

A strategy for impact

2020 – 2022

Building the evidence base to
support cost effective public health
practice



A strategy for impact

Overview

This document details the NIHR School for Public Health Research Impact Strategy. An accompanying guidance document is also available which provides advice on impact and how it can be affected.

This is an overarching document and links with [other strategies in the School](#). These connections have been highlighted where relevant throughout the document.

Definition of impact

The National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) defines impact as: “the demonstrable contribution that research makes to society and the economy, of benefit to individuals, organisations and nations.”

As the NIHR School for Public Health Research, we have adapted the definition to reflect the nature of the School, its members and our research: “The NIHR School for Public Health Research defines impact as the demonstrable changes that occur as a result of the existence of the School, our research and the broader activities of our members, staff, associates and partners in relation to the School.”

Although primarily our activity involves research, there are other activities of the School beyond research, in particular our research capacity building remit and our commitment to public, policy and practice involvement and engagement. It is important to acknowledge that all of these SPHR activities contribute to wider impacts, and it would be a lost opportunity not to consider and plan for the potential benefits that we might support better by understanding these contributions. It is also important to acknowledge that all members of SPHR can influence the impact the School has. This includes our researchers, staff, associates, collaborators and partners from the worlds of academia, policy, practice and the public in relation to School activity. Leaders within SPHR have adopted this strategy understanding that everyone has their part to play in creating and supporting the impact of the School.

Vision

Established in 2012 the NIHR School for Public Health Research (SPHR) conducts high quality research to build the evidence base for effective public health practice. Our research looks at what works practically to improve population health and reduce health inequalities, can be applied across the country, and better meets the needs of policymakers, practitioners and the public.

Our vision for impact is to create a culture that maximises the beneficial impact achieved by the School for Public Health Research.

In order to do this, the School is committed to understanding, recognising, enhancing, monitoring and recording the impact we have, and supporting our members, including our PhD students, Fellows and Interns to develop and enhance their impact skills.

We understand that everyone within the School has a role to play, and has a responsibility for, delivering impact.

By embedding impact skills within the School we will maximise the relevance, timeliness, utility and uptake of our research. We will work in a way that addresses the priorities of our policy and practice partners, that takes into account contextual barriers, that engages local stakeholders and decision-makers in the process and has actionable messages. We will collaborate with and engage members of the public to ensure our work is relevant and meets their needs.

We will capitalise on recent investment in infrastructure and career development awards for public health researchers in the School, to build capacity in public health research, inspiring the next generation of academics into public health research with the option to combine academic research with practice as a career pathway.

We will use our unique position as a collaboration for excellence in public health research to make a demonstrable impact on the evidence base for cost-effective public health practice. We will develop a strategic, long-term programme of work that allows the 'big issues' in public health to be addressed.

Principles for impact

- NIHR seeks to maximise the potential impact of research on outcomes for patients and the public and on the efficiency and effectiveness of health and care system by the NIHR. As the NIHR School for Public Health Research we are committed to maximising the potential impact of our research on outcomes for the public and on the efficiency and effectiveness of public health policy and practice.
- We acknowledge that we have a responsibility to our funders (NIHR/DHSC) and the public to ensure that we achieve maximum positive impact, both as a School and as individual members of the School.
- We recognise that everyone within the School has a responsibility to ensure that we maximise the positive impact of the work we do.

