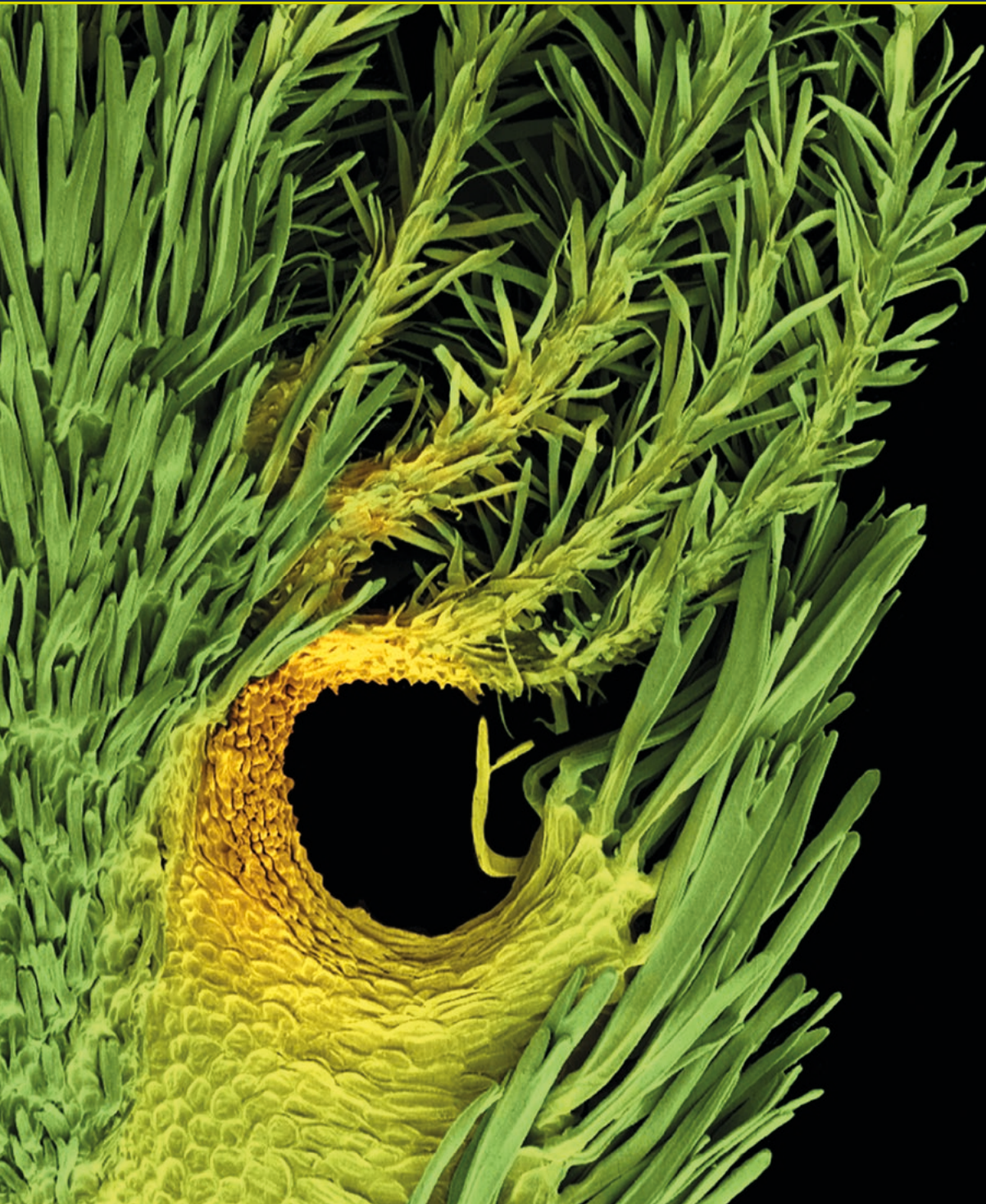


The creative role of research

Understanding research impact in the creative
and cultural sector



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Foreword



There is no doubt that the UK excels at culture and creativity. People come from all over the world, and also visit digitally, to experience, enjoy, and learn from our first class museums, theatre, radio, music and the rest. The UK is also at the forefront of the creative industries, a high-growth sector of the economy that is now essential to the nation's prosperity.

