



University of Nottingham

Linking investment to impact

The University of Nottingham discuss how impact has really grown in the last few years, largely driven by the requirement to demonstrate impact through the REF (Research Excellence Framework), and often goes beyond the length of a grant and/or project.

researchfish spoke with Steven Hardy (Head of Research Outcomes), Zahra Sheraz (Research Manager Analytics) and Dipa Patel (Research Policy Administrator) from the University's Research and Innovation Department, and Sue Jones (Transformation Manager) and Hazel Sayers (Knowledge Exchange and Impact Officer), both from the Research Council UK Horizon Hub, about the University of Nottingham's use of the researchfish platform to collect outputs, outcomes, and to begin to understand impact across the University's large multi-disciplinary funded research portfolio.

The University of Nottingham was the first research organisation to subscribe to researchfish in 2012 when it evolved from the Medical Research Council's eVal system.

“ Impact is in our DNA and we need to never forget this. What difference are we making? Impact has really grown in the last few years, largely driven by the requirement to demonstrate impact through the REF, and often goes beyond the length of a grant and/or project. Impact can take many forms, not just in terms of money, it can be time saved, change of policy for example. We need to understand the world around us and others who may be interested in our research. ”

Steven Hardy
Head of Research Outcomes

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“From an institution level the primary goal is to collect and record all outcomes from research for the funders that use researchfish,” explained Steven Hardy. “We do this to help inform funders of the outputs of their funded research. Before researchfish, this used to be done via interim and final reporting which could be inconsistent. researchfish also helps the researchers and academics involved to understand that reporting isn’t a one-off event, it’s to help with the thinking that it’s a longitudinal activity where you can potentially link it to other things such as impact.”

“Before researchfish we used the RCUK ROS system for those Research Councils that used it, but it was sometimes challenging to engage academic staff with this system. researchfish gave a completely new dimension to outcomes collection. With the previous system, the information flow from researcher to funder through to gateway-to-research just didn’t happen.”

Sue Jones and Hazel Sayers spoke about the University of Nottingham’s use of researchfish for projects within the Horizon Hub.

“Before researchfish, when we relied on final reports, we used to have to scramble around to try and get the data at the last minute and it was all over the place. researchfish is good to have as a repository of data especially for very large projects such as Horizon.”

“The RCUK-funded Horizon Digital Economy Research Hub is interdisciplinary and so we have a whole breadth of outputs and outcomes, crossing sectors such as creative industries, energy and healthcare, and disciplines such as engineering, psychology and computer science. researchfish allows the data to be captured in one repository with consistent categories, and hence addresses the issues of different schools using different methods.”

What would happen if you didn’t use researchfish?

“researchfish is a central repository of data that we can go back to historically and use. Without the evidence that researchfish provides, it can be difficult to start to build up a picture of how investment (from the proportion of funders who use researchfish) can be linked to impact.”

“It is also how we put the case forward to secure future funding at similar or increased levels – we recognise that funders that do this well have a good outcome in the spending review because of the data that they used.”

“It is a useful tool for researchers, especially if they are moving around from place to place, as they can use researchfish to track what they have been doing and use it moving forward.”

researchfish benefits

researchfish provides a central repository of all the data that can be updated and can be used as a historical record going forward. The data has the potential to be used for future research grant applications.

“The publications data is probably the most useful from researchfish. I’ve used subsets of

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researchfish data to answer questions e.g. are publications funded by research councils grants better quality? I downloaded the data and analysed further and found the answer,” said Steven. “I also looked at collaborations and partnerships internationally to see who has connections. This gives a more rounded picture that you wouldn’t normally get.”

researchfish and the REF

Can researchfish data help with the REF? “Potentially it could be used for many aspects of REF, alongside other data but this largely depends on how the new criteria for REF2021 will emerge.”

Without researchfish

“Funding would stop and someone would have to pull information together from various sources. With researchfish this is all done and is simpler for everyone in the research supply line.”

The importance of impact

“It’s about demonstrating to our stakeholders that we are making a difference. A quote from Sir Jesse Boot who generously gave the land to build the University talks about impact. This quote is inside the front cover of our new global strategy – we are here for impact:”

“In each succeeding age the University will spread the light of learning and knowledge and will bind science and industry in the unity that is so essential for the prosperity of the nation and welfare of our fellow citizens” – Sir Jesse Boot on the royal opening of the Trent Building and University Park in 1928.

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“Impact is in our DNA and we need to never forget this. What difference are we making?” concluded Steven Hardy.

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. Over 400 clients based in 15 countries 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.