

**Report on the
AIREN Project Event on
Research Impact**

Held on Wednesday 26th January 2022

This AIREN Event discussed what is meant by 'research impact' and the growing drive and importance of delivering and communicating research with impact. Samples of resources available to support PI's to plan, capture and communicate research impact effectively across a range of purposes including the preparation of funding proposals and for public engagement were shared. Research impact in action in the context of addressing and delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals was also presented. Advice on the art of communicating research impact effectively was also shared.

We thank each of our presenters for their time and contribution at the AIREN event on 26th January 2022:

Mr Peter Brown, Director, Irish Research Council, gave opening remarks on 'What is Research Impact'. He commended UCD, QUB, Ulster and InterTradelreland on the AIREN Project initiative which is happening at a very opportune time with the current emphasis on all-island collaboration in research and innovation. He introduced the Irish Research Council and the mandate it has to support all disciplinary and multidisciplinary research. Peter shared his perspectives on research impact, from impact simply 'going beyond the research and where the research is done' to a the more multifaced and traditional focus on quantitative and commercialisation impacts. He highlighted the importance of the link between research and innovation, particularly for the longer-term impact of basic research, and spoke about the broad spectrum and different types of impact there are including for instance impact on the economy, health and wellbeing, social and cultural. Peter also highlighted that the internal impact delivered by research and innovation on the teaching of students and in developing their skills and knowledge is also extremely important and valuable. He advised that impact, and also the collaborations involved, should be considered during and throughout all stages of the research life cycle - this point was echoed and expanded on further by other presenters and during the Panel Discussion. Peter also commented on how Open Science and Research Culture underpin and promote research impact, and he noted the resources UCD has already developed to support the planning, capture and communication of research impact. Peter closed with final remarks on how the need to deliver impact to address global societal challenges has never been more important than now.

Mr Liam Cleere, Senior Manager, Research Analytics and Impact, UCD Research presented on the growing drive, resources and supports for research impact. Liam explained that while Ireland does not have a Research Excellence Framework as in the UK, research impact is embedded in national and funding agency strategies and is an integral part of university research strategy and culture. He shared the definitions of academic and economic & social research impacts that are broadly used by the RCUK and within UCD. He introduced the Kellogg Foundation - Logic Model for explaining the differences between inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts through the impact life cycle. Liam outlined UCD's approach to developing capacity for research impact in the University, which evolved over many years. He shared a number of initiatives UCD developed including an annual Impact Case Study competition to celebrate research impact; a research impact seminar series; public engagement supports; the use of analytics such as Elsevier SciVal and

Altmetrics; systems to enable researchers to maintain an up-to-date online Researcher Profile; an internal Output-Based Research Support Scheme (OBRSS) to assist researchers with the day-to-day costs of research. In 2019 the Higher Education Authority (HEA) awarded UCD funding to develop impact-related resources and to make them available to other higher education institutions. A Research Impact Working Group was then established to progress the project which developed a Research Impact Toolkit of resources and supports for researchers to plan, capture, communicate, and monitor their research impact.

Prof Emma Crew, Professor of Social Anthropology, Director, Global Research Networks for Parliaments and People, SOAS University of London. Emma presented on research impact in the context of addressing and delivering on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). She works on international aid, development, and politics since the late 1980s, with much of her work relating to SDG's 16 & 17. She shared great insights and many examples of research impact in practice from projects she is involved in. Throughout her presentation Emma emphasised a key message that having impact means working with people ethically and giving attention to practical detail. She outlined a framework for understanding impact and expanded on the links element of this further to highlight the importance of learning about impact through partnerships. She outlined five principles of building partnerships including to think about the sustainable legacy; focus on relationships and always ask / check who am I leaving out and make sure to involve them; challenge your own assumptions; be ready for hard work to navigate difference; democratizing not decolonizing. Emma talked also about relationships and outlined the importance of ethics in how you work in a partnership. When managing risks, Emma advises to always take advice from those closed to the risks and the local setting, particularly in the context of her work which is often based in difficult and fragile environments. Emma closed with comments on communication and how it is important in any new collaboration to discuss and agree how they wish to communicate. Links to some of Emma's current work include [Learning from research coalitions](#) and [Research Ethics](#).

Dr Claire O'Connell, Science Journalist and Writer, presented on communicating for and about impact. Claire opened by outlining 4 steps in the art of communicating effectively, and then explained and gave practical tips and advice on each. The first step of 'Know What to Say' involves knowing what research impact is and the various types of impact there are ranging from economic, political, cultural, scientific, social, health etc. It is important then to focus, for instance by writing one sentence that describes the impact you want to convey. Step 2 in the art of communicating is to 'Think about what your audience wants to know' and refers to your bubble of expertise, and for interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research, the connection(s) within and between your bubble and other bubbles of expertise is also important for effective communication. Claire advises to think about the audience and listener through a series of questions including who are they? what is in it for them? what interests them? how can I get their attention quickly? what do they want to know? For step 3 'Make your communication immediately interesting/relatable to them' Claire gave lots of tips and advice on how to structure a communication to hook the audience and how to hit the main points home once you have their attention. The final step 'Keep everything clear' refers to keeping language in a communication as simple as possible, avoid acronyms and jargon, and be careful when presenting graphs and statistics so the meaning and interpretation of them is clear. Similarly to previous presenters, Claire advised strongly that impact and communications should be planned at the start of any project, and the rationality of the people you are communicating with should also be considered as early as possible.

Dr Ciara Leonard, Public Affairs Manager, UCD Research & Innovation, chaired a very stimulating Q&A and Panel Discussion session. It opened with discussion about whether a Research Excellence Framework such as that in the UK will be introduced in Ireland, and the immense resources and time such a system requires were commented on. It was also noted there is fragmentation in the research impact system in Ireland that would be beneficial to draw together. Peter highlighted a new Report published by the Royal Irish Academy and the Irish Research Council on '[Research for Public Policy: An Outline Roadmap](#)' which looks at and provides recommendations on what is needed in Ireland to develop evidence-informed policy between government and researchers for the public good and to address global challenges. The role of Research Manager's and Administrators in meeting the challenges research impact presents was also raised, and Emma shared her view that they are integral to achieving impact that their role and contribution should be developed as partnership with the academics. Claire was asked for her advice on how to select the most effective medium for communicating research impact and she used the government's communications for the Covid-19 vaccine roll out as an example of how different mediums should be used for different audiences. In her response Claire also highlighted the need for communications training at PhD and Postdoctoral level. Liam was asked to comment on the challenge of tracking long-term and cumulative research impact, and he advised that there are lots of different approaches ranging from the use of bibliometrics, case studies. He also highlighted the need for robust data capture systems and again the importance of communication. During the discussion Emma suggested it would be useful for Funding Agencies to offer funding schemes to support researchers to carry out post-project follow-up to evaluate and expand the research impact their projects have had. The final question invited the Panel to share their comments and tips on how to incorporate research impact in narrative CV's which many funders are now beginning to ask for in the context of frameworks such as DORA.

ⁱ The AIREN Project is being delivered with support from InterTradelreland's Synergy initiative. Synergy is a cross-border cluster initiative set up by InterTradelreland, the cross-border trade and business development body. It aims to scale cross border collaboration among SMEs and other players such as universities, third sector organisations and government agencies using cluster and networking supports.