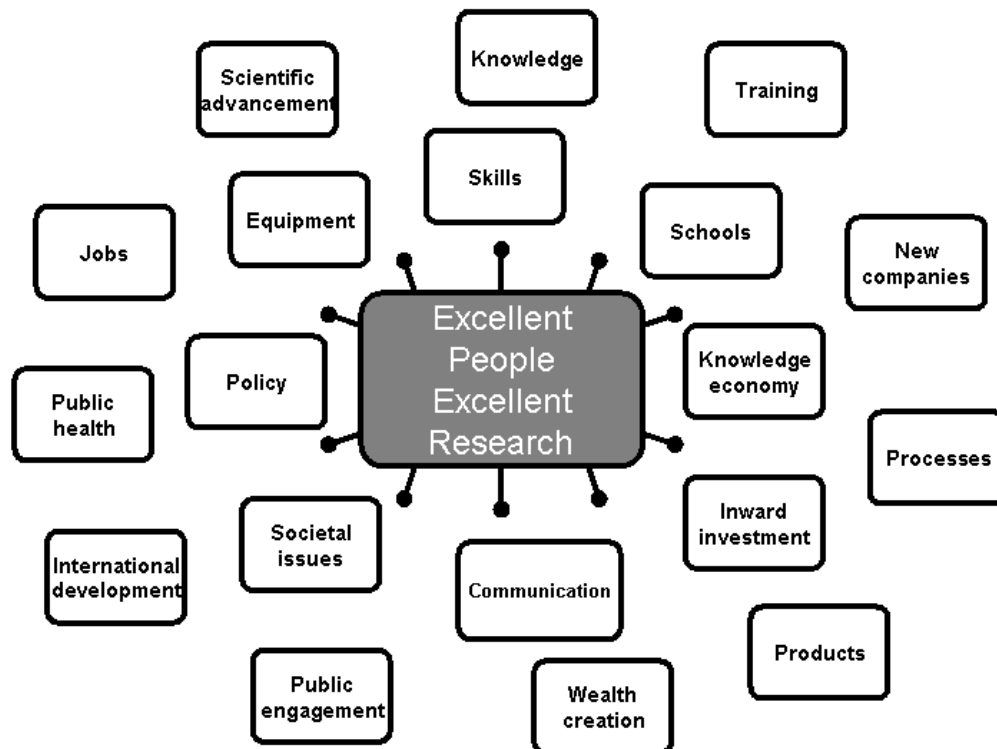


## NERC Pathways to Impact – FAQs

### Introduction

#### 1) What do you mean by ‘Impact’?

All research has an impact. There are numerous different ways in which research achieves impact.



In considering what constitutes impact, RCUK (Research Councils UK) has provided a broad definition that includes environmental, social and economic aspects:

“Academic impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding methods, theory and application.

Economic and societal impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy. Economic and societal impacts embrace all the extremely diverse ways in which research-related knowledge and skills benefit individuals, organisations and nations by:

- fostering global economic performance, and specifically the economic competitiveness of the UK
- increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy, and

- enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.”

As you are thinking about your project, key questions to be asking yourself are:

- What will change as a result of answering the questions that my project is posing and who might be interested in this?
- What difference would the outcomes of my project make, and to whom?
- Who might benefit from my research and how might my research benefit from their involvement?
- How could I involve the potential beneficiaries in my project?
- What areas of science could be advanced as a result of my project?
- What could be done differently?

2) Does this focus on impact and benefits imply a shift away from blue-skies to applied research?

No, the aim is not to change the type of research you undertake, but to encourage you to think about the potential impacts of your research from the outset and the resources required to carry out the necessary knowledge exchange/impact activities from the outset. The Research Councils Royal Charter has, since 1994, included a requirement for knowledge transfer and value for money – this is not a recent change of mission.

NERC recognises that blue-skies research is essential in underpinning future academic advancements and it will continue to fund high quality blue-skies research. Research excellence remains the primary criterion for making decisions on funding.

3) Will there be any follow-up on Pathways to Impact?

Reporting the outputs of grants is a key process in all councils and assessment of the impact of grants will be part of this process. NERC may follow up on the impact of the science supported by any of its awards and is in the process of reviewing how impact information can best be captured through JeS and OPMs.

**Application**

4) Which funding schemes will be affected?

**All** funding schemes will require all proposals to include Pathways to Impact.

5) What is the format for the Pathways to Impact?

The Pathways to Impact should be up to 2 pages of A4 (text size and font requirements as for the science proposal).

6) What information should the Pathways to Impact contain?

