BACKGROUND PAPER
SOCIAL SCIENCES: UNDERSTANDING POLICY IMPACTS

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ACADEMY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES IN AUSTRALIA
SYMPOSIUM ON “SOCIAL SCIENCES: UNDERSTANDING POLICY IMPACTS”
Canberra, 8 November 2016
Symposium

SOCIAL SCIENCES: UNDERSTANDING POLICY IMPACTS

OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES – WHY ARE WE HERE TODAY?

Knowledge about social behavior and institutions underpins notable advances in economic growth, technological innovation, health, education, good governance, and quality of life. This knowledge also helps us understand why public policy sometimes fails to improve our lot.

Yet much of this knowledge is either taken for granted or, increasingly, reduced to metrics of impact that belie the complexity of knowledge communication and influence.

This Symposium considers alternative ways of demonstrating the value, relevance and impact of the social sciences for Australia. It does so informed by international comparisons, such as the ‘impact’ agenda pursued under the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (which accounts for 20 percent of that exercise), and similar moves to evaluate impact under discussion in Sweden, the Netherlands and elsewhere. Clarifying the purposes of such schemes is important as part of establishing appropriate measures.

With the assistance of leading social science researchers, senior government officials and industry experts participating in this symposium, discussions will identify the wide range of contributions and benefits made by the social sciences, and consider how these benefits can best be communicated to various non-university audiences in industry, government and the community. The symposium puts these issues into context, exploring how social scientists from a variety of disciplines can tackle the challenges of improving engagement with external stakeholders and demonstrating a variety of benefits and impacts.

BACKGROUND

Why have these themes and challenges emerged with such intensity in advanced societies in recent decades? They are closely connected to a number of interconnected changes in the public sector, the economy and higher education:

- The growing demand for performance measures and enhanced efficiency and accountability in public sector agencies and not-for-profit organizations.
- This is the driving force behind the call for evidence-based policy and practice, which is part of a broader focus on data-driven decision making across government agencies.
- Increasingly, and noticeably in times of fiscal restraint, there is pressure to demonstrate that publicly funded research and science offers benefit to taxpayers, often referred to as “broader impacts.”

The accountability agenda and the impact agenda are closely linked, as noted by the Australian Research Council:

*There is an increasing focus on showcasing or measuring the societal benefits from research, and a need for better coordination in reporting and promoting the impact of these research outcomes. This will become increasingly important in a tight fiscal government environment where returns on investment in research will*
need to be demonstrated in terms of environmental, economic and social impact. For these reasons and others, key stakeholders including government, industry and the community require more information on the benefits derived from investment in Australian research activities.’

(Australian Research Council, 2012)

Governments are operating in an increasingly complex society, managing competing tensions, pressures and risks. The sense of austerity and crisis in many countries has important consequences for the governance of science, technology and research. This has happened at a time when innovation is being promoted more vigorously than ever as a way out of crisis and as a foundation for future prosperity (European Science Foundation 2013, p. 3).

The focus on innovation is one shared by many countries, including Australia. In December 2015 as part of its National Innovation and Science Agenda (NISA), the Turnbull Government announced the development of a national engagement and impact assessment. This aims to examine how universities are translating their research into economic, social and other benefits and incentivise greater collaboration between universities, industry and other end-users of research. A consultation paper was released in May 2016 (ARC-DET 2016), and the outcomes of the development process are expected shortly. It is understood that a pilot assessment may take place in 2017, with the prospect of a full national assessment and reporting exercise in 2018 running in parallel with the existing research quality assessment process known as Excellence in Research for Australia.

Where do the social sciences fit into this landscape?

WHY THE SOCIAL SCIENCES ARE IMPORTANT

The social sciences and humanities are indispensable to understanding and addressing contemporary global challenges and to grasping emerging opportunities. Every challenge the world faces has a human dimension, and no solution can be achieved without enlisting the support and efforts of individuals, communities and societies. The social sciences and humanities cultivate knowledge about human expression, behaviour, and social life that is essential to understanding the human context of these challenges and crafting viable solutions to them.

(Leiden Statement 2014, p. 1)

Knowledge about social behaviour and institutions is fundamental to advances in economic growth, technological innovation, healthy lives, education and training, good governance, and quality of urban and rural life.

