

University of South Wales: Investing in Researchers Ability to Create Impact

Background

Achieving and demonstrating real-world impact from research is becoming a vital skill for university researchers at all levels. The University of South Wales (USW) is committed to being a catalyst for economic growth in the region and creating impacts that have wider benefits for society. The research impact agenda is therefore crucial to the University's vision of being *'The University of choice in Wales and beyond for students, organisations and communities who value vocationally-focused education and applied research which provides solutions to problems that affect society and the economy'*. The development of staff to enable them to grow their external impact activities is therefore very important to USW.

Researcher Development Initiatives

To meet this strategic need USW's Research & Business Engagement (RBE) department created a dedicated initiative called the Impact Investment Scheme (I2S) to invest in staff who wanted to amplify the impact of their research and expertise and shine a light on the subsequent impacts that were created.

Impact Investment Scheme (I2S)

The Impact Investment Scheme (I2S) was approved by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Board in 2015 and provided researchers with dedicated funding and one-to-one support to support their external engagement activities in the following categories:

- Enabling staff to develop strategic partnerships with external organisations such as businesses, public sector bodies, Third Sector organisations, NGOs, in the UK or internationally leading to increased engagement.
- Enabling staff to develop collaborative research or knowledge exchange activities with external partners.
- Enabling staff to develop their commercial potential and test an innovative commercial idea arising from the University's research and/or expertise which could lead to the development of new commercial products, processes, or services.

Researchers were able to use small amounts of funding to help them engage with external organisations. They also received coaching support from RBE development officers to help them reflect on their progress and identify future needs for support and development.

40+ researchers were supported via I2S across all Faculties and feedback was very positive:

- "The support and input has been immensely useful. It is helpful to realise, [RBE] are there to help us succeed and will work with us to achieve our aims"
- "an admirable scheme, one of the most important and innovative USW initiatives. Impact and outreach is a trump card for USW"
- "The I2S scheme has offered a great support..."
- "The I2S scheme helped me develop my ideas further, meet possible partners and start working on a research funding application within a short period of time"
- "really useful scheme and I appreciate your support to develop my work"
- "has enabled expansion into an area that would have otherwise been unavailable to us"
- "The work I have put into searching for stakeholders has also been very valuable. This is not something that a psychologist and researcher would have normally done, and I would not have thought to do it without [support from I2S]"

Impact Workshop Programme

In response to a training needs survey carried out, RBE followed up I2S with a series of impact workshops offering specialist training to academics in impact development and collaborative working. The workshops are tailored to researchers' needs and availability with two formats being used:

- Introductory bite-size, lunch hour sessions to develop a common understanding of impact, why it's important and the support available.
- In-depth, half day, highly interactive, practical workshops to develop researchers to plan for and embed impact in the research project life cycle.

All workshop participants were encouraged to spend time thinking through a pathway to impact for their own research and identify practical next steps. Those attending the half-day workshops create a detailed impact plan which identifies potential collaborative partners, engagement activities, impact indicators and resources required.

Over 100 researchers benefited from the workshops and we received some great feedback:

- "It [workshop] was really useful and particularly the discussion and examples. Thanks for the opportunity as I feel I know much more about this important area"
- "Learned a lot by actually mapping out impact"
- "Great to take a multi-disciplinary approach, working across campus and developing links."
- "Useful for me to prepare the impact part of the research proposal"
- "Very useful and exciting workshop..."
- "Essential, informative & accessible. Now feel far more clued up re: impact"

One of the outcomes of the workshops was the development of an Impact Toolkit which is accessed via the university intranet and provides a repository of best practice documents and additional guides and templates to help staff plan and develop their own impact activities.

Examples of the tangible benefits and outcomes of I2S:

Strategic partnership	Dr Emma Hayhurst, established a partnership agreement with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, to develop a sustainable, long term, cross-faculty strategic partnership to develop collaborative opportunities. The partners went on to secure external funding for a jointly hosted conference bringing together HEIs and all 3 Welsh National Park Authorities to facilitate the transfer of knowledge and ideas. As result have identified a number of cross-sector collaborative research opportunities.
Collaborative R&D	Prof Sandra Esteves investigated the potential for collaborative research & development and has gone on to secure £1m Welsh Government and European funding to work with industry partners such as Tata Steel and Welsh Water.
Commercial Feasibility	Prof Mark Williams undertook a market feasibility study for an innovative respiratory assessment concept which then enabled him to secure Pathfinder Funding from the Welsh Government's Life Science Bridging Fund for a Proof of Concept project to further commercialisation.

Lucas Brown, Knowledge Exchange & Impact Manager, lucas.brown@southwales.ac.uk

Donna Szarun, Knowledge Exchange & Impact Officer, donna.szarun@southwales.ac.uk