

# Changing the game of UK research

## The quest for non-academic impact

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## Today's session

- About me
- The context
- The issues
- Action



# Definitions (non-academic impact)



Impact is defined as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia



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 (UK competitiveness)
- increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy,
- enhancing quality of life, health and creative output.

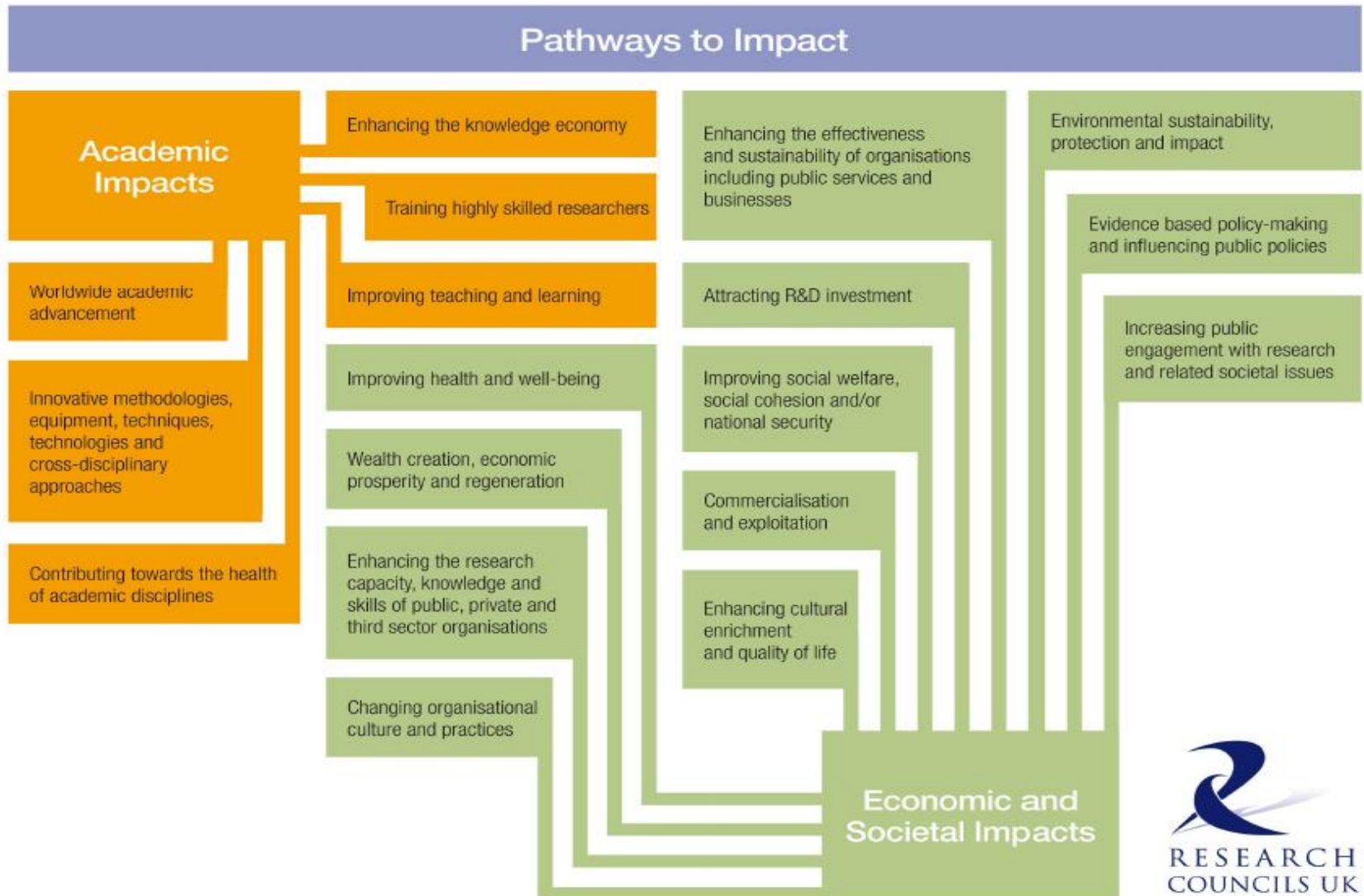
# Economics and Social Sciences Research Council (ESRC)