- We will collaborate, and co-produce work, with our partners to ensure it continues to be relevant of maximum positive benefit. We understand that evidence-based practice requires practice-based evidence.
- We understand that involving the public in our work improves the quality of our research and helps us to ensure it is relevant. Working with the public means our research is more likely to be transformed into health benefits for people. We believe that it is important to give the public a voice in all our work. The public voice influences everything we do from how we prioritise the issues we want to study, how we carry out research, how we interpret our results to how we share our findings. By providing opportunities for all members of the public to get involved in and engage with our research, we will increase our accountability for the way we spend the public funds we receive. We will pay particular attention to creating opportunities for people experiencing inequalities, marginalised voices those furthest from the research structures to become engaged with our work as we understand our work can have a profound impact on these communities.
- We will value and nurture our ongoing relationships within SPHR, our collaborators, partners and participants. We understand that these relationships need to be built on trust, developed and maintained over time and across projects. These ongoing relationships at both organisational and strategic level and with individual 'research-users' and their communities are key for increased impact are vital to ensuring our work is relevant and has impact.
- We will be cognisant of other research taking place within the wider public health remit and ensure our work builds and compliments this research, rather than replicating it. Thereby increasing the impact both our research, and other research within the area of public health, has.
- Our [Knowledge Exchange Strategic Objective](#) is to embed a culture that is receptive and responsive to the acquisition and application of knowledge and evidence among researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners. We understand that this will help us to maximise our impact to achieving relevant, useful research.
- We understand that impact can be difficult to define, measure and record, it can take on many forms, it is not predictable, and impact may happen until long after activity has ended. Impact may be non-linear and it may not be possible to trace back to a cause. Impact is also seen differently from different perspectives and can be valued differently by different individuals. These challenges are particularly evident within a complex, public health environment. However, we will embrace these challenges and support all SPHR members to do the same.
- We understand that impact takes on many forms, from a change in policy and practice to subtler impacts such as influencing a discussion. Although impact may take on a subtle form, it is still important and it is still important to understand, measure and record. We appreciate it often takes a body of evidence to bring about a more concrete policy change rather than a single piece of research.

- We will measure, monitor and record impact, and present this information so it can be accessed and understood by all our stakeholders. We understand that this is necessary to learn from our actions, be held accountable for our performance and move towards continuous improvement.

Our commitment

As a School, we will ensure that:

- We support our members and give them opportunities and support to develop their impact skills.
- We will build on our established networks and relationships with research users to develop an understanding of priority research areas so we know where and how our work will achieve the most benefit.
- We will draw on our networks and relationships to understand policy and practice contexts and lived experiences. We encourage research users to bring knowledge of context to research.
- Our research will have a 'plan for impact' in place at the outset, involving users at all stages of the research
- We will seek the views and voices of our partners and collaborators throughout our research to ensure our work continues to be relevant and responsive.
- We acknowledge the expertise of, and the active roles played by research users in making impact happen.
- We adopt flexible knowledge exchange strategies, which recognise the roles that partners and collaborators may wish to play
- Impact is reported and reviewed throughout our research. These requirements are embedded in our structures and processed to ensure we have the opportunity to review and adapt our work to maximise impact.
- We provide resources, including tailored advice on knowledge exchange and knowledge mobilisation, to our members.
- We will continue to develop our impact skills and evaluate our work in this area to ensure we continue to improve.
- We will ensure that the impacts and experiences of collaboration and engagement are evaluated and lessons are learned and improvements are made.
- We investigate the role of the School in reducing barriers to achieving impact and address these where possible.
- We encourage, and facilitate time for, collaborative reflection on research design and process, research findings and overall impact (expected and unexpected).
- Impact literacy is the ability to "identify appropriate impact goals and indicators, critically appraise and optimise impact pathways, and reflect on the

skills needed to tailor approaches across contexts” (Bayley & Phipps, 2019). We are committed to improving our impact literacy, and supporting members in developing their own impact literacy.

- This document is a ‘living document’ – it will be updated and amended as we learn and develop in this area.
- Formal review time and resource will be committed to ensure this strategy remains fit for purpose.

Implementation

We will work together to develop an implementation plan with consideration of the resources and systems required to realise the ambition and commitment of this strategy.

For more information, please contact sphr@ncl.ac.uk

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The information in this report/brochure is correct at the time of printing.