Culture and the creative economy are by definition driven by innovation and new knowledge, and University research is a primary source of new knowledge. Although under pressure from international competitors, UK universities still fare well in global research league tables¹.

Putting the cultural and academic sectors together, academic research plays a pivotal role in the cultural and creative ecosystem, generating new ideas, creating new networks and nurturing talent development. However, as the Arts and Humanities Research Council notes: "The UK boasts a world-leading position in both arts and humanities research and the creative industries. [But] realising fertile connections between the two is neither inevitable nor easy." (AHRC)

I therefore welcome this new report from King's College London into the Creative Role of Research; a report that improves our knowledge about how research affects and impacts both the cultural and creative sectors and the wider world, thereby helping us to understand how those 'fertile connections' can be increased in number and quality.

The report analyses 1582 impact case studies that were submitted nationally to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as part of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework. It provides a taxonomy for eight areas of impact, including influencing industry practice, transforming public understanding, developing audiences, informing curricula and pedagogy, promoting social change, developing policy, growing the economy, and improving health and wellbeing. It discusses the activities and partnerships that gave rise to those impacts, and offers an account of the forms of evidence used to support the impact claims.

Academics and creative practitioners have always forged relationships, collaborated, borrowed from and influenced one another; but in the past these relationships often came about by chance, and their characteristics and consequences were poorly

understood. This report provides evidence of the immense scale of the collaboration that is going on, and the wide range of academic disciplines that are involved, but it focuses most closely on the impact that these activities have within the world.

Impact takes many forms. It is not only about the direct effect of research – delving into creative practice in order to hone and improve it – because it extends, significantly, into the public understanding of creativity and culture. And impact is felt in many places, with Higher Education itself changed by collaborative research processes. Research produces new products and services, but it also drives talent development. In addition, it aids policy development: this report itself should be used to shape policy, providing as it does a full recognition of the importance both of research and the creative industries, and a better understanding of the connections between them.

In particular, this report disabuses us of the notion that the connection between research and the creative economy is a simple matter of linear transfer from idea to implementation. Collaborations between Higher Education and the creative sector are complex, and their success depends on the quality of relationships, the creation of networks, and the stimulus generated by collaboration as much as on the formality of research processes and methodologies.

I hope that the report will inspire researchers from a wide range of academic disciplines to embrace new opportunities to partner with the creative and cultural sector and, at the same time, illuminate for artists and creative professionals the many ways in which academic research can inform and develop their practice.

Research is an adventure, a step into the realm of uncertainty; and it often leads to unexpected conclusions and unlooked-for destinations. It is that spirit of open inquiry that produces advances in the human spirit, which ultimately are more important than financial return. Impact emerges in this report as not only a utilitarian measurement (which we need), but also as a multi-faceted enquiry, full of nuance and interest.

Prof. John Holden, Cultural Fellow, King's College London, Visiting Professor, University of Leeds and Honorary Professor, University of Hong Kong

¹ [timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/world-reputation-rankings-2017-results-announced](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/world-reputation-rankings-2017-results-announced)



“The ways in which universities contribute to the cultural sector are well documented – through the generation of relevant knowledge, as partners and collaborators, through provision of publicly accessible spaces and, not least, through the education of creative graduates (who also find employment in sectors way beyond the creative industries). The contribution of the cultural sector – its people and organisations – to universities is perhaps less well understood. Since arriving at King’s five years ago, I’ve been privileged to work with colleagues across the university to develop a distinctive approach to culture and cultural partnerships, embedding collaborations that have been transformative in both education and research. For students, these partnerships help to increase creativity, flexibility and employability, developing their networks and offering a chance to test learning in environments beyond King’s. For academics, art and artists can provoke imaginative perspectives

on research questions as well as new mechanisms to communicate findings to a broader public. The contribution that arts and culture can make to problem solving and innovative thinking is in no way restricted to disciplines within the arts and humanities. Research at Michigan State University found that creative experiences are ‘significantly correlated with producing patentable inventions and founding new companies’ and that lifelong participation in the arts ‘yields the most significant impacts for innovators and entrepreneurs’. The university’s new Strategic Vision is underpinned by this approach to partnership and its potential to help King’s achieve its ambitions on the road to its 200th anniversary, in 2029.”