**Instrumental:** influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour

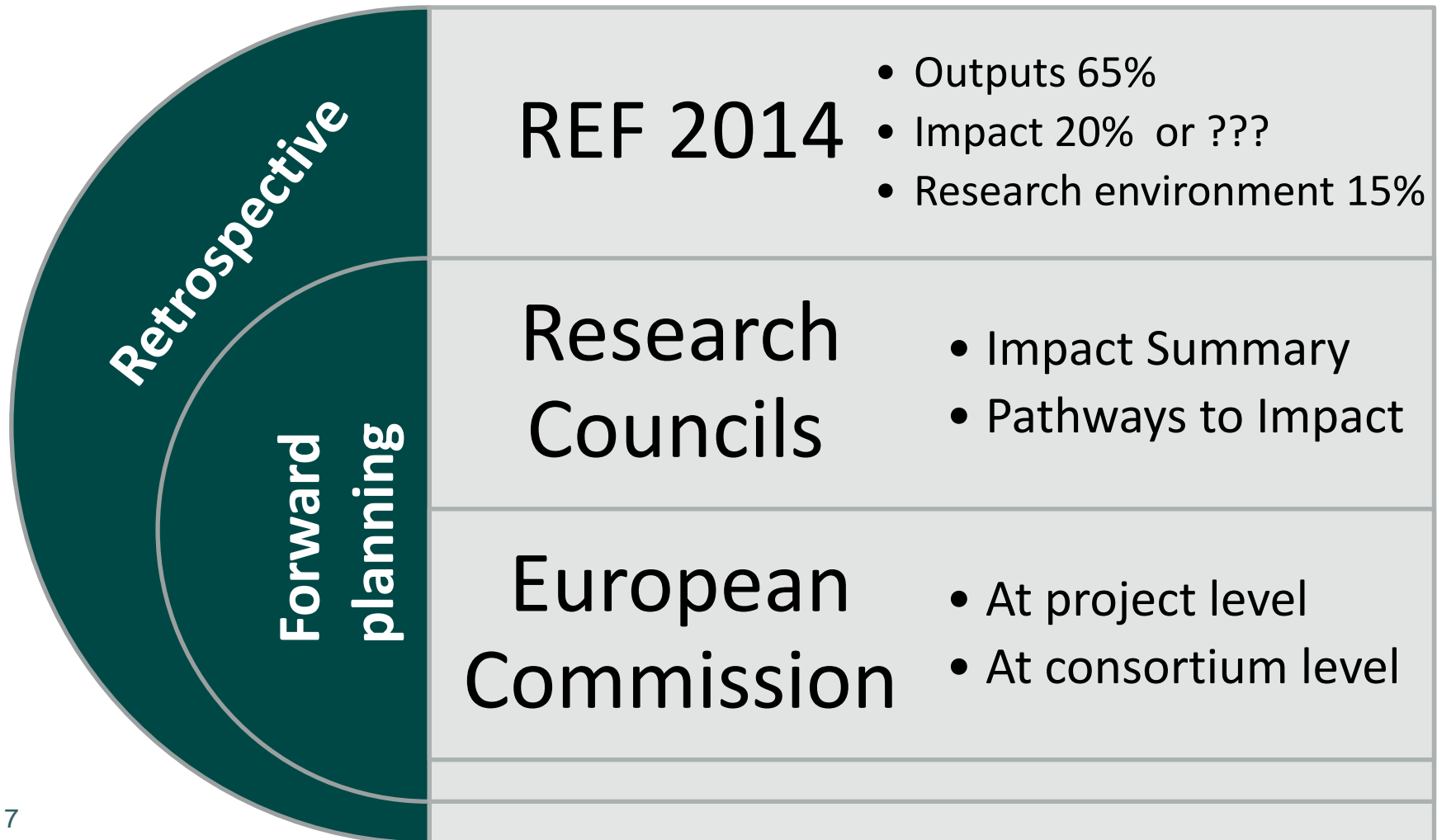
**Conceptual:** contributing to the understanding of policy issues, reframing debates

**Capacity building:** through technical and personal skill development.

# RCUK – Pathways to Impact



# Impact as a funding criterion





## Examples of impact

### Impacts on health and welfare

Outcomes for patients have improved

Disease prevention has been enhanced

Care practice has changed

Clinical/dietary/healthcare guidelines have changed

Public awareness of a risk/benefit has been raised

The costs of treatment or healthcare have changed as a result of research-led changes in practice.

### Impact on public policy and services

Policy debate has been stimulated or moved forward by research evidence.

Policy decisions or changes to legislation, regulations or guidelines have been informed by research evidence.

