

The University of Auckland Research Impact Strategy

What is research impact?

Research impact is “*The contribution that research and creative practice makes to society, the environment and the economy*”.

Background and context

The concept of impact is becoming increasingly important to New Zealand’s research ecosystem. In mid-2017 the Ministry of Business Innovation & Employment (MBIE) launched a national dialogue by publishing the discussion paper ‘[The Impact of Science](#)’ to begin to define impact and the implications of an impact agenda for the science system. MBIE received 59 submissions on the paper, from research organisations, tertiary education organisations, funding bodies, government and business. A [summary of submissions](#) shows that although the scope needed to be broader to cover all research, the majority of the research community welcomed the paper. However, it was clear that MBIE’s focus was on how to conduct evaluation of the impact of research they fund and not on the support and infrastructure needed to help develop future impact.

There were a number of other significant national developments concerning research impact in 2018. The Health Research Council revamped the assessment of grant applications, stressing the importance of a well thought through pathway to impact; and the Tertiary Education Commission released the [Terms of Reference for the review of the New Zealand Performance-based Research Fund \(PBRF\)](#) which had a strong emphasis on assessing impact on communities, the environment, business or government sectors.

However, the concept of formally addressing impact is still relatively new to researchers in New Zealand. This poses several opportunities and challenges which are outlined in the document below.

Why does the University of Auckland need a Research Impact Strategy?

There are numerous benefits to designing and generating impactful research and in having the University infrastructure, advice and recognition that supports this. A fit-for-purpose impact strategy can:

- Support us in producing beneficial research impact to society, the environment and the economy.
- Help attract more and new sources of funding. Particularly international, philanthropic, and industry.
- Improve our reputation and relationship with local and national communities.
- Embrace and support staff and student attitudes to wanting to make a difference in society.
- Assist in attracting world-class researchers and the best students.
- Improve our international rankings.
- Support us in producing beneficial research impact with Māori.
- Position us as ahead of the game in terms of government and/or funder impact reporting requirements.
- Provide our researchers with new research questions or fresh insights into their work.
- Support our future research leaders to develop new transferable skills.
- Recognise and provide mechanisms to support research excellence in its many forms, and reward ‘non-traditional’ research and impact activity.

Whilst this strategy is driven by the benefits outlined above, a number of concerns were raised during the consultation process. These are listed below:

- Although it is often impossible to foresee the impacts of basic research and may take many years or decades to be realised, all research and creative practice has the *potential* for societal impact. All will be valued within the strategy no matter the scale of reach or significance of that potential impact.
- Academic impact (the contribution that research makes to advancing understanding across and within disciplines) is an important component of impact and shouldn’t be ignored. However, academic impact is often conflated with dissemination and attention.

- Researchers have finite capacity and impact activities often take more time, effort and require different skills than dissemination of research, therefore impact will understandably not be a priority for some and will certainly not be a requirement of all.
- Many of our researchers are already conducting impactful research but are often not recognised or rewarded for this, or their work is perceived negatively.

We may have limited control over the impact of our research, but we can at least foster an environment that increases the likelihood of impact occurring. This document outlines a University of Auckland Research Impact Strategy with the aim of enabling a positive and supportive impact culture and environment within the University. This strategy is long-term, ambitious, and created with input from a wide range of enthusiastic academic and professional stakeholders with the ultimate aim of supporting our researchers to achieve impact on a local, regional, national and international scale.

Proposed Research Impact Strategy:

Vision

We will make a difference to the lives of the people of Auckland, Aotearoa-New Zealand and beyond by contributing our expertise to create positive change. We will harness our cutting-edge research and world-leading knowledge and work in meaningful partnership with our communities to ensure the greatest possible impact is realised.

Values

- **Whanaungatanga** (relationship creation through shared experiences and working together which provides people with a sense of belonging. It develops as a result of rights and obligations, which also serve to strengthen each member of a community. It also extends to others to whom one develops a reciprocal relationship). We strive to support and contribute to our communities by listening and responding to their needs.
- **Manaakitanga** (the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others). We are open to build new partnerships and aim for true meaningful collaborations with benefits for all.
- **Noho haepapa** (to be accountable, responsible). The University embraces, endorses and promotes its role as a “critic and conscience of society”.
- **Hei hua mā te katoa** (research bringing benefit to society). We have respect for all research and creative practice. We encourage researchers to address societal issues but respect academic freedom.
- **Whai mātauranga** (seeking, creating, disseminating, and celebrating knowledge). We want researchers to feel comfortable with what they are able to achieve in terms of research impact and celebrate their successes.

Strategic Objectives

This strategy is framed around four inter-related pillars: *understanding*, *enabling*, *identifying* and *publicising* impact. The following strategic objectives have been developed through consultation with academic and professional staff representing all faculties, career stages and relevant service divisions.

1. **Understanding:** Nurturing the development of a positive impact culture within our University

- Provide a central repository with information, tools and guides related to research impact presented in a variety of formats.
- Develop an impact case study database with exemplars identified at faculty and school level, covering all forms of research impact and promote these internally.
- Deliver impact training opportunities for local research support teams and other professional staff.
- Develop a series of specialised workshops covering impact competencies for both doctoral students and academic staff.
- Develop an internal communications strategy to build knowledge and acceptable use of terminology to grow impact literacy.
- Promote the benefits of designing research to enhance impact.
- Identify both academic and local research support impact champions.

2. Enabling: Providing opportunities to enable and empower our academics to engage with our communities and other stakeholders, offering expert support and celebrating significant achievements

- Provide clear signposting to specialist support and review gaps and capacity limitations in support available.
- Celebrate and promote examples of engagement and impact successes.
- Consider whether it is appropriate to broaden promotion criteria to recognise research excellence in its many forms and clarify the optional impact evidence required for promotion.
- Assess the potential for launching an internal, flexible and responsive impact fund, as well as other funding mechanisms, to enhance the impact of our research.
- Develop an impact network or networks to connect those who are interested in impact or who are engaging in impact activities already.
- Support initiatives to encourage and enable cross-disciplinary linkages.
- Provide opportunities for our local communities and other stakeholders to share with us what impact means to them.
- Promote the use of open-access publishing options to maximise research visibility and lead conversations on making it more economically viable.

3. Identifying: Realising potential opportunities and being ahead of the game in terms of reporting requirements

- Conduct a review of available impact tracking tools in preparation of impact reporting becoming a government-directed mandate.
- Share Alumni Relations and Development impact reporting template as an example for capturing short-term post-project outcomes and potential impact.
- Investigate more robust ways to share and promote our expertise both internally and externally.
- Work with faculties to develop impact implementation plans that are relevant and focus on their own impact priorities.
- Host industry/stakeholder days to identify stakeholder needs.

4. Publicising: Embracing our role as critic and conscience of society, proving our impact, and inviting our communities to engage in two-way conversations to add-value to our research.

- Promote our impact successes externally to showcase the economic, societal and environmental benefit The University of Auckland makes locally, nationally and internationally.
- Investigate mechanisms to increase the promotion of evidence-based news.
- Utilise our web presence to show how and why to partner with the University, with an aim to generate new research partnerships and position ourselves as a partner of choice.
- Investigate new ways for our communities to see, hear and engage with our research.

How will we deliver our Research Impact Strategy?

This strategy will complement [The University of Auckland Research Strategy 2017-2022](#) to help meet our ambitions to greatly increase the impact of our research.

An implementation plan will be developed to accompany the strategy. This will be a long-term plan to prioritise actions, outline resource, measure success, and provide accountability and visibility to help drive change.