Deborah Bull, Assistant Principal (London), King’s College London



“During my time at Arts Council England we became a truly research-driven organisation, thanks to an expanded unit in Manchester which informed all our policy initiatives. At the same time we saw the crossover between technology and creativity take flight...with games, Virtual Reality and other embryonic sparks yet to be fully realised. To this I might add the diligent consumer research we rely on in media to shape our programme offer.

All well and good. But perhaps the research I value above all recognises the serendipitous discoveries that intriguing research projects, with no obvious initial utility, eventually yield. So, yes to research; yes to funded research and please don’t make it solely utilitarian.”

Sir Peter Bazalgette, British television executive and author



“The King’s College London survey of the creative role of research shows the extent to which academic research is engaging with the cultural and creative sector and role the creative sector plays in maximising the impact of academic research. The opportunities and benefits of such collaboration are mutual. This

report provides a platform for discussion as to how the huge body of existing research informs creative practice and public understanding.”

Jenny Waldman CBE, Director, 14-18 NOW, Cultural Fellow at King’s



“I am one of a number of academic scientists who have been working for several years to integrate conversations about science – by which I mean, broadly, the scientific method of enquiry, as well as the discoveries of modern science – into popular culture. I included my work in communicating science through my writing and broadcasting into an impact case study for my physics department’s submission into the last REF exercise. As such I had to stress just how integral my research has been in enabling me to achieve what I have

in public engagement. I continue to carry out research in theoretical physics within the nuclear physics group at the University of Surrey and I also publish papers in a new field of research called quantum biology. For me, the joys of fundamental research and of enthusing the wider public about what I do are integral to each other.”

Jim Al-Khalili OBE, Professor of Physics and Professor of Public Engagement in Science, University of Surrey, Cultural Fellow at King’s



“In my work with King’s I have had first-hand experience of the ground-breaking new ideas that can be catalysed through the collaboration of scholars, artists and arts professionals. From a new vision for the future of Carnival, to the creation of a Museum of Homelessness, to enhanced communication between young people and clinicians through interactive forum

theatre, the breadth and depth of new work emerging at the interface between Higher Education and the creative and cultural sector in the UK is innovative, pioneering and vital.”

Hilary Carty, Director, Clore Leadership Programme, Cultural Fellow at King’s



“As somebody working in the creative industries, I’m acutely aware that we still rely far too much on anecdote and optimism rather than solid research and analysis as a basis for thinking about the future. For a sector whose success depends, almost by definition, on the generation of new knowledge and an understanding of new and unexpected dynamics, that’s crazy. Robust

research doesn’t just give us a better understanding of what works in our world and why, it’s the window that allows the academic world to better understand the needs, recognised and unrecognised, of the creative economy.”

John Newbiggin OBE, Chairman, Creative England



“The roles of research and collaboration are a rich – and urgent – part of the cultural and educational landscape in the UK today. Many artists and academics regularly come together to share their knowledge, and to create multi-arts projects that are innovative, thought-provoking and entirely unique. Even better, their explorations often cross cultural, intellectual and national boundaries, as well as create

new audiences for their work. The higher education sector in the UK is a brilliant crucible for forging new ideas and partnerships: in dance, music, literature, visual arts and more.”

Professor Joanna MacGregor OBE FRAM, Head of Piano, Royal Academy of Music, University of London, Cultural Fellow at King’s



“The hope is that these growing creative catalyzations, inter-disciplinary partnerships and deep collaborations with culture will open up the academy to the broader public in ways that might truly alter our understanding of research and education. We are entering an age of burgeoning cross-disciplinary collaboration – of new creative mechanisms for the analysis, presentation, and

dissemination of research, of new forms of academic output that will utterly explode traditional intellectual silos.”

Dr Gus Casely-Hayford, British curator, cultural historian and Director of the National Museum of African Art in Washington, Cultural Fellow at King’s



“Making art is in many ways like research: it is a process of exploration, experiment, and discovery. I look forward to closer collaboration between creative practitioners and multi and interdisciplinary researchers. Collaboration and exchange, based on mutual respect and trust, can enrich arts practitioners

and academics alike, providing challenge and stimulus. The opportunity to reflect on practice and incubate new ideas leads to unexpected outcomes and innovation.”

