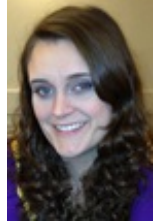


Researching research: New skills of targeting audiences and networking are now necessary to create impact

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2013/01/08/lester-researching-research-climate-change/

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Correctly targeting your audience and specifically tailoring outputs to policymakers is key to improving the impact of your research. [Sarah Lester](#) explains how building contacts and targeted dissemination of research requires skills outside those traditionally used in academia.



Since 2009 the [Grantham Institute for Climate Change](#) at [Imperial College London](#) has been conducting a case study to provide knowledge about the impact of research in helping to inform public policy, which contributes to informing the broader societal understanding of climate change problems and debates about their solutions. The research focuses on measuring and assessing the impact of the Grantham Institute's climate and energy mitigation work as an example of academic impact. A secondary benefit has been to help the Institute improve its performance in this area. The report includes impact case studies of individual pieces of work, substantive analysis of the institute's efforts to inform mitigation policy in UK and overseas, and mapping the pool of influence of the Grantham Institute within the climate change and energy communities. The study is part of a Higher Education Funding Council of England (HEFCE) funded and London School of Economics led research project on [how social science helps shape public policy](#).

The work, which examines research impact through qualitative analysis and quantitative metrics, essentially 'researches research' and aims to understand effective impact and communication strategies. Our key findings, summarised in the table below, suggest that:

- Networked institutions such as the Grantham Institute can be valuable in drawing together different strands of academic expertise to focus on particular areas of policy.
- Effective impact can be achieved by targeting specific audiences and tailoring published outputs and events to them.
- Effective building of contacts and accurate dissemination of research require skills and techniques beyond those traditionally used in academia and have a significant cost.

The chief finding of the study is that measuring non-academic research outputs may require different indicators to traditional academic citation measurement. For example, audience analysis, logging website citations of reports, and interviews with key policy-makers and business members, are required to understand the impact of research outputs. Four types of research impacts have been identified by this project – impacts created by events and research interactions, project outputs, publications and briefing paper impacts, and academic impacts. The timescales for delivering these impacts can vary significantly, and while it may be appropriate to measure reports and event outputs on a 6 monthly-basis, academic and journal publications may be more appropriately considered under a 5 year reporting system. This suggests that a research portfolio approach to measuring research impacts from organisations such as the Grantham Institute maybe more valuable than only examining citation rates. It is also important to critically evaluate the purpose of the indicator being used. Indicators can be used to measure different stages of research programmes, including the inputs and processes that lay the foundations for a successful programme, as well as the output and outcome indicators which measure its overall success.

These findings suggest several conclusions regarding the role of policy and research institutions working within an academic environment. In particular the production of policy-relevant briefing papers and peer-reviewed academic publications demonstrates the research capacity of the institute and the value of audience-targeted written material. The Grantham Institute has created a network of contacts across academia, business, and government, which has enabled both the transfer of material, as well as successful collaborations with high-profile institutions. One of the

key findings of the project has arisen from the evaluation of the Grantham Institute’s contribution to policy outcomes: whilst academic impact is vital in creating a knowledge-base and understanding of the problem of climate change, many of our case studies point to the importance of translating this into ‘real world’ action. The final conclusion of the report is that data and evidence collection is vital to the success of policy-research institutions: understanding the successes and failures of different methods of translating research is not possible without financial and administrative support in collecting information on the impacts of research.

| Conclusions on: | General Conclusions | Grantham Institute specific Conclusions |
|--|--|---|
| <i>Networked Institutions</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Networked institutes within universities can raise the impact of academic research on policy makers and opinion formers. Such institutions benefit from being able to draw on relevant expertise from across the host university - It is often necessary to bring together diverse expertise in order to address issues of relevance to policy makers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within Imperial College London the Grantham Institute has enhanced the impact of climate mitigation research - The Grantham Institute has been able to aggregate across disciplines and to lead funding bids for cross-cutting research programmes. |
| <i>Publications and dissemination methods</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A number of additional approaches to making policy-makers aware of relevant research results have been shown to be valuable including; preparing and promoting briefing papers and reports, hosting targeted events such as lectures, seminars, conferences, discussion dinners and workshops, and speaking and presenting at events hosted by others, and broader outreach through the media | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Imperial College London academics associated with the Grantham have an excellent record of publication in peer-reviewed academic journals - Grantham Briefing Papers for policy makers and other academics as well as project reports and executive summaries have shown their value in disseminating information |
| <i>Contacts and events dissemination methods</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Effective building of contacts and dissemination of research results requires skills that are not specifically academic – especially web design and the management, development and maintenance of a wide and diverse range of personal contacts, and communication skills for a non-specialist audience - Many areas of policy act on an international level: cross-cutting organisations are sometimes able to make international links that would not be available to individual academics | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantham directors and staff have extensive links with key bodies - Department for Energy and Climate Change, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the International Energy Agency - Grantham strategy has included alliances with respected organisations, and lectures and presentations from renowned academics and public figures. |
| <i>Data Collection and impact measurement</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is essential to plan in advance to collect evidence of impact – specifically on the roles of those attending events and web-hits on documents available on the internet. There is a need to collect more information on downloads and the rates of hits on web material as this provides valuable information on impact | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is reasonable to conclude that Grantham has enhanced the quality of decisions relevant to climate mitigation by making decision takers better informed. - The Institute is currently working with Imperial College London to develop a measurement system of web impact indicators from research |

An executive summary of the Grantham Institute’s research impact report is available [online](#).

Note: This article gives the views of

the author(s), and not the position of the Impact of Social Sciences blog, nor of the London School of Economics.

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About the Grantham Institute for climate change:

The Grantham institute is committed to driving research on climate change, and translating it into real world impact. The Institute’s policy activity aims to provide authoritative analysis and assessment of evidence, and the Institute’s ambition is to communicate this research in a relevant way to decision-makers and more widely to inform the often

heated and polarised debates about climate change.

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