

Project Title	What is the impact of the UK's research impact agenda?
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Project Highlights:

- Exploring how UK University staff (academics and professionals) perceive and value open and engaged ways of working.
- Investigating how University staff (academics and professionals) are responding to the research impact agenda in strategic and operational terms.
- Identifying and assessing methodologies and methods used to support engagement between University staff (academics/professionals) and user communities, citizens, institutional actors, NGOs, representatives from economic or societal entities, and/or groups who pre-exist, come into existence or develop an identity in relationship to research.

Overview

This PhD will explore the changing landscape for publicly funded research in the UK. The PhD candidate will compare research conducted in different academic domains to address one or more of the following research questions:

- What value(s) are associated with excellence in monitoring progress in generating, and reporting evidence of, impact?
- How are UK-based university staff (academics and professional staff) working in different domains responding to the requirements to plan for, enact, evidence and report impacts derived from publicly funded research?
- To what extent does the peer review system that underpins planning for impact within applications for publicly funded research consistently identify and support excellence?

Much has been written over the past 12 years about the use of open and engaged practices to generate, evidence and assess the value of research impact (e.g. Reed, 2022 ; RCUK, 2010). In the main, this literature has focused on the theoretical and practical implications of engaging 'publics', representatives from economic or societal entities and end-users as a pathway to generating impacts from UK research (e.g. Holliman et al. 2022).

UKRI-sponsored research has explored physical science researchers' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities they faced in the course of balancing engagement activities alongside other aspects of their careers (e.g. Duncan et al. 2016), whilst related work has sought to increase our understanding of systems used to create, support, and evaluate high-quality engagement (Holliman et al. 2018). Less has been written about how professional staff in universities have supported (and been supported to) deliver high-quality research impact.

Strategically, the Open University has committed to “lead the way in creating an open research culture, supporting public engagement with our research and scholarship, and knowledge exchange with businesses and communities” (Open University, 2022), whilst practically, University staff have explored ethically informed and pragmatic approaches in support of holistic planning, management and evaluation of engaged research (Figure 1).



Figure 1: The engaged research design framework (Holliman et al. 2022).

Methodology

The PhD could take a number of forms. We are interested in research that investigates how University staff (academics and professionals) from different academic domains are responding to the research impact agenda, therefore we are not proposing specific methodologies and methods in advance.

However, the research is likely to be informed by triangulation through mixed methods (e.g. Khalil, 2018), and could draw on methodological approaches, such as participatory design or action research.

It is likely that the successful candidate will draw on a range of methods to collect data, which could include: a ‘systematic review’ (Miljand, 2020) of relevant research literature and other public documents surveys; self-reporting; semi-structured interviews; focus groups; and methods of systematic observation. It is not expected that applicants would have experience in all of these methods prior to starting the PhD. Training in research design, methods and analysis will be provided.

Further reading

- Duncan, S., Grand, A., Hope-Stone, H., Holliman, R., Hollingworth, N., Chambers, J., Norton, A., McDonald, A., Kukulka, M. and Gillespie, D. (2018). [Public Engagement. Attitudes, Culture and Ethos](#). Swindon, STFC
- Holliman, R., Marino, A., Grand, A., Berardi, A., Mistry, J., Jafferally, D., Thomas, R., Roberts, G., Marcus, C.-A., Roopsind I. and Roberts A. (2022). [‘A case study from Guyana of adapting engaged research design to promote ‘fairness in knowing’](#). *Research for All*, **6**(1): 1-17.
- Holliman, R., Hollingworth, N., McCrombie, J., Leach, K., Townsley, R., Fuller, I. and Gillespie, D. (2018). [Pathways to Excellence in Public Engagement](#). Swindon: STFC.
- Khalil, B. (2018). [‘Teacher autonomy in Turkish lower secondary schools, in relation to English language teaching: A mixed methods study’](#). PhD thesis. Milton Keynes, The Open University.
- Miljand, M. (2020). [‘Using systematic review methods to evaluate environmental public policy: methodological challenges and potential usefulness’](#). *Environmental Science & Policy*, **105**, 47-55.
- Open University (OU) (2022). [Learn and Live](#). Milton Keynes, OU.
- Reed, M.S. (2022). *Impact Culture*. Aberdeen, Fast Track Impact.
- Research Councils UK (RCUK) et al. (2009). [Concordat for engaging the public with research](#). Swindon: RCUK.