Sue Hoyle OBE, Cultural Fellow at King’s



'Madness & Modernity', © Wellcome Collection



Contents

Executive summary	09
Pathways to impact	12
The creative role of research: final reflections	14



'Performing Migration' © Mark Loudon

Executive summary

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a national assessment exercise that measures the quality of research undertaken across all UK universities. In 2014 this included, for the very first time, an enquiry into the *impact* of academic research beyond Higher Education (HE) in the form of brief narrative case studies.

Impact was defined by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) as ‘an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’. The two key criteria highlighted by HEFCE for the assessment of impact were *reach* and *significance*. Though the definitions of these terms differed between each academic panel tasked with scoring research impact (see Section 4.1), they broadly focus on the scale and diversity of beneficiaries, and the ways in which academic research has made a difference for an individual or community, policy or practice.

A total of 6,975 impact case studies were submitted to the REF 2014 exercise, most of which are now available in the public domain in a searchable online database. This database provides a rich source of information about the ways in which researchers have engaged with projects and programmes in the creative and cultural sector, many of which had their genesis long before impact was incorporated into research assessment practices.

This report seeks to understand the relationship between all fields of research and their impact within the creative and cultural sector. Based on an analysis of 1,582 impact case studies from the above database that were identified in this study as being germane to the sector, the report illuminates the different types of impact described, discusses the activities and partnerships that gave rise to those impacts, and offers an account of the forms of evidence used to support the impact claims. It does not, however, seek to make judgements about the quality of the REF impact projects described, nor does it contain guidance on writing impact case studies. Rather its goal is to better understand the longstanding ways in which academics and creative practitioners have forged relationships, collaborated, borrowed from and influenced one another.

We hope that *The Creative Role of Research* will inspire researchers from a wide range of academic disciplines to foster new opportunities to collaborate with the creative and cultural sector and, at the same time, illuminate for artists and creative professionals the manifold ways in which academic research can inform and develop their practice.

Headline findings

For the creative and cultural sector

- The creative and cultural sector plays a significant role in maximising the impact of research in the UK. REF 2014 demonstrated that there was a degree of interaction with the sector appearing in a quarter of the total number of impact case studies available for analysis.
- *Informing creative practice* and *transforming public understanding* were the primary areas impacted through researcher involvement in the creative and cultural sector in REF 2014.
- The creative and cultural sector was linked to research from a wide range of academic disciplines. While there are strong disciplinary links between research in the arts and humanities, considerable interdisciplinary activity also takes place between the sector and all fields of academic research.
- Creative and cultural sector collaboration with HE enabled knowledge exchange on a broad range of topics, from science and politics to human rights and social responsibility, which in turn facilitated new creative responses to issues of social and political significance.

For the HE sector

- The impact of research in the arts and humanities, the research discipline primarily associated with creative and cultural sector, scored more highly than any other discipline in REF 2014, having received the highest concentration of world-leading rankings (4*) for the reach and significance of its research.
- HE partnerships and collaborations with local and regional cultural organisations were far outnumbered by projects describing work with a national or international partner. This indicates the important role that national cultural organisations play in bringing research to wider audiences but also suggests there is an as yet untapped opportunity for universities to develop more work with sector organisations based outside of the capital.
- Research impact on or through the creative and cultural sector is seldom achieved through a single, focused activity or mechanism: it is

the product of various interdependent, yet often disparate activities spanning multiple areas.

- Research impact was not evaluated by just one yardstick but through a web of indicators. While evaluation of *reach* was largely evidenced through quantitative data, evaluation of *significance* was more nuanced, ranging from evidence that acted as an endorsement or a pledge to think or act differently in the future, to reflections on longer-term change. However, across all evidence types, evaluation of research impact was most often anchored in the immediate period after an event or activity, rather than over a longer term.

Using the REF alone to understand the nature of exchanges between universities and the creative and cultural sector is limited to showing what research has done for the creative and cultural sector and not what the sector can do for research. Developing a two-way dialogue may enhance understanding of the benefits of partnership to the development of research and the generation of new knowledge.

Further breakdown of key findings

Which academic research disciplines have an impact on or through the creative and cultural sector?

- While research impact on and through the creative and cultural sector had close ties with research in the arts and humanities, the sector nevertheless interacted with almost all fields of academic study. 75 per cent of the case studies that were identified in this study as being relevant to the sector came from the arts and humanities, with the remainder coming from other fields.
- The academic disciplines with the greatest interaction with the creative and cultural sector in REF 2014 were:
 - English language and literature (15 per cent sample, 238 case studies)
 - history (14 per cent sample, 222 case studies)
 - art and design: history, practice and theory (11 per cent, 176 case studies).