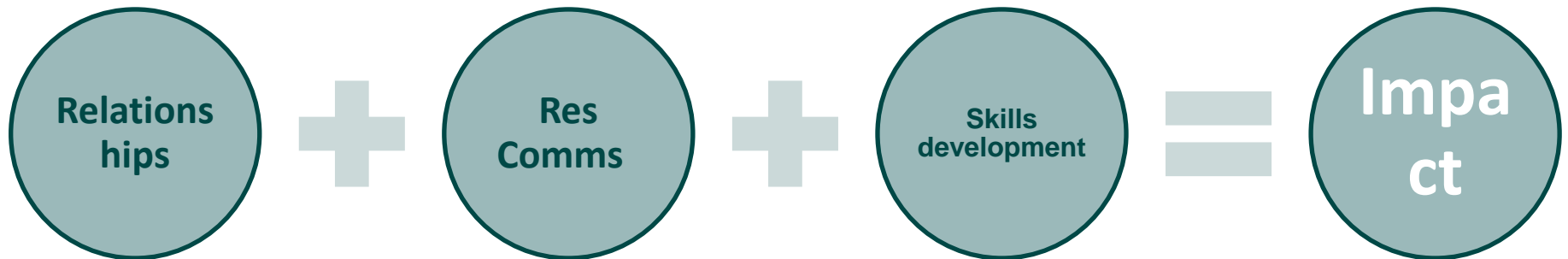
The implementation of a policy (for example, health, environment or agricultural policy) or the delivery of a public service has changed.



# How we understand impact

Core messages:

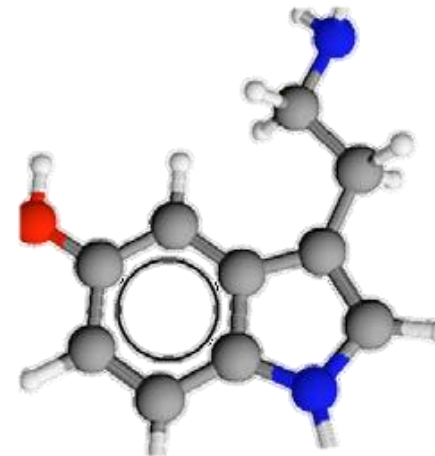
- Engaging with **non-academic** research users (relationships)
- **Maximising** the impact of research (research communications)
- **Training** highly-skilled people (capacity-building)



# Examples from the University of Sussex

# Pioneering new Drug Treatments for Obesity

- Obesity rates are soaring worldwide presenting an escalating healthcare burden with huge socioeconomic cost
- Pete Clifton (Professor of Psychology) collaboratively investigated the role of serotonin 2C receptor in modulating appetite
- This provided the scientific rationale for developing a new generation of anti-obesity drugs
- As a result, Lorcaserin, the first in its class of new serotonin 2C receptor agonists, was launched in the US in June 2013



# Virtual museums – Engaging with our Cultural Heritage through Digital Media

- Research at Sussex has enabled the development of interactive ‘virtual museums’, creating an **immersive**, dynamic experience of historic sites, monuments and artefacts
- The research has global reach as it allows members of the public to engage with their cultural heritage
- Dr Martin White (Reader, Computer Science) explored several novel ways of developing intelligent, dynamic, self-aware and adaptive digital interfaces that allow the public to engage with museum’s digital objects and relate them to their cultural context.



# Boosting poor households' incomes through temporary worker schemes in the Pacific

- Thousands of poor rural workers from 11 island states in the Pacific have benefited from the findings of research programmes led by Alan Winters (Professor of Economics)
- New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employers Scheme (RSE), which welcomes workers from poor Pacific Islands for the agricultural season, is a direct outcome of his research
- Winters was also instrumental in designing and implementing the RSE in a way that permitted formal evaluation and which has become an exemplar of good practice
- Evaluations show that households in Vanuatu and Tonga benefitting from the scheme have experienced average increases in income of 35–40 per cent

## Why is impact difficult?

- Impact is not a tangible output
- It takes a long time for impact to be achieved
- Pathways to impact are more obvious in some disciplines
- Connecting research to specific impacts is not a straightforward process (attribution)
- The nature of impact may change over time
- What might have happened anyway?
- Capturing and measuring impact
- Evidence gathering

- The need to determine the added-value and to develop the outcomes
- How (at project and institutional level)
- Barriers
  - Research lacks built-in mechanisms for capturing impact
  - Lack of understanding of what to capture: focus on activity
  - Time and resources
  - Adding to admin burden
- Metrics: Bibliometrics, scientometrics, altmetrics (no agreed metrics, HEFCE consultation)
- Impact indicators



# Evidence of impact (from REF 2014)

**Testimony** of experts or users who can attest to the reach and/or significance of impact.

Third-party **evidence of changed policies, practices, processes, strategies.**

Professional **evaluations** of exhibitions, performances or other outputs.

Information about the number and profile of people engaged and types of audience.  
Follow-up activities or media coverage.

