ASSESSMENT OF SOCIETAL IMPACT – VR CONNECTIONS

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The concept of societal impact of research - delimitations

- ”Impact beyond academia” rather than ”impact within academia” (e.g,, citations)
- ”Impact” not the same as *co-operation and partnerships* with partners outside academia – although impact normally presupposes co-operation
- ”Impact” not the same as *communication and outreach* - although impact normally presupposes outreach activities
- ”Impact” not the same as *relevance* (an *ex-ante* judgment)

VR definition of the concept of societal impact of research

- VR definition: *”effects of research beyond academia which in some contexts and over time could amount to concrete influence on society by the application of research results to achieve social, economic, environmental or cultural effects.”*
- Impact assessment not a part of the daily evaluation agenda at VR (neither *ex-ante* nor *ex-post*)
- Growing interest for impact assessment
  - on European level
  - on national political level
  - at VR and other public research funding bodies
  - at local universities and university colleges
- A number of proposals and initiatives on impact assessment from VR in recent years
- Pilot study in the HS area – Criminology 2012

Recent VR proposals including impact assessment

- **VR FOKUS proposal 2014**: A model for allocating resources to universities and university colleges involving peer review of research quality and societal relevance, enabling resource allocation such that quality and performance are rewarded (not adopted by Swedish government)

- **VR ALF proposal 2013**: A proposal for evaluation of ALF-funded clinical research presented by the Swedish Research Council to the Government, September 2013 (adopted/decided, and now being prepared with the first evaluation planned for 2017/2018)

  (ALF is a Swedish acronym for an agreement between the state and regions on the funding of medical training and clinical research)

FOKUS proposal in a nutshell

FOKUS – Research evaluation in Sweden

Purpose: To improve the quality of research and ensure that high quality research is of benefit to society

Background information (not to be graded)	70 % Scientific quality	15 % Quality enhancing factors	15 % Impact outside academia

All research to be evaluated in a cohesive manner every sixth year

ALF proposal in a nutshell (modified)

ALF – a model for peer review-based quality evaluation of ALF-financed clinical research in Sweden

50 % Scientific quality	25 % Clinical relevance and societal utility of the research	25 % Preconditions for (clinical) research

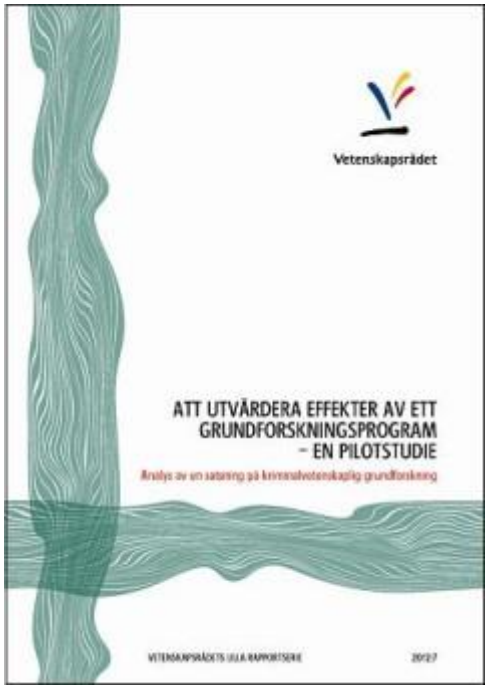
Proposed/preferred methods for impact assessment in VR:s proposals

- *Expert review* by panels of national and/or nordic experts with experience from societal use or application of research findings
- Material for expert assessments:

  - FOKUS: Case studies complemented by self-evaluations (”British model”)
  - ALF: Self-evaluations complemented by case studies (”Dutch model”)

- Quantitative indicators can be used but only as parts of the self-evaluations or/and case studies; and can vary between research fields
- Indicators should *not* directly inform resorce or funding allocation