Beyond the arts and humanities, other prominent disciplines were:

- geography, environmental studies and archaeology (5 per cent sample, 79 case studies)
- psychology, psychiatry and neuroscience (3 per cent sample, 41 case studies)
- physics (1 per cent sample, 23 case studies).

What form did research impact take in or through the creative and cultural sector?

- There were eight key areas in which researcher engagement with the creative and cultural sector had an impact. Listed by the most prominent type first, these include:
 - influencing industry practice
 - transforming public understanding
 - audience development
 - informing pedagogy and curricula
 - social change
 - policy development
 - economic growth
 - improving health and wellbeing.
- ‘Influencing industry practice’ within the creative and cultural sector was the primary area in which research had an impact, with research collaboration and practice-led research making a marked contribution to innovative practice.
- The creative and cultural sector played an important role in ‘transforming public understanding’ by translating research into impacts on opinions and behaviour, and brokering wider audiences for academic research (‘audience development’) through the translation of research findings into more widely accessible formats. The prevalence and quality of such impacts suggests that research collaborations are being utilised to address issues of social and political significance by combining research with creative practice.

How did researchers engage with the creative and cultural sector?

- The partnerships that researchers engaged in, be it on a local, national or international scale, were the product of both direct and indirect engagement with the creative and cultural sector:
 - 89 per cent of case studies described a collaboration that researchers had initiated directly or proactively contributed to.
 - 67 per cent reported researcher involvement in an advisory capacity or as a featured expert.
 - 18 per cent included examples of indirect forms of collaboration, with no contact between the researcher and the practitioner.

What was the geographic spread of researcher engagement with creative and cultural sector partners?

- In REF 2014, researchers primarily engaged with cultural organisations in the UK that have a national or London remit. Of the regional creative and cultural partners in the UK cited by researchers, 79 per cent were based in England.
- Just over a third of collaborations or partnerships with the sector were located outside of the UK, spanning six continents. These were concentrated in Europe, with 47 per cent of international partner organisations situated in one of 19 European countries.

What were the activities or mechanisms that enabled research to have an impact?

- 68 discrete activities or mechanisms (see Section 3.1) led to research impact on or through the creative and cultural sector. These research mechanisms were rarely cited in isolation, with an average of six mechanisms being presented per case study.
- The most prevalent impact mechanism cited was public talks, which occurred in 43 per cent of case studies analysed.
- Activities related to ‘music, performing and visual arts’, ‘film, TV, video, radio and photography’ and ‘museums, galleries and libraries’ emerged as hot spots for sector engagement with research.

How did researchers evaluate and evidence impacts involving the creative and cultural sector?

- 18 distinct evidence types (see Section 4.1) were specifically used to describe or evaluate the presence and extent of research impact involving the creative and cultural sector.
- Impact generated from creative projects was not evaluated by just one yardstick but through a web of indicators, with an average of five evidence types supporting each case study.
- Evidence of *significance* was the most common means of evaluation, underpinning the impact narratives in 97 per cent of the case studies in the sample; evidence of *reach* appeared in 88 per cent of the case studies analysed.
- Evaluating research impact in the creative and cultural sector was as much about validating and contextualising the activities that enabled an impact as it was about supplying evidence that corroborated impact directly. While testimonials were the most common way in which a change in opinion, practice or policy was illustrated, other forms of evidence, such as indicators of reach, critical reviews or levels of income, predominantly communicated the scale, quality or repute of the activities that enabled an impact.

What were the limitations of the evaluation methods and evidence used to describe impact?

- The narrative approach to describing reach precluded an analysis of the data gathered on anything but a thematic basis due to the inconsistency of the quantitative measures used.
- Information about reach offers little indication of the demographics represented by quantitative measures; this is essential if we are to fully grasp the public benefit of research. The case studies also offer limited evidence of how researcher engagement has contributed to wider economic activity within the sector: researchers seemed reluctant to use financial indicators if there was not a clear and causal link between the research and income generation, even in cases where wider economic activity was likely to have occurred.
- The evaluation of significance was predominantly anchored in the immediate period after exposure, typically communicating an endorsement or a change in opinion for the short term.
- The most effective examples of change confirm that, even within the constraints of the REF’s reporting guidelines, evaluation is not something that occurs at a set point at the end of a project, but is a reflexive process that is more usefully set in motion at the beginning of a project, and extends long beyond its end.

