



Cancer Research UK

Articulating and evaluating research

Cancer Research UK's ultimate goal is patient benefit, and impact assessment helps them assess whether they're getting there as quickly as possible. This case study includes the eye-opening moment when the sheer scale and breadth of the research collaborations was revealed by researchfish data.

Cancer Research UK is the world's largest charity dedicated to cancer research, with an ambition to see 3 in 4 people survive cancer by 2034, funded entirely by donations. They are primarily a funder of research but they also provide health information and policy advocacy work.

researchfish spoke to Andrew Knowles, Senior Research Evaluation Manager, [Cancer Research UK](#) about the effect Research Impact Assessment has had on Cancer Research UK's goal of beating cancer sooner.

"My role is to lead the thinking on Research Impact Assessment at Cancer Research UK — reporting and evaluating all of the research that we fund and increasingly looking at the outputs, outcomes and impact of that research," explained Andrew. "We then use this information to support our fundraising and internally for strategic decision making."

“ researchfish helps us to collect a wealth of information on the outputs and outcomes of our research — it gives us some of the raw data to help us articulate impact and evaluate our research further along that pathway. We've used the data collected via researchfish for many useful analyses, but if I had to pick one to highlight then the sheer scale and breadth of our research collaborations was pretty eye opening. ”

Andrew Knowles
Senior Research Evaluation Manager

Case Study: Cancer Research UK — Articulating and evaluating research

Cancer Research UK started using the researchfish Research Impact Assessment platform in mid 2014 with their first submission period in November 2014.

“Our ambition is to be able to track research along the impact pathway from funding input right through to patient benefit. researchfish helps us to collect a wealth of information on the outputs and outcomes of our research – it gives us some of the raw data to help us articulate impact and evaluate our research further along that pathway.”

Impact assessment is central to effective medical research. Cancer Research UK’s ultimate goal is patient benefit, and impact assessment helps them assess whether they’re getting there as quickly as possible.

“To be able to understand where we’ve had impact, and where we could help to drive impact if we applied funding, has become central to our decision making. It allows us to look at ourselves – were our funding decisions effective? Are they efficient? In short, it helps us see all the great work our researchers are doing and support them in the best way possible.”

Cancer Research UK did capture outputs and impact information before their adoption of researchfish, but it was fragmented. “We would ask for Scientific Milestone Reports and Final Reports that captured some of the narrative impact. We also used to manually collate our publications, and lists of prizes. At the other end of the pathway, we had some strong case studies of impact, for example our involvement in developing some of the top cancer drugs, but these were challenging to produce and not systematic.

When Cancer Research UK started looking for a Research Impact Assessment platform solution there was particular focus on the articulation of impact for fundraising – economic conditions were challenging and Cancer Research UK were being asked to demonstrate the impact of their funding. “This information simply wasn’t available in a format, or breadth, that was usable. We knew we were funding good research but couldn’t really prove it. The opportunity to join forces with other funders was attractive, giving us an opportunity for joint benchmarking and reducing the reporting burden for our researchers.”

researchfish benefits

Cancer Research UK picks out 3 benefits:

- Efficiency – reduces office time to collect and process information and researcher time to input.
- Standardisation – collecting the same information across all of our portfolios helps us to compare internally. The fact researchfish is a federated system makes it easier to compare ourselves with other funders.
- Added value – lots of metadata being added by researchfish (e.g. address cleaning, pubs metadata), and the ability to collect information after funding has finished, which is when the majority of outputs often arise.

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“We’ve used the data collected via researchfish for many useful analyses, but if I had to pick one to highlight then the sheer scale and breadth of our research collaborations was pretty eye opening — we turned it into a [graphic for the front cover of our researcher publication](#).”

If Cancer Research UK didn’t have researchfish they would spend a lot more time manually collating research outputs. “We’d be missing the opportunity to understand all the good things our researchers are doing and it would hamper our ability to make good decisions about how to spend our supporters’ money.”

The next five years for research impact assessment

Andrew believes a number of shifts would help to accelerate progress in research impact assessment:

- Greater interoperability between systems: Collecting this information takes time and effort, so it’s important we continue to link systems together to drive efficiencies. “Collect once, use many times” is a good principle!
- Building a coalition between funders, host institutions, researchers and systems providers to drive mutual benefit. We’re all in this together.
- Funders learning from each other — building a community of practice (e.g. through initiatives like ISRIA).
- More data sharing between funders! The more we can benchmark against each other, the more quickly we can understand what works in research funding.
- Evolving the conversation from effectiveness — “did we see impact?” towards efficiency — “how do we get the most impact?”, and focusing on how funders can support impact rather than the output of individuals. In general, there is lots of information available, our challenge now is to work out how to use it in the best way!

“If you are a funder that doesn’t do research impact assessment talk to funders that do. We’re all doing similar things, grappling with similar issues — we can probably give you a useful perspective.”

About Interfolio

Conceived by academics for academics, Interfolio is an education technology company headquartered in Washington, DC, USA and in Cambridge, England, UK. Founded in 1999, Interfolio operates the acclaimed Faculty Information System, the researchfish impact assessment platform, and the widely used Dossier service. Clients all around the world choose Interfolio’s technology for hiring and recruitment, academic appointments and timelines, activity data reporting, faculty reviews and promotions, and research impact analysis. For more information about Interfolio, please contact team@interfolio.com.