The Pathways to Impact should primarily detail the activities which will help develop potential economic and societal impacts. In writing your Pathways to Impact you should aim to address the following question: “What will be done to ensure that potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to engage with this research?”

Plans for engaging with academic audiences may be included in the Pathways to Impact, but **only** where these form part of the critical pathway towards economic and societal impact. This pathway must be clearly articulated.

Information on who might benefit from this research and how they might benefit from it should be provided in the Impact Summary section.

See [Je-S Help](#), [RCUK guidance](#) and [NERC guidance](#) for further information.

7) Will there be any changes to the JeS proforma?

The beneficiaries section of the JeS proforma has been replaced with 'Impact Summary' and 'Academic Beneficiaries'.

8) I notice on the JeS form that there is a 4000 character Impact Summary: how does this differ from Pathways to Impact?

The Impact Summary should cover potential economic and societal impacts and pathways towards addressing these impacts. In writing the summary, you should try to answer the following questions: who might benefit from the research and how might they benefit from it? As well as considering those end-users who will benefit from a greater involvement in the project, you should also think about those who may have some interest, but who don't need to engage fully, for example users who may want to hear the outcomes at the end of the grant.

Note: The Impact Summary may be published to demonstrate potential impacts of Research Council funded research. Please ensure confidential information is not included in this section.

9) Where do I write about Academic Impact?

Unless the academic impact of your proposal forms a crucial part of the route to economic and societal impact, you should write about academic impact in the Academic Beneficiaries section of the JeS form.

10) How do I submit my Pathways to Impact?

Pathways to Impact replaces the current Impact Plan and should be submitted as an attachment in the JeS system.

11) When will these changes take place?

These changes will be apparent in JeS from 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010. All research grant proposals submitted will require the inclusion of Pathways to Impact.

12) What happens if I submit a grant proposal without Pathways to Impact?

All research proposals must include Pathways to Impact and you will not be able to complete the JeS submission process if you have not attached your Pathways to Impact.

## **Costs**

13) How should the costs relating to Pathways to Impact be identified on the application form?

Details of these costs (including relevant staff costs) should be provided in the financial resources section of the JeS proforma (under the standard FEC headings) and should also be clearly identified in the Pathways to Impact document itself.

14) How much can I apply for in relation to my Pathways to Impact?

At present there is no maximum limit to the cost of activities defined by Pathways to Impact as theoretically all costs are eligible under FEC. However, all impact activity costs must be reasonable and must be identified in the “Justification of Resources” section of your application.

15) What about partner contributions to activities in my Pathways to Impact?

Details of partner contributions to the costs of impact activities may be included in Pathways to Impact or in a letter of support. They should not be included in the contribution requested from NERC.

16) Can staff be recruited specifically to carry out activities described within Pathways to Impact?

Yes, but employing staff who are already involved in the research proposal may allow the impact activities to be better informed and more embedded in the research process.

### **Impact Activities**

17) What activities are eligible for inclusion in Pathways to Impact?

Numerous activities are eligible, but key to their success is the involvement of end-users, preferably as early on in the development of the proposal as possible. Examples of activities include (but are not restricted to): open access data management, workshops involving both researchers and end-users, engaging with the public through public lectures, building networks, exploiting results wherever possible / appropriate, training users in new skills, developing new technologies / methodologies, etc.

More information and ideas can be found on the following webpages:

NERC Knowledge Exchange:

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/using/introduction/>, <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/using/casestudies/>

Science Impacts Database:

<http://sid.nerc.ac.uk/>

NERC Pathways to Impact (guidance for applicants):

<http://www.nerc.ac.uk/funding/application/documents/guidance.pdf>

RCUK Typology of Impacts

<http://impacts.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/impacts/TypologyofResearchImpacts.pdf>

18) I have an idea of what the impact of my research will be: is it sufficient to describe just this in my Pathways to Impact?

No, you will need to describe what you are going to do to ensure that potential beneficiaries have the opportunity to engage with your research. You may find it useful to discuss this with any end-users already involved in your project.

More information and ideas can be found on the webpages listed under FAQ 17.

19) I publish papers and go to conferences: can I include this in my Pathways to Impact?

The dissemination of results is a key activity in ensuring your research has an impact. However, unless these activities form clear steps in the pathway to economic and societal impact, they should be discussed in the Academic Beneficiaries section.

20) Are international impacts allowed in Pathways to Impact?

Many impacts are international in nature; there is no specific requirement for impacts to be UK only.

21) My research is relevant to policymakers, but how do I engage with them?