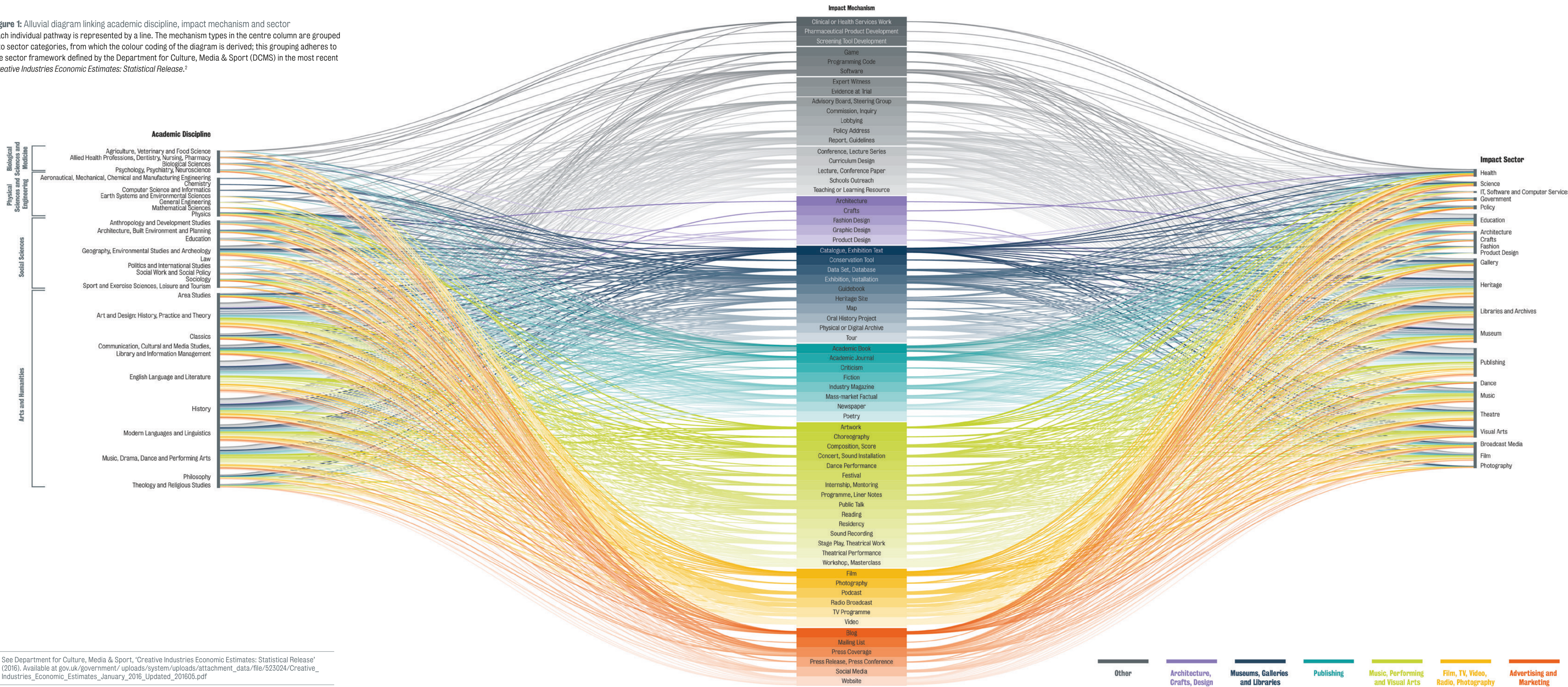
Key areas identified for further investigation include:

- An enquiry into how the strong, yet underutilised links between practice-led research in the arts and mental health services are helping to improve provision for mental health illness.
- A review of the ways in which activities in the creative and cultural sector help build communities.
- An analysis of whether the relative deficit of impacts on policy, economy and health were a product of barriers to working in these areas with and through the creative and cultural sector.
- A review of the ways in which engagement with research may play into a bigger impact strategy for creative and cultural sector organisations.
- An analysis of how frequently creative and cultural organisations draw upon academic research without direct collaboration with the author of the research.