**Evidence of sales**, downloads of linked resources or access to web content.

**Acknowledgements** in annual reports or other publications of NGOs, charities and other civil society organisations.

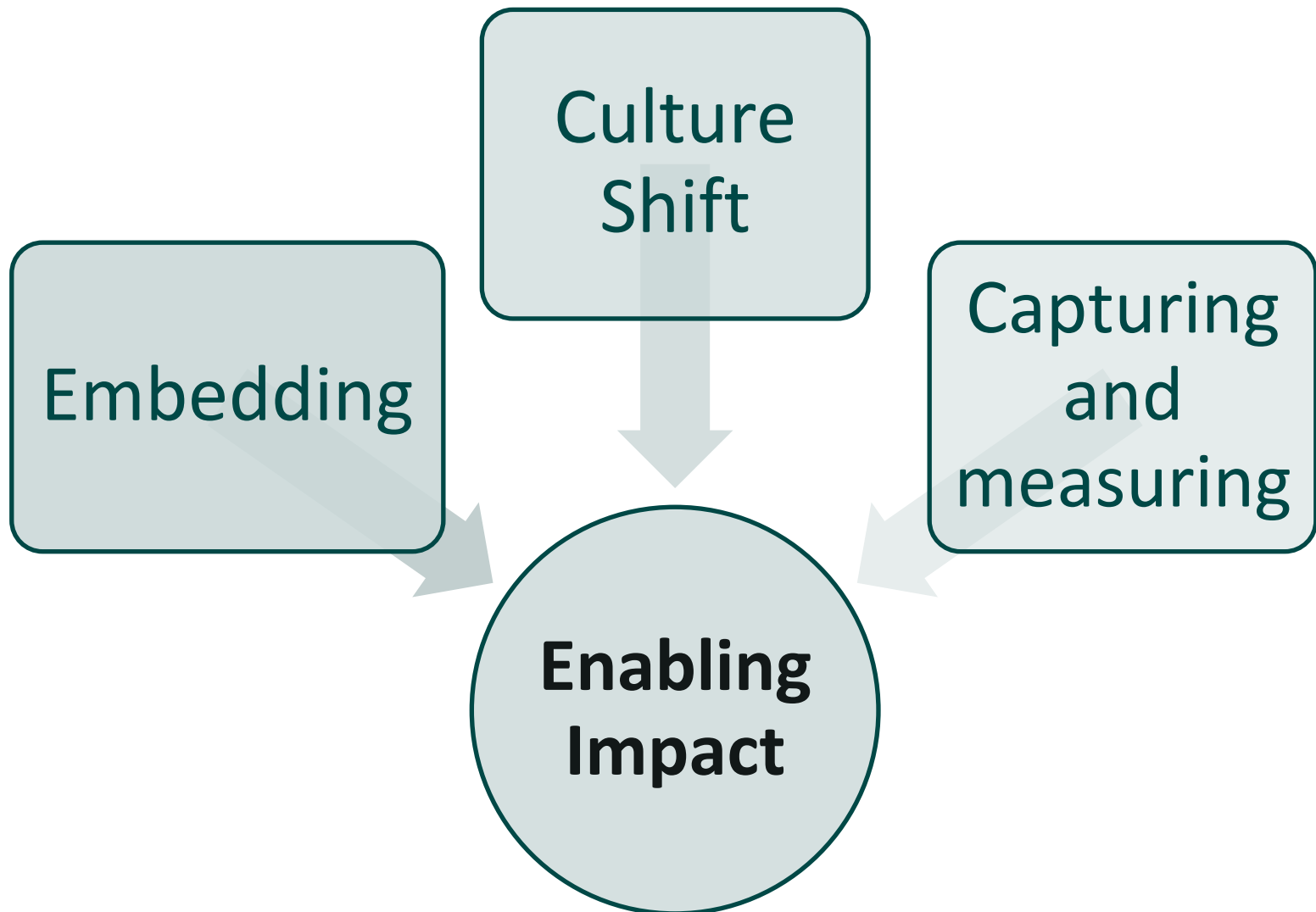
**Formal partnership agreements** or research collaboration with major institutions, NGOs and public bodies. Consultancies to public or other bodies that utilise research expertise.

**Evidence of engagement with campaign and pressure groups** and other civil organisations (including membership and activities of those organisations and campaigns) as a result of research.

## Other concerns

- Undermining Social Sciences and the Humanities
- Applied research privileged over 'blue skies' research
- Infringement of academic freedom (commercialisation)
- None/limited recognition
- Who owns impact: academics? The central professional services?
- Lack of skills to achieve impact
- Impact at individual vs. Group level
- What about research with 'no impact'?
- <sup>17</sup>Two-way engagement

## Changing the game of academic research



## Action!

- Establishing formal and informal networks
- Training (toolkit, workshops)
- Develop impact roles along with our understanding about impact
- Make the most of schemes at an institutional level
- Benefit from international perspective
- Treat impact as part of the research life-cycle

- Set impact objectives
- Design research for user relevance/involvement
- Understand the context
- Engage with end users from the outset
- Package and communicate research results
- Excellent infrastructure, management, support
- Monitor and Evaluate

**Last slide!**

**THANK YOU**

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