Pilot study on impact of a research programme in the HS area - criminology



- https://publikationer.vr.se/produkt/att-utvardera-effekter-av-ett-grundforskningsprogram-en-pilotstudie/ (Swedish with English summary)

Pilot study on criminology – methodological conclusions

- Programme theory/Logic model (useful tool)
- Case study approach (successful)
- Tracking of references (possible but time-consuming; hardly cost-effective)
- *Up-stream approach* more successful than *down-stream apparoach* (start with the effect rather than the cause)

Some issues to consider in impact assessment

- Time-frames
- Attribution vs. contribution
- Positive effects vs. avoiding negative effects
- Unintended effects

COMPONENTS AND METHODS FOR SSH EVALUATION IN THE VR PERSPECTIVE – AN OVERVIEW

	Evaluation of scientific quality, e.g - Novelty & Originality - Significance for the field - Scientific reliability and methodological rigour	Evaluation of societal impact and relevance, e.g. - Reach - Significance
Peer review - Reading and assessment of actual scientific texts (samples)	A	N/A
Classification of journals and publishers	A	N/A
Citations and references	N/A	A?
Narratives/case studies	N/A	A
Quantitative indicators	N/A	N/A

VR Standpoint on the issue of societal impact of research – as expressed to Science Europe

There is a need to continue efforts to develop tools and methods that can demonstrate the value and impact research and innovation has in society. This is important in order to facilitate better informed research policy decisions, to gain and maintain trust from politicians to receive continued large funding but also to inform, gain and maintain trust from citizens. We recognize that this is not an easy task.

Our premise is that research does benefit society from the perspective of a knowledge economy. Assessing the relevance and societal benefit of research can then be done by means of an assessment of how it contributes to knowledge and skills development in society. We propose that the term "impact of research" be used to describe the effects of research beyond academia. Impact means, in a broad sense, effects of research beyond academia which in some contexts and over time could amount to concrete influence on society by the application of research results to achieve social, economic, environmental or cultural effects. Impact beyond academia thus refers to the dissemination, further refinement, commercialisation, patenting, licensing or other practical use of research results.

Methodological diversity is recommended for the proper assessment of the impact of research on society. Evaluation techniques and the availability of specific indicator sets should not drive assessments. Any indicators used as part of an assessment should be integrated into narratives, quantitative models, or both, that attempt to show causal links between the research and observable effects.

Sources of inspiration:

National systems in other countries

- UK: Research Execellence Framework (REF; 2014, 2020)
  - From 2014, impact is part of REF assessed by impact case studies
  - Determines 20 % of the resource allocation
  - Ca 6700 case studies 2014
  - Several meta-evaluations, positive

- NL: Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP)
  - *Societal relevance* equally important as *scientific quality* (50 %)
  - No connection to resource allocation
  - Methodological flexibility between research fields allowed

- AUS: Excellence for Research in Australia (ERA, every 3rd year)
  - So far, no impact assessment
  - Has determined a small part (4-7%) of the resorce allocation; now abolished
  - An impact component is now being developed for the next ERA as a consequence of political pressure and decisions
  - Several university-based pilot studies of impact – e.g.
    - Excellence in Innovation for Australia Trial 2012 (EIA; case studies)
    - Research Engagement for Australia Trial 2015 (REA; indicators/metrics showing industrial investments in university research)

Other international initiatives

- ”Payback Framework”, research-based framework originally developed in the UK to examine the ‘impact’ or ‘payback’ of health services research (Hanney, Donovan et. al)
- International and national networks:
  - AESIS (Network for Advancing & Evaluating the Societal Impact of Science) – biennial conferences (next conference Stockholm June 2017)
  - BIN (Broader Impacts Network) – formed at MU, USA, in 2012 in response to initiatives from the American NSF
  - ISRIA (International School of Research Impact Assessment) - an Initiative founded by the Catalonian Agency of Health Quality and Assessment (AQuAS), RAND Europe and the Canadian Alberta Innovates – Health Solutions (AIHS) in 2013