Answers to these questions fall beyond the remit of the REF, but are critical for gaining a more complete picture of how research informs work in the creative and cultural sector.

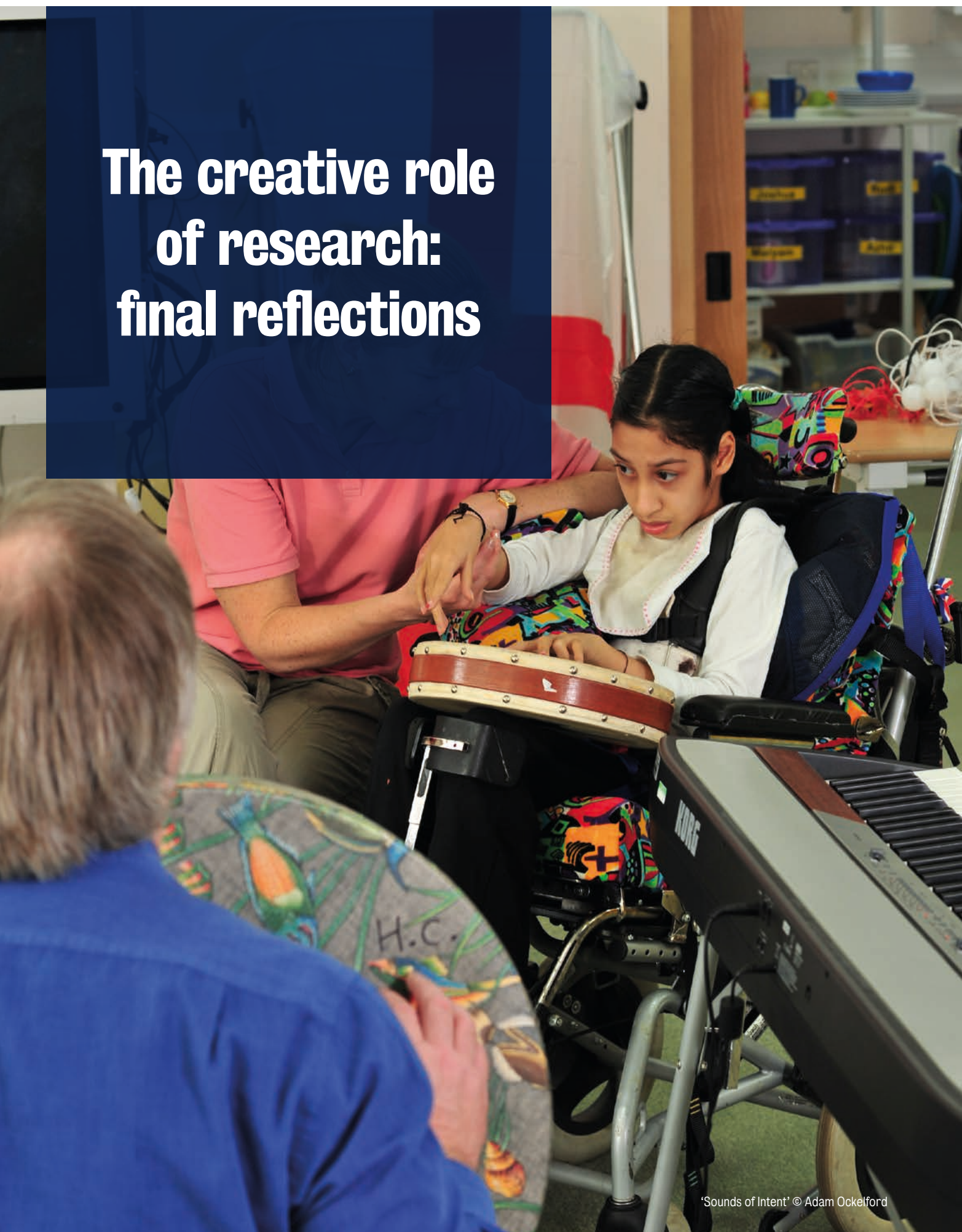


Figure 1: Alluvial diagram linking academic discipline, impact mechanism and sector
 Each individual pathway is represented by a line. The mechanism types in the centre column are grouped into sector categories, from which the colour coding of the diagram is derived; this grouping adheres to the sector framework defined by the Department for Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in the most recent *Creative Industries Economic Estimates: Statistical Release*.²



² See Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 'Creative Industries Economic Estimates: Statistical Release' (2016). Available at gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523024/Creative_Industries_Economic_Estimates_January_2016_Updated_201605.pdf

The creative role of research: final reflections



'Sounds of Intent' © Adam Ockelford

This report has identified the breadth and diversity of ways in which research has flowed into the creative and cultural sector, and highlighted the opportunities to further strengthen these exchanges and more effectively describe their impact.