Approximately every six months NERC organises science-policy training workshops, usually with a partner organisation, which you may be able to participate in. For more information see <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/using/publicsector/sciencetopolicy.asp>. Alternatively, NERC has published a booklet entitled 'Science into policy' which describes various ways in which scientists can influence policy: an online version is available at <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/publications/corporate/policy.asp>.

## **Peer Review**

22) How will my Pathways to Impact be assessed?

Pathways to Impact will be included with grant proposals in the normal review process according to the relevant scheme.

23) What will my Pathways to Impact be scored?

The assessment scale for Pathways to Impact has been changed to provide greater clarity to applicants and reviewers alike. Scores are now from 0-6, where 0 is 'Non-Scoring' (representing those proposals where no Pathways to Impact have been written and where the reviewer / panel feels that this is properly justified) to 6, which is 'Outstanding'. Full details of this new scoring system are provided in Annex I of this FAQ document.

24) Will the grade awarded to my Pathways to Impact count towards the final assessment of my grant proposal?

Yes, Pathways to Impact will be considered as a secondary criterion.

25) What will happen if my science proposal receives a high grading but my Pathways to Impact do not?

If your science proposal is in the funding frame, the grade of your Pathways to Impact will be used as a secondary criterion. Secondary criteria are used to help assign a final ranking to science proposals. They are important in determining which proposals finally go forward for funding: poor Pathways to Impact will affect where in the final ranking your science proposal falls, which will in turn affect the likelihood of your science proposal being funded. In addition, requests for funds associated with impact activities, which are deemed inappropriate or which are not fully justified are likely to be rejected.

Only Pathways to Impact that are linked to proposals recommended for funding will be potentially eligible for financial support. Where Pathways to Impact receive a low

grade, NERC reserves the right not to release research funding until revised Pathways to Impact have been accepted: low scoring pathways are deemed unacceptable. In such circumstances, feedback on low scoring pathways will be provided and the applicant will be able to discuss how to improve the Pathways to Impact so that they are of sufficient standard.

26) What will happen if my Pathways to Impact receive a high grading but my science proposal does not?

If the science proposal is outside the funding frame, activities in Pathways to Impact will not be funded, irrespective of the grading. The aim of the impact activities is to complement and advance the science in the proposal. It is therefore not appropriate to support Pathways to Impact as stand-alone activities

27) My proposal is very much of a novel, speculative nature and I'm really not sure what or who the benefits / users will be: will I be penalised for this?

NERC acknowledges that research proposals of this type are less likely to be able to identify lots of benefits or users at the outset and that they may therefore be limited to academic impact activities only. If having reviewed the NERC / RCUK guidance (see FAQ 17 for information), you feel that it's not possible to link your research to activities aimed at enhancing economic and societal impact, you should use your Pathways to Impact to explain why this is so. Your Pathways to Impact will then be reviewed with the rest of your proposal.

## Annex I

### Scoring System for Pathways to Impact

Based on the reviewer scores and comments as well as the PI response, moderating panels are asked to assign a final grade of between 0-6 to each proposal for Pathways to Impact using the definitions provided below.

Score	Pathways to Impact (Secondary Criterion)
6	<p><b>Outstanding</b> - Strong and potentially effective Pathways to Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All appropriate end-users have been identified and are actively engaged in the project.</li><li>• End-users have been involved in the proposal development from its inception (e.g. in setting project objectives) and this involvement is clearly demonstrated in the Pathways to Impact.</li><li>• A clear understanding of the needs of the end-user community is demonstrated; potential end-user benefits are comprehensively identified, with the research likely to be answering a particular end-user need.</li><li>• Letters of support go beyond the norm and provide real evidence of end-user interest, support and potential end-user benefit (e.g. providing details of end-user objectives that the proposal hopes to meet, etc).</li><li>• Activities proposed are appropriate to the research, use both routine and novel ways of engaging end-users and are likely to generate very significant potential for impact. Management of these activities has been well thought out in terms of timing, personnel, finance, etc, and the ability to deliver them is clearly evident.</li></ul>
5	<p><b>Excellent</b> - Robust Pathways to Impact with minor weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Most appropriate end-users have been identified and are actively engaged in the project.</li><li>• End-users have been involved in the proposal development, but possibly not from its inception. This involvement is clearly demonstrated in the Pathways to Impact.</li><li>• A clear understanding of the needs of the end-user community is demonstrated, but this may not have been translated into a comprehensive identification of potential end-user benefits. However, regardless of which end-user needs have been identified, the research will likely go a significant way to answering them.</li><li>• Letters of support go beyond the norm and provide real evidence of end-user interest. End-user support is more limited, but there is still clear evidence of how the proposed work will benefit the end-user.</li><li>• Activities proposed are appropriate to the research, use both routine and novel ways of engaging end-users and are likely to generate significant potential for impact. Management of these activities has not been thought through quite as well as it might have been, but this should not pose a risk to the ability of the proposers to deliver these activities.</li></ul>