A strategy for impact - guidance document

Guidance to provide support on the
SPHR strategy for impact

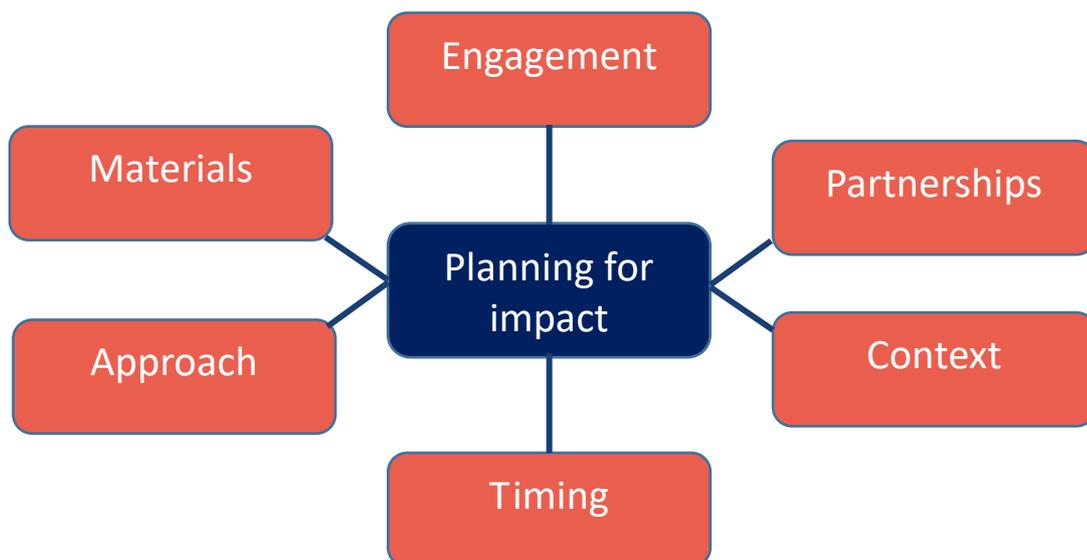


Guidance to provide support on the SPHR strategy for impact - Planning for impact

This guidance has been developed to help support SPHR members, staff, associates and partners to think about impact and how to influence it. This document is not intended to be prescriptive. The relevance of each of the areas discussed below will change depending on the situation and you will have to use your judgement to adapt your approach. This guidance has been written primarily to support researchers, but much of the guidance holds true for other activities in the School. In these areas, please substitute thinking about research with thinking about 'activity'.

Impacts are the outcomes that happen as a result of doing something. Affecting those outcomes (impacts) in a positive manner, and hence improving your impact, can be done by processes known as knowledge exchange or knowledge mobilisation. It is important to recognise this distinction, and understand that, sometimes, even the best knowledge exchange will not result in the impacts you wanted or expected. However, good two-way knowledge exchange, including seeking advice on your research right from the outset, will help you to get your research into a position to create impact.

The [NIHR Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2018 - 2022](#), the [NIHR SPHR Knowledge Sharing Principles](#), provide further guidance. A robust understanding of the systems, processes, organisations and people who contribute to the area that is relevant to your research (sometimes called the 'landscape') will help you to understand how to achieve impact, who needs to be aware of your research and how they can help you to achieve impact. Planning for impact should be done from the very earliest stages of research planning. You should plan to review and evaluate frequently to allow monitoring for any changes and ensure that the positive benefits achieved by the research will be maximised. You may wish to use the following questions to start building a map of how the landscape looks:



Adapted from the NIHR [Plan for impact pages](#).

Planning for impact - What do you want your research to achieve or do?

Firstly, identifying what it is exactly that you would like your research to do will go a long way in helping you to understand how to achieve impact. Think about this in terms of how you would like the research to affect other people (non-academic and academic). Would you like it to change practice? Would you like it to save money for the public health system? Would you like it to make life better for vulnerable people? The aims you identify are your goals and the impact you want to achieve. You may have more than one goal for your research. Your aim is to position your research well. This means getting your research in the right environment, in front of the right person at the right time so it will be adopted and achieve your goal. The following questions will help you to develop an understanding of what the right environment, right person and right time is.

For each goal you identify, then go on to answer these questions:

1. Context – What do you want to research? What environment will your research be used in? What cultural, financial and other factors affect this environment? What systems and processes are involved in achieving your goal? How can they enact your research so it takes effect?

In order to understand how to position your research, and understand who needs to be involved in advising you on your research, you need to understand the context that you want your research to be part of. The research you produce will have to be fit for purpose to be used within these contexts. Think about how you will identify and check your assumptions about what you want to research and the context around it.

2. Partnerships - Who is involved in these systems or can help navigate them? Who makes decisions which affect them? How can you best engage with them and use their skills to ensure the research produced is appropriate and relevant?

Working in partnership and collaborating with the people who you want to use your research will help to ensure that the research is fit for purpose and help to develop people who will champion your research.

Find out who the 'key influencers' are within these environments. Seek out their support and advice. Key influencers can include policy makers, but also practitioners, charities and other third sector organisations who have influence, key contacts and insights into the environment you want to influence.