Academic research in the social sciences contributes to economic prosperity, achieves public policy impacts, and informs public understanding of policy issues and societal changes. The social sciences predominantly achieve external impacts by influencing people to think about things in a different, more precisely reasoned and better-informed way, and this is where their value lies. A great deal of the external influence of the social sciences is concentrated in policy-making (Bastow et al. 2014; see also Saunders & Walters 2005).
Furthermore, the types of complex problems societies face require a ‘joined-up’ approach, which requires ‘all of the sciences, what the Germans would call Wissenschaft, the natural, physical and social sciences, engineering, technology, the arts and humanities’ (HM Treasury & BIS 2014, p. 9). This is increasingly recognised in crisis management and disaster preparedness. As Sir Mark Walport, UK Government’s Chief Scientific Advisor, said in October 2015:

_The case of Ebola does not simply point yet again to the unforeseen uses of academic research. Even more significantly, it highlights the central contribution of the social sciences and humanities to informed decision-making by national governments and transnational organisations. Put simply, the perspectives of historians, psychologists, geographers and others – alongside anthropologists – are essential to sound policy development and delivery. This truth, however, has been properly recognised only relatively recently._

(Walport 2015)

The importance of the social sciences in understanding the human side of new technologies has also been noted. Both the US and the UK governments have explicitly funded ‘human-factors’ research by social scientists in order to understand cybersecurity and cybercriminals (Waldrop 2016). When Tay, the Microsoft artificial intelligence experiment, started tweeting offensive comments after the experiment was hijacked online, commentators noted the need for the developers of such technology to work alongside social scientists with the sociological skills to understand the range of communities on the Internet and what they would do once such technology was released (Glance 2016).

In 2006, Alan Leshner, CEO of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, testified before the Senate in support of National Science Foundation Social, Behavioural and Economic science research:

_Every major issue facing modern society and every major issue facing our economic competitiveness will ultimately be multidisciplinary in nature...[requiring] the integration of the physical sciences or biological sciences with the social and behavioral sciences._

(American Association for the Advancement of Science, 2011).

The social sciences in Australia

*Mapping the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* (Turner & Brass, 2014) established a baseline for the size, scope and capabilities of HASS in Australia at that time, and the report was envisaged as a first step towards providing a comprehensive data profile of HASS in Australia. It demonstrated the contribution that the HASS sector makes to the national higher education system, to the national research and innovation system, and to preparing our citizens for participation in the workforce.

The report contends that the high quality performance of the HASS sector, as demonstrated in the *Excellence in Research for Australia* (ERA) exercise, has been maintained in the face of significant challenges generated by the increasingly market-oriented system, by federal government policy settings, and by universities’ strategies for the allocation of funding (p. 1).
Figure: Snapshot of HASS in Australia 2002-2012.

HASS teaches 65% of Australia’s students with 52% of the staff.

60% of tertiary educated Australians aged 20-69 with a Bachelor degree HASS trained.

The HASS sector received 16% of the nation’s research income, contributed 44% of the total number of Units of Evaluation in the 2012 ERA research assessment exercise, and produced 34% of the research outputs in the university sector.

Strong performance of SBE disciplines in HERDC Category 2 (Other Public Sector Research Income), indicating high levels of engagement with the public sector and the need for evidence-based policy and evaluation.

PUBLIC POLICY AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

Government Social Research (GSR) is an essential component of evidence and analysis for government decision making. Social research evidence helps decision makers understand the true costs and benefits of policies through highlighting their social and cultural value, the social aspects of risk, public acceptability, and the intended and unintended outcomes of policy implementation. GSR gives policymakers and those on the frontline an understanding of the people and organisations affected by their decisions, as well as evidence of the wider social consequences. Social science methods, such as ethnography, are now at the heart of open policymaking.


Public policy relies on good evidence and good policy ideas. The social sciences provide much of this knowledge, and bring a variety of robust systematic and empirical approaches and methods to the study of the complex and dynamic social systems in which policy interventions develop. Sir Peter Gluckman, New Zealand’s Chief Scientific Advisor, notes that ‘given the large government responsibility for social programme expenditure, quality evidence to support appropriate policy development and formal evaluation of desired impacts is critical’ (Gluckman 2013, p. 13). Social sciences also provide insights into why some programs are high risk or likely to be unsuccessful, and why certain policy ideas from one country are unlikely to ‘work’ in the different context of another country.

Policymaking takes place in a contested space, where evidence is only one of a number of factors that influence the decision-making process and outcomes (Head 2016). Academic
research is only one of a number of sources of information and evidence; think tanks, advocacy groups, lobbyists, and journalists often provide research that policymakers use in the policymaking process. However, academic research is valued because of its perceived independence, quality, transparency and rigour (Hillman et al. 2015, p. 3).

