

Community of Practice: Shaping the Research Impact Network at UCL

Dr. Amy Hong, Research Impact Manager



Impact at UCL

The influence of the Impact Agenda on HEIs can not be understated. The REF, Pathways to Impact and other policy drivers are important mechanisms for UCL to maintain its global position, gain financial support and to grow partnerships.

However, the impact agenda is greater than the sum of its parts. Impact is an umbrella term that covers many areas, including industry partnerships, knowledge exchange, public and community engagement, and public policy. Through external engagement and collaboration, **the process of impact can challenge traditional modes of knowledge creation and dissemination**, and help mitigate a contemporary distrust of experts.

The impact agenda can be harnessed to achieve the academic, economic and social mission of UCL. The position and perception of impact can be reframed as one that is beneficial, empowering and integral, rather than onerous or the sole purvey of administration and metrics.

UCL2034 asserts the importance of working in more thoughtful, positive and radical ways, both internally and with external partners, to achieve our goals. **Impact can become a key tool in enabling meaningful internal and external change.**



Supporting Impact

There are an increasing number of research administrators and managers working across UCL with a remit for supporting impact, from **the planning, curation, to evidencing and evaluation of impact**, and they are also experts in the **various pathways through which impact can be generated**.

Through conversations, we recognise that we do not have the time or resource to work on all aspects of impact in isolation, and wish to avoid duplication of effort, as well as leverage our influence as a group. Collaborating across UCL to understand and share best practice in impact facilitation will ensure that we create opportunities across career levels and backgrounds, and are used to equitably support change beyond academia.

Following an initial meeting in October 2018, we set out our **mutual beliefs, values and interests**. In the short term, this collection of ideas sets foundations for our initial projects and approaches. In the long term, we hope to establish a formal **UCL-sponsored Community of Practice**, as a basis for helping faculties, departments, centres and individual academics work across the institution, and as a tool for gaining more support for impact at UCL.



COP Values

- Working inclusively, openly and collaboratively
- Harnessing the opportunities created by the REF and other policy areas for change
- The creation of genuine impact beyond 'box-ticking' exercises
- Clear lines of communication and seamless impact support across all career levels
- Reframing and learning from impact in wider contexts
- The longevity and depth of collaborations between UCL and external partners
- Sharing and learning, respecting and drawing on a diversity of experience and expertise
- Responsive and flexible modes of supporting impact, with an appreciation of staff and students' needs and circumstances

Aims and Model



The **aims** of the COP are:

- To create a network of support for people working in impact and impact pathways
- To identify specific projects for collaboration, including the development of best practices
- To create professional development opportunities for those working in impact and impact pathways
- To broaden the definition and profile of impact at UCL, creating the potential for culture change

The **structure** of the COP consists of a working group which focusing on specific projects, and a wider community group which is an open space for members to share best practise, and discuss issues and opportunities.



Current Progress

- Attracted 27 members across UCL to the wider COP community group
- Set up regular termly meetings, the COP community group has met 3 times so far
- The COP working group has mapped over 500 impact stakeholders, the group is currently working on analysing and visualising the relationships between the impact stakeholders and each faculty / function within the university
- The COP community group to develop the 'walk-in impact surgery session' plan in collaboration with all specialised impact functions across UCL

Areas of Interest

• Stakeholder mapping & Networks

Who needs to be involved to make this work meaningful? What internal and external groups and areas are key to getting support? What would a successful Impact Network look like? What internal and external examples can we learn from?

• Impact toolkits and guidance

What would an UCL-wide impact toolkit look like? Where would this live, and how would we balance generic advice with more specific approaches? How to tailor toolkits and guidance to academics at different career level with the use of axis and metrics?

• Impact funding and training programs

What training already exists (internally such as UCL Doctoral School trainings; externally such as FastTrack Impact resources) and where are the gaps? How do we share and record these opportunities? Who has the most need for these trainings? How would it help support different career levels/academic background? What would the next steps after training be?

• Communications

What channels already exist to showcase and celebrate research impact externally? What do other universities, funding bodies and the sectors do to support this? Internally how do we reach people across the institution who could benefit from our work? How do we ensure that we are not only speaking to those committed academics? Can we realistically build an impact database and would it be useful?