The [NIHR Knowledge Exchange Strategy 2018 - 2022](#), the [NIHR SPHR Knowledge Sharing Principles](#), the [NIHR SPHR Strategy for Public Involvement and Engagement 2018-2022](#) and the [NIHR SPHR Policy and Practice Engagement and Collaboration Strategy 2018 -2022](#) can provide guidance on these relationships.

3. Engagement - Who will be affected and who will be interested?

In order for your research to be fit for purpose and potentially implemented, you should consider who will be affected or interested and ensure that their needs, expectations and perspectives are taken into account.

See the [NIHR SPHR Strategy for Public Involvement and Engagement 2018-2022](#) and the [NIHR SPHR Policy and Practice Engagement and Collaboration Strategy 2018 -2022](#)

4. Approach - How can you best engage with them?

Once you have identified who you need to engage with, consider how you are going to approach them. It is likely that your research will have several audiences and will need several different approaches in order to reach each of these. Are there existing networks or events in place that you will be able to take advantage of? For example, professional conferences can be a great way to get in front of a captive audience and don't forget that the SPHR network may already have links to key audiences relevant to your work. The SPHR Knowledge Exchange Broker may be able to provide advice on reaching these audiences.

5. Materials – How can you best get your message to them? Why do you want to engage with them?

Different audiences generally need different materials tailored for them to receive and understand messages. In addition, people have different preferences on how they like to receive and engage with information. Consider a range of options and try to make your information as accessible as possible to help get your messages out there (e.g. NIHR SPHR Research Briefing, [POSTnote](#)).

Be clear in your mind about why you want to engage with them and plan to regularly check back that your messages are supporting this. Where possible, it is useful to work with a representative/s of the audience to co-produce dissemination materials.

6. Timing – Are there any opportunities coming up to position your research so it will be taken up?

Reviewing your plan will highlight upcoming opportunities to position your research and get it in front of influential stakeholders. For example, government consultations and enquiries are a great opportunity to get your research in front of decision makers and horizon scanning for these opportunities is recommended (these are circulated to School members regularly by the SPHR Knowledge Exchange Broker).

When you have worked through these questions, then go on to identify your assumptions and see if you can test them. This will further develop your understanding.

The answers to these questions will help you to start building a map of how the system works in relation to your goal and allow you to plan ways to achieve this impact and goal.