‘Commentary on the use of science in public policy frequently argues that its use will produce better policy or improve policy making. We offer a narrower but, we believe, more scientifically sound position, particularly with reference to the social sciences. Social science does not promise “better policy.” It is not social engineering, misguided accusations notwithstanding. It is, simply, a guide to understanding problems, the conditions that give rise to those problems, and the outcomes likely to occur when policy addresses those problems. In this very specific sense, social, as well as natural sciences, are a more reliable (“better”) guide than what is otherwise available to policy makers in considering many issues.’ (National Research Council, 2012, p. 19)

THE INNOVATION AND PRODUCTIVITY AGENDAS

Modern governments are increasingly concerned to generate economic growth and social well-being. They see science and technology as key resources to stimulate productivity and innovation. The technological sciences (the STEM disciplines) have arguably been singled out as the engines of growth and innovation, both in government strategies and in significant funding schemes. As noted in the Leiden Statement, one consequence of this policy environment has been growing pressure to refocus areas of STEM research onto more applied areas and to increase the purely vocational aspects of teaching in these disciplines. In some cases, the debates around funding have questioned the need for government support for at least some HASS disciplines, in both education and research (Leiden Statement 2014, p. 2). This is sometimes couched in the language of funding research only in ‘the national interest’, such as the proposed US changes to the NSF funding rules across all disciplines, and with proposed large funding cuts to the Social, Behavioral and Economics (SBE) Directorate (Committee on Science, Space, & Technology 2016).

As noted in previous sections, investing in the HASS disciplines is vital to develop the knowledge and expertise needed to address the complex problems facing the world. It is essential to engage social sciences, humanities and the creative arts as important actors in the processes of producing innovations. This includes social innovations as well as, but not limited to, making effective use of the opportunities presented by STEM research (ESF 2013, p. 27). These knowledge relationships are recognised in Australia, although sometimes in ways that imply that the social sciences can function as the handmaidens of STEM disciplines in the service of economic productivity.

The balance between STEM and HASS is strongly weighted towards the STEM areas in terms of public funding and linkages to private industry and commercialisation. From time to time, the federal government has released a list of National Research Priorities to encourage researchers to focus on matters of national significance. These lists have varied in the scope provided for social science contributions. A review of research in 2011 found that the
National Research Priorities should be ‘augmented’ to better reflect the priority of the HASS disciplines.

‘The HASS disciplines are important to innovation. Moreover, a number of stakeholders considered that there would be value in augmenting the existing NRPs with the inclusion of an additional priority to better acknowledge the priority of HASS in the national research enterprise. This was considered to be an effective way for the substantive contributions of these research disciplines to be acknowledged in their own right, rather than as a ‘handmaiden’ to the physical sciences. In addition, HASS was seen as essential to ensuring that the Australian community understand and accept current and future innovations.’

(DIISR 2011, p. 6)

Recent further developments in federal government strategies for economic productivity and innovation have increased the investment focus on STEM, and with very limited salience to the social sciences. However the HASS disciplines are not entirely excluded:

‘There is no doubt in my mind that the disciplines we now group under the banner of STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) are critical infrastructure. But it is not, and has never been, STEM alone. The humanities, arts and social science (HASS) disciplines provide vital knowledge and understanding of our world, its peoples and societies. ….. Scientists cannot implement workable solutions without the confidence and consent of the community. Indeed, it is unlikely the solutions could be workable without an understanding of the people who have to carry them through. It is the potential of STEM made real in the lives of Australians, with the insight HASS can provide.’

(Chubb, Chief Scientist’s foreword, in Turner & Brass, 2014, p. iv)

THE EXTERNAL IMPACT AGENDA

‘Research impact is the demonstrable contribution that research makes to the economy, society, culture, national security, public policy or services, health, the environment, or quality of life, beyond contributions to academia’.

(Australian Research Council, 2012).

The ‘impact’ and ‘engagement’ agendas in universities (and in higher education more broadly) are about reorienting the behaviours, values and cultures of universities towards collaboration, knowledge transfer and knowledge exchange with external stakeholder sectors, sometimes known as ‘third stream’ activity. These agendas are aimed at maximising the economic, social and other benefits of publicly-funded research by working with external stakeholders. They are intended to broaden the traditional preoccupation of universities with matters of research quality and teaching quality.