4	<p><b>Very Good</b> - Appropriate Pathways to Impact with minor weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some appropriate end-users have been identified and are engaged in the project.</li> <li>• End-users have been involved in the proposal development, but perhaps only in the latter stages. This involvement is clearly demonstrated in the Pathways to Impact.</li> <li>• An understanding of the needs of the end-user community is demonstrated, but it is not fully developed. Some potential end-user benefits have been identified and the research will likely go some way to answering a particular end-user need.</li> <li>• Letters of support provide evidence of end-user interest and potential end-user benefits, but the connection between the proposed work and the end-user benefits may be unclear.</li> <li>• Activities proposed are appropriate to the research and use both routine and novel ways of engaging end-users. These activities are likely to generate reasonable potential for impact. However some appropriate activities may have been missed.</li> <li>• Whilst the management of activities has clearly been thought through, there is a minor risk that it will not be possible to deliver these activities in the appropriate time frame, or with the resources requested.</li> </ul>
3	<p><b>Good</b> - Satisfactory Pathways to Impact with evident weaknesses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some attempt has been made to identify likely beneficiaries, but they have not been engaged in the development of the proposal. The most appropriate end-users may have been missed.</li> <li>• End-users are involved in the Pathways to Impact, but only in a rather passive manner (e.g. attending workshops at the end of the proposed work, when there is little opportunity to feedback into the research process).</li> <li>• Only a modest understanding of the needs of the end-user community is demonstrated. Potential end-user benefits are identified, but it is not clear how the research will answer the particular end-user need.</li> <li>• Letters of support are of a standard format and although demonstrating general support for the proposal, don't go very far in outlining end-user interest or potential benefit.</li> <li>• Activities proposed are generally routine and unlikely to result in significant impact within the end-user community. Some attempt has been made to identify more novel forms of engagement, but the most appropriate activities may have been missed.</li> <li>• There is some evidence that management of the activities has been considered, but the detail provided is limited. It may not be clear who is going to carry out the activities or how much they are going to cost. The timing of the activities may not be optimal for achieving the greatest potential for impact.</li> </ul>
2	<p><b>Modest</b> - Weak Pathways to Impact with major flaws:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only a limited attempt has been made to identify likely beneficiaries and those that have been identified may have been approached as an</li> </ul>

	<p>‘after-thought’. The most appropriate end-users have been missed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Pathways to Impact may describe anticipated end-user involvement, but no engagement has actually taken place.</li> <li>• A limited understanding of the needs of the end-user community is demonstrated, but there is no clear idea of potential end-user benefits, or of how the research might answer the particular end-user need.</li> <li>• Letters of support are of a standard format and although demonstrating general support for the proposal, do not go very far in outlining end-user interest or potential benefit.</li> <li>• Activities are limited and may be inappropriate to the proposed work. They are unlikely to result in any real impact within the end-user community.</li> <li>• Management of the activities has only been loosely considered and there is no detail concerning who is going to carry out the activities or how much they are going to cost, etc. Resources requested may not be adequate and the timing of the activities will likely do little to enhance the potential for impact.</li> </ul>
<p><b>1</b></p>	<p><b>Poor</b> - Only minor aspects of impact have been demonstrated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no attempt has been made to go beyond routine impact activities where non-routine activities would clearly be possible. Any activities or users that have been identified are not appropriate to the research described in the proposal.</li> <li>• Little or no attempt has been made to identify likely beneficiaries, even though there is an end-user community with an interest in the proposed work. End-users that have been identified may be inappropriate to the proposed work.</li> <li>• The Pathways to Impact make little attempt to describe any end-user involvement and there has been no prior engagement with end-users.</li> <li>• There is little or no understanding of the needs of the end-user community. Any end-user benefits that are described are likely to be unrelated.</li> <li>• Letters of support are absent.</li> <li>• Any activities that have been proposed are not particularly relevant to the proposed work and will not result in any impact within the end-user community.</li> <li>• Management of the activities has not been considered sufficiently and little or no information is provided as to how the activities will be managed.</li> </ul> <p>- No Pathways to Impact have been described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Either there is no justification, or the justification given is not deemed adequate or appropriate.</li> </ul>
<p><b>0</b></p>	<p><b>Non-Scoring</b> - No Pathways to Impact have been described:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full justification has been given and the justification is considered appropriate given the nature of the research.</li> </ul>