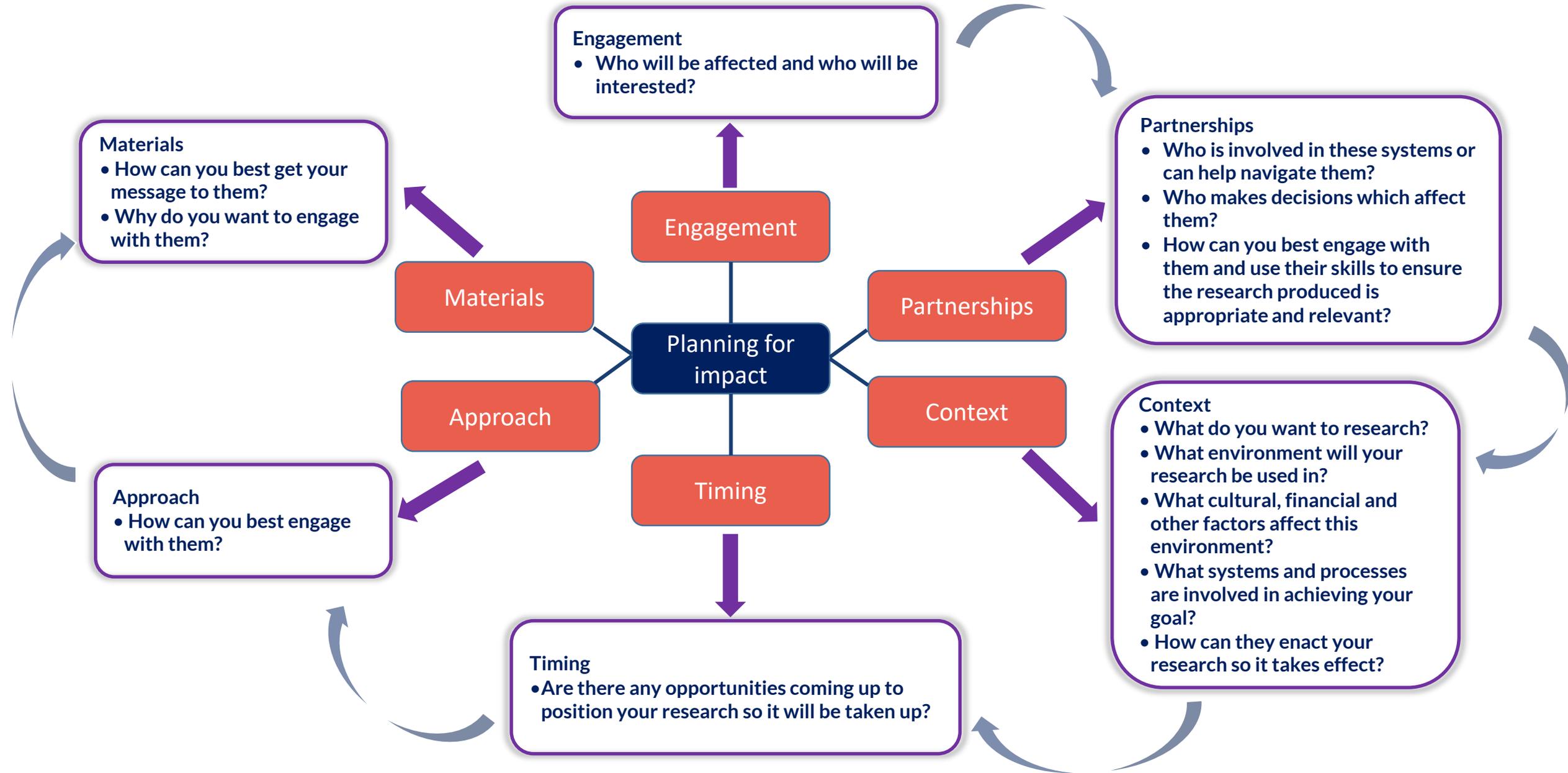
It is also useful at this early stage to think about how you will know you have had an impact. Are there any specific outcomes that would signal that you have been successful in producing impact? How could you go about capturing, recording and potentially measuring these? The SPHR Knowledge Exchange Broker is a useful resource in terms of seeking advice on how to identify, capture and record impact.

Please remember to inform the Directorate on your impact and the impact of your work so we can celebrate and record these successes.

For more information, please contact sphr@ncl.ac.uk

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Useful impact resources

Further information and support on how to understand impact in the context of your work can be sought from the NIHR School for Public Health Research Knowledge Exchange Broker (katie.appleby@newcastle.ac.uk).

The NIHR website has a number of useful resources, including the [NIHR Plan for impact](#) and [NIHR Reporting impact](#).

The NIHR Clinical Research Network has produced advice for people working in health services research. [They have tips on dissemination and impact](#).

The Department for Health and Social Care has a Translating Research for Policy Makers Toolkit. Copies of the slides describing this toolkit can be obtained by contacting the SPHR Knowledge Exchange Broker (katie.appleby@newcastle.ac.uk).

[The Canadian Knowledge Mobilisation toolkit](#) has many tools to help researchers plan, carry out and evaluate knowledge mobilisation activities.

[Research Impact Canada](#) has a useful [resources section](#) that focus on dissemination and capacity building for knowledge mobilization, providing tools and supports that promote best practices and innovative approaches.

[The ESRC impact toolkit](#) details how to collaborate and influence policymakers. 50 case studies are available.

[The Health Foundation communication toolkit](#) is an excellent resource for understanding communications strategies in general, and the communications strategy template is particularly good.

[Impact Literacy toolkit](#) focuses on the first step as identifying the problem in collaboration with research users.

AdvanceHE have developed a [Research Leader's Impact Toolkit](#) which can be accessed by members.

The company Fast Track Impact has some free resources at:
<https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/>

Julie Bayley is Director of Research Impact Development at University of Lincoln and has produced a number of papers on impact:

[Bayley J, Phipps D. Building the Concept of Research Impact Literacy. Evidence and Policy. 2019 Nov;15\(4\):597-606.](#)

[Bayley J and Phipps D. Extending the concept of research impact literacy: levels of literacy, institutional role and ethical considerations. Emerald Open Res 2019, 1:14](#)

Bayley and Phipps work have gone on to develop the [Impact Literacy Workbook](#) and other [useful resources](#).