Assessing ‘impacts’

More generally, governments have been increasingly under pressure to demonstrate accountability for public investment in science and research. This is where it becomes important to show the many ways in which value can be generated and documented.
Some countries, notably the UK, have taken this further by introducing schemes to assess research impact (see the recent review of the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) by Stern 2016). Assessment of research impact is typically tied to performance metrics, and typically influences the distribution of future funding. Such assessment schemes are intended to shape the behaviour of universities and their myriad research centres, on the assumption that doing so will fulfil the government’s broader economic development agenda.

Research collaboration, engagement and communication have become hot topics. There is a large research literature about how knowledge flows from the research sector into the worlds of industry, public policy and professional practice. This literature is concerned with communication, collaboration and relationships. The facilitators and barriers to such collaboration and mutual understanding are now well known.

There is little evidence that retrospective ‘ex-post’ research impact evaluations will improve research collaboration unless the barriers and disincentives to partnering are squarely identified and addressed. Simply being exhorted to communicate more effectively and more frequently to meet performance measurements will not necessarily lead to higher usage of research.

There is a risk that narrowly instrumental and easily measured indicators will predominate. These would suit some knowledge disciplines much better than others. There is also the risk that a narrowly or poorly designed impact assessment scheme can lead to goal displacement, e.g. a shift in researcher behaviour toward meeting performance measures, rather than toward beneficial societal impacts. A poorly designed scheme would also have very uneven impact on the knowledge disciplines that are less closely connected to industry (e.g. see Wilsdon et al. 2015, The Metric Tide).

Current implementation of the research impact agenda and the methods used for assessing research ‘quality’ and ‘impact’ may place the social sciences at a disadvantage. The problems for the social sciences in demonstrating impact are multi-faceted as their outputs are often conceptual, collective in nature, and cumulative but diffuse in impact. They are often about clarifying the nature and extent of issues rather than recommending specific ‘solutions’ (NRC 2012). Few of the social science research outputs are easily ‘commercialisable’.

Even in policymaking where the influence of the social sciences is concentrated, given the multi-causal processes in policymaking, it is difficult for researchers to demonstrate any distinctive or individual influence, still less linked to individual research projects as the [UK] research councils tend to seek (Bastow et al. 2014, p. 170). Thus, a better understanding is needed of the processes involved in how the social sciences engage with external stakeholders, contribute to society, and perhaps influence wider decision-making; the challenge is to develop more nuanced understandings and ways of thinking about how to consider benefits and impacts.

The social sciences have not been sufficiently active in making a strong case for a broad view of the value and benefit of social science knowledge. This deficiency has been recognised within both the social sciences and other disciplines, and there are a number of initiatives designed to address this, such as the UK’s Campaign for the Social Sciences.
Alternative perspectives

Are all countries following the UK pathway to formal research impact schemes, with differential rewards for those university research groups that best demonstrate external relationships and impacts? On the contrary, a comparative study of international experience shows a patchwork of different approaches, including an emphasis on non-financial indicators and an explicit rejection of the commercialisation/technology focus of narrowly economic approaches.

The literature on research relevance and impact shows there are many different perspectives. Finding common ground would require flexibility across disciplines and across different stakeholder audiences.

Sir Peter Gluckman has argued that:

‘The word ‘impact’ has come to be the catch-all term to describe the expected benefit or ‘return’ from investing in scientific research. But what the word actually means can vary greatly depending on whom one asks and who does the asking. Indeed, as an increasingly used keyword within the science-policy community, ‘impact’ is used in very different ways by both the scientific community and by the policy and political communities. Inevitably this can spawn confusion.’

(Gluckman 2015).

He notes that ‘the temptation of some contemporary policy makers is, too often, to define impact narrowly in terms of economic growth, despite the obligations of the State in research being much broader’ (Gluckman 2015). He has further argued that:

‘The point is that ‘impact’ should not be defined generically but needs to take into account the multiple goals within a national science system. Thus, one should think in terms of the range of impacts that the various parts of a holistic government funding system might want and thus establish the mix of bespoke funding tools accordingly. I would argue that a particularly valuable and more strategic use of impact evaluation is to shape researcher behaviour in a more proactive manner. At a recent forum on impact in Melbourne sponsored by the journal Nature, I suggested that the value of impact assessment is very different if ‘impact’ were systematically considered a priori rather than post-hoc’.

