Are Humanities failing to generate Impact?

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Impact of Social Sciences and Humanities for a European Research Agenda, Pillar 3: Assessing Impact (I am particularly grateful for the assistance given by Jakob Sturm)

4th Impacts

Characteristics of high-scored impacts
As there are no simple recipes how to produce a 4th impact
Considering the substantial financial consequences of the ratings (Reed et al. 2017 calculate “something like €324,000 for the most significant and far-reaching impacts”), it was only obvious that innumerable recommendations were offered on how to produce a high-score impact case (see eg Reed et al. 2018), in the last two years, researchers across the UK have been mining and analysing the REF 2014 data to learn what was considered best practice. Some findings:
• Benefits should be articulated as concretely as possible (specific groups, significance and reach)
• Research (high score) and impact should be connected properly
• Impact statements should be written in a clear and plain language

“REF documents are written in the unolly technocratic language of generic templates, impact sub-profiles, and submitted units, which turn out to be people like me, who put 30 years of [of] work into a single book” (Robert Hewison, speech at a conference 2011, cited by Bulatao 2017, p. 5).

Nevertheless, my own calculation for the Arts and Humanities shows no difference between 4th impact cases (200 cases randomly picked) and the total amount of impact cases in the discipline group according to:
• The type of impact
• The spread of impacts over the world
• The share of interdisciplinary cases

"Scholars in British universities will devote less time and energy to this attempt [to deepen our understanding of “Humanities”], and more to becoming door-to-door salesmen for vulgarized versions of their increasingly market-oriented products” (Collins 2009).

Using this data base as a starting point, the paper investigates the following questions:
1. Do various disciplines produce different types of impacts?
2. Are some disciplines more successful than others?
3. Is output and impact interconnected in a way that applications with highly rated outputs receive high scores for impacts as well?
4. Do high-scored impacts show characteristics different from the total amount of the impacts?

Source: JIFs for those featured in the figures from Research Excellence Framework; Arts and Humanities from JIFs from Times Higher Education 2014

It seems that Humanities are less able to produce impact beyond academia than other disciplines, or, rather, are less able to show and communicate the impact they achieve.

A simple linear regression (Spearman’s rank correlation) shows significant positive links between output and impact for all of the four disciplines. However, with r = 0.36, the connection for Humanities turns out to be much weaker than for the other three disciplines (r between 0.46 and 0.53).

The picture shows Life Sciences and Humanities according to grade point average (GPA, a weighted average of the number of stars received, see box). This means that, in general, research that scores highly on output, also receives good assessment on impact. In a recent study, Derrick et al. investigate the divergence in opinions of evaluators involved in the REF prior to the assessment. They show the wide range of views about impact as well as how research excellence (output) and impact relate to each other (Derrick et al. 2016).

Source: JIFs for those featured in the figures from Research Excellence Framework; Arts and Humanities from JIFs from Times Higher Education 2014

Each assessment unit’s quality profile is converted into GPA by subtracting percentage of 4th results by 4, its percentage of 3rd results by 3, its percentage of 2nd results by 2, and so on. This procedure is added together and divided by 100 to give a score between 1 and 6.