“Work on creative projects supported knowledge exchange on a wide range of topics, from science and politics to human rights and social responsibility.”

“There is a clear paradox between the simplistic, causal link between research and impact reflected in the REF impact submission form, and the messy, circular and often fortuitous pathways to impact that surfaced in our analysis.”

While our analysis focused on research that had a primary impact on practice within the creative and cultural sector, it was equally apparent that work on creative and cultural projects supported knowledge exchange on a wide range of topics, from science and politics to human rights and social responsibility. These impacts did not just originate from research in the arts and humanities, although strong links in these areas were evident, but stemmed from almost every disciplinary area within HE. This study also found that impact was seldom achieved through a single, focused activity, since each case study included various interdependent – yet often disparate – pathways to impact, creating a network of mechanisms that typically supplemented a central project rather than each being impactful in its own right.

What the impact assessment in the REF could not, however, capture was the extent to which the creative and cultural sector draws on research without any direct contact with the researcher. The reporting instead tended to be focused on proving a proactive and causal link from a piece of research and the impact claimed. Moreover, the extent to which research itself evolved through the process of collaborative working went largely unreported, as did any acknowledgement of the new knowledge generated through these exchanges. These omissions highlight the areas where impact case studies from REF 2014 are limited research subjects, since researchers were not required to report on the reciprocal benefits to their work, and are unlikely to be aware of the full extent to which their work has impacted on the sector indirectly.

The analysis of time lag between embarking on research and achieving impact was also limited by the data available. Though this suggests that research impacts involving the creative and cultural sector do not have such lengthy time lags compared to other sectors such as health, this is based on evidence that tends to capture only the immediate response to an event, offering little or no evidence of the longevity of the impact. This lack of long-term perspective was true across all evidence types, which more commonly endorsed the activity or reflected the potential for impact, rather than documenting actual examples of change.

These limitations already highlight some of the issues that should be acknowledged when considering and communicating research impact. There is a clear paradox between the simplistic,

causal link between research and impact reflected in the REF impact submission form, and the messy, circular and often fortuitous pathways to impact that surfaced in our granular analysis of the narrative reporting; presenting impact as having a forward trajectory within a prescribed timeframe distorts this reality. Yet notwithstanding such caveats, REF 2014 is an unprecedented starting point for understanding the ways in which researchers and creative practitioners have collaborated, and continue to work together.

The introduction of ‘impact’ to the assessment of publicly-funded research in the UK, in spite of its limitations, has positively incentivised academic collaboration with the creative and cultural sector, and opened up many exciting opportunities for practitioners to engage with new knowledge and expertise in an unprecedented way. It has also gained recognition for the quality and social importance of practice-led research, which historically has tended to slip through the cracks of research assessment practices in UK HE.

Gathering impact data on a national scale has also helped to identify sectors and sub-sectors that are not yet fully benefiting from research, and where the provision of training and networking opportunities in untapped areas may be beneficial. This study identified broadcast media and cultural policy as two key areas where researchers have tended not to take a proactive role in initiating and delivering projects, and found that impact projects with local and regional cultural organisations were far outnumbered by projects describing work with a national or international partner.

Finally, though we, the authors of this report, have sought to identify frameworks for understanding research impact in the creative and cultural sector, we are conscious of the risk of impact assessment criteria becoming too prescriptive. The current diversity of research impact pathways is something to be celebrated and supported rather than curtailed by a desire to find accurate metrics. We therefore welcome the recommendation proposed by Lord Stern in his independent review of the REF to further broaden the definition of impact. In this way, we hope that researchers from a wide range of academic disciplines will be further encouraged to foster opportunities to work with the creative and cultural sector, and that sector professionals will in turn be inspired by the vast array of ways in which research can inform and develop their policies and practices.

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