(Gluckman 2014)

The impact discourse and the research evaluation system in any given country is mediated by the underlying national culture, for example, one of consensus and collaboration, or one of competition (Young 2015). This national culture in turn affects the policy culture and policy advisory system and thus the preferred interpretation and implementation of research ‘impact’. While an increasing number of countries are retrospectively assessing academic research quality in the form of excellence frameworks, very few countries have adopted a retrospective assessment of impact similar to the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF), or the likely proposed Australian framework. In other countries, such as the Netherlands and New Zealand, impact is included in the assessment exercise, but is not linked to funding. It is notable that Canada does not have a national research evaluation system at all, and the key element of the US system, STAR Metrics, is essentially a centralised research information system (CRIS). In their concern to encourage the broader
benefits of publicly funded research, many countries have focused on incorporating impact into specific research grant or program funding schemes, such as the Broader Impacts criterion in National Science Foundation grant applications.

The Small Advanced Economies Initiative (SAEI) brings together officials and experts from New Zealand, Israel, Singapore, Denmark, Finland, and Ireland in order to consider policy issues of common interest and where the ‘small size’ perspective actually influences policy choices. The SAEI group (initiated by New Zealand in 2012) defines impact as:

‘The direct and indirect ‘influence’ of research or its effect on an individual, a community, or society as a whole, including benefits to our economic, social, human and natural capital.’
(Harland & O’Connor, 2015)

The SAEI framework, which is also incorporated in New Zealand’s National Statement of Science Investment 2015-2025, focuses on five dimensions, or ‘pillars’ of impact, with cross-cutting themes – as an alternative to outlining pathways to impact, or specific types of inputs and outputs.

‘All of our science should have a strong line of sight to the eventual benefits for individuals, businesses or society. This does not mean focusing purely on industry-led, close-to-market research. Science has an important role in challenging, as well as supporting, existing industries, products, practices, approaches and frameworks. Impact encompasses the ways in which scientific research benefits individuals, whānau, communities, organisations, New Zealand, and the world. It encourages researchers and investors to think about the broader implications of research from the outset, as priorities shift, or when research raises unexpected discoveries. This Statement includes a significant focus on the commercial impact of research and on industry research activity...However, high-impact research cannot always be valued in economic terms alone. For example, the impact of endangered species protection could be considered in terms of economic (tourism revenue), environmental (role in the ecosystem), and cultural or social (as taonga or public amenity) values.’
(NZ National Statement of Science Investment, p. 11)

Sweden is currently moving away from purely performance-based metrics for resource allocation, towards a new model, FOKUS, which will be based on peer review informed by metrics, and include measures of both academic quality, and impact beyond academia. It is scheduled to begin in 2018 and aims to ‘improve the quality of research and ensure that high quality research is of benefit to society’ (Swedish Research Council 2015, p. 22). In this context,

‘Impact means, in a broad sense, effects of research beyond academia which in some contexts and over time could amount to concrete influence on society by the application of research results to achieve social, economic, environmental or cultural effects. Impact beyond academia thus refers to the dissemination, further refinement, commercialisation, patenting, licensing or other practical use of research results. The relevance of research is sometimes used as a concept when assessing or evaluating research. Relevance is not necessarily the same thing as an actual impact, but the relevance of research for activities beyond academia, e.g. in
industry or public authorities, remains an underlying assumption of the ability of research to have an impact beyond the academic sphere.’
(Swedish Research Council 2015, p. 5).

The Netherlands system has had various forms of research assessment since the early 1990s, and the focus on the ‘societal relevance’ of science and research has been a concern since the 1950s. The current Standard Evaluation Protocol (SEP 2015-2021) uses the term ‘societal relevance’, distinguishing between ‘societal quality’, ‘societal impact’ and valorisation (knowledge dissemination and exchange). Societal relevance is defined by:

- the degree to which research contributes to and creates an understanding of the development of societal sectors and practice (such as industry, education, policymaking, health care) and the goals they aim to achieve, and to resolving problems and issues (such as climate change and social cohesion); and
- a well-founded expectation that the research will provide such a contribution in the short or long term.

Interaction and relationship-building are widely seen as essential:

‘If research is to have an impact in society, there must be some interaction between a research group and societal stakeholders. Such interaction can take place when the research agenda is defined, during the research itself, or afterwards, when the results are communicated to stakeholders. Such ‘productive interaction’ is vital. A summary of instances of such interaction is therefore an essential element of the information on a research group’s performance. If productive interaction exists between research groups and stakeholders, there is more reason to expect that the research will sooner or later have a societal impact.’
(ERiC 2010, p. 10).

COMMUNICATING THE VALUE AND IMPACT OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

The social sciences have many good stories to tell about their value, relevance and impact. These benefits are broadly distributed. Some of this value is largely ‘internalised’ within the academic sector itself (through research quality and teaching excellence). However, many other forms of benefit and impact are ‘externalised’ through engagement and relationships with external stakeholders in industry, government, NGOs and the community.

The social sciences have not been adept at selling their messages. Much of the value of social science knowledge has been taken for granted rather than acknowledged and celebrated. In their book The impact of the social sciences (2014), Bastow, Dunleavy and Tinkler of the LSE Public Policy Group argue that we should be pragmatically seizing the opportunities within the impact agenda to demonstrate the contributions and value of the social sciences, and to argue the case for increased funding. In the face of the impact agenda, the social sciences need to consider how to define, demonstrate and communicate their value and relevance. We need to develop a wider capacity to communicate and engage productively with different organisations such as industry, think tanks, the media, NGOs, government agencies, and deliberative forums.
In terms of understanding impact on public policy, part of the problem appears to arise from the way impact is defined and articulated by research funding bodies, as noted by the OECD (2014) and by Oliver et al. (2014). Some of the expectations surrounding research-into-policy impact, and the ways in which the pathways to impact have been articulated, betray a lack of understanding of the complex nature of the policy process and the ways in which policy decisions are made, and how, when and why academic research is accessed and used. Oliver et al. (2014) highlight the importance of understanding the processes and factors that underlie the use of evidence in policy making, and suggest that identifying the relative importance of these factors and new undiscovered facts in different contexts, at different levels, or in different countries, may contribute to the understanding of evidence use in policy.

Thus, the social sciences need to improve communicating their research, but they also need to improve their understanding of how the policy world works and how to identify key moments and opportunities. Positioning research findings for impact and engagement is key.

‘Arguably two of the most potent ways in which social scientists already induce Whitehall departments, reluctant ministers and a huge range of public sector bodies to do more evidence-based policy making is not through direct interactions at all. Instead influence comes through researchers’ roles in acting with civil society organizations, and in publicizing and commenting on policy problems with the media and in ways that engage the wider public.’

(Bastow et al. 2014, p. 171)

For social scientists wishing to engage with public policy, how can we improve the use and impact of academic research? Public sector organisational cultures and practices that value expertise and rigorous evidence increase the likelihood of academic research expertise being accessed and used, but academics do not have any influence over those cultures and practices. Just because research is produced in policy-relevant ways does not guarantee it will be used by others in current policy debates. But research has a greater chance of being picked up by policy audiences when it is framed in policy-relevant ways, is timely, relevant to current policy needs, and accessible to others (Hillman et al. 2015, p. 3).

Enabling structures are needed, including a shift in academic incentive structures towards recognising and rewarding collaboration as an intermediate goal within the impact agenda. Just as important are enhanced communication skills and relationships with the media and with intermediary bodies that process and disseminate information.

**Institutional and financial pressures underlying assessment**

Over the past twenty years an enormous amount of intellectual effort and money has been spent on citation-based systems to assess intellectual impact through peer assessment of research. The assessment has been largely funded from the public purse, while the big multinational journal publishers have created a new line of business by supplying the data. University sectors around the world have embraced this quasi-commercialised assessment model, especially the more prestigious institutions which excel in the ranking systems. Some government research agencies have started to question this entire process, suggesting that publicly funded research should be genuinely available to the public, not hidden behind commercial pay-walls of journal publishers.
Assessing the wider impacts in the social sciences does not lend itself to being so readily commercialised. A research project or research partnership could have a major impact on the quality of life in a small town or suburb, but this impact is unlikely to be recognised beyond that location. Social scientists sometimes come up with novel solutions that eventually have dramatic impacts, such as Bruce Chapman’s income contingent loan scheme for tertiary students, now adopted in a number of countries. This type of exceptional achievement cannot, however, be the yardstick for measuring the value of all research-based policy ideas. In general, calculated attempts by social scientists to change public policy have fallen on deaf ears, usually because incumbent governments have their own priorities and stakeholder support base, and public servants have limited time and capacity to explore new policy ideas (British Academy 2008).
REFERENCES


FURTHER RESOURCES

ARC Linkage Project LP100100380 ‘The utilisation of social science research in policy development and program review’ – publications and symposium resources available at:  
http://www.issr.uq.edu.au/ebp-home


London School of Economics Impact blog http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/


UK Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) programme. ‘Studying the use of research evidence in Parliament’ 2013.  