In the following table we explore the advantages and disadvantages of different impact evidence types and provide the types of contextual evidence that may support each type. As we have mentioned previously each piece of impact evidence is only as strong as the narrative.

Guidance on the types of evidence that could be collected

Evidence Types	Guidance	Advantages	Disadvantages	Related evidence
Awards	• Include comments from competition judges and other experts demonstrating how the research led to recognition from stakeholders.	• Awards and other recognition show best performance following direct comparison with other similar projects.	• There needs to be clear evidence that the awards are as a result of the research. • Additional information may be needed to show that the research improved standards to award-winning levels.	• Comments from awarding bodies • Testimonials from those on the judging panels.
Commercial impact	• These should be independent and within the relevant time frame. It should be clear how the research led to changes in valuations. • Evidence about spin-outs should show that the companies are commercially active not only their registration, for example sales revenue, investment raised or numbers of employees.	• Demonstrates the value that the research has accumulated. Sales revenues or investment gains also show impact whereas the registration of companies and agreements to work with industry without actual sales should be considered outcomes.	• It may not be clear how this directly links to the research without additional testimonials or other qualitative evidence.	• Intellectual property records specifically that the research lead to the creation of the business. • Testimonials from company founders. • Changes in revenue or investment. • Change in number of jobs. • Investment gained. • Reports about research projects undertaken and the results.
Numbers qualifying in new skills	• Using the statistics about those gaining new qualifications can show impacts on professional ability or capability.	• It is relatively cheap collect this data for example one can survey alumni or use online tools such as LinkedIn.	• A survey will only give a sample of responses. • It may be difficult to attribute changes to one research piece or training programme.	• Testimonials. • Comparisons with control groups who did not have access to the training.
IP- Patent, licences	• Patents can be used as proof of the innovative nature of research while licenses/ sales show the commercial viability of the offer.	• These may show how innovative the research is.	• They do not show whether the innovation has been exploited and therefore actually made a difference. • Attribution may be difficult.	• Evidence of funding to support exploiting the research. • Evidence of increases in sales.
Legal	• Changes to legislation as a result of research or researchers' advice.	• Changes to the legal process or regulations can have a wide impact.	• Further evidence may be needed to show the difference made e.g. increase in prosecutions and/or fewer accidents.	• Further stakeholder reports about the impact of the legal changes. • Testimonials relating the research to the changes.
Media	• The best examples are those mentioning or directly linking the research to a change. • Media coverage could also show how research has informed public debate. • Focus on the beneficiary.	• This can show how awareness about a topic has been raised. • Media coverage can also show how research has informed public debate.	• This does not show what has changed as a result of this awareness. • Some stories may be seen as sensationalist.	• Quantitative reports e.g. market data showing increase in purchases of technology.

Evidence Types	Guidance	Advantages	Disadvantages	Related evidence
Public policy	• Documentation directly mentioning research's contribution specifically or a series of documents showing a change as a result of researchers' advice.	• Public policy changes could have wide-reaching impacts for example on a wide geographical region or large population.	• It may be necessary to show how the policy changes are adopted and the difference this makes. • Challenges in creating impact maybe due to political environment.	• Further reports about the impact of the legal changes. • Testimonials relating the research to the changes. • Petitions data. • Campaigns data.
Practice Guidelines	• Provide a narrative that shows that research informed guidelines.	• The professional body offering the guidelines is often well respected and has a robust process e.g. National Institute for Clinical Excellence. • This can also be a good way to show the prevention of risky activity or behaviour.	• The guidelines may not be followed in practice.	• Data showing the take up of the guidelines in practice.
Reports published by organisations e.g. company report, statistical report	• These should be from an independent body, directly mentioning the research and how it has affected stakeholders. • Where reports mention audience figures it is helpful to also have evidence showing the difference made to the audience.	• These are independent and may include useful quantitative descriptions.	• They may not specifically show what difference the specific research has made.	• Testimonials may be needed to describe the link between the reported impacts and the research.
Social media	• Statistics on viral spread, followers, impressions or shares can help to show engagement with a particular topic with a specific audience.	• This can show how awareness about a topic has been raised or informed public debate.	• This does not show what has changed as a result of this awareness. • Maybe seen as shallow.	• Quantitative reports e.g. market data showing increased purchases of technology.
Testimonials	• These should be from an independent, well-respected figure, directly mentioning the research work and how it has affected them. Where possible, the statement could include quantitative examples of impact.	• These can show specifically how the research led to the impact.	• Ideally these should be from senior figures in organisations. • These can be seen as inherently biased in favour of the researcher.	• Quantitative reports showing the difference made.
Web Links	• The best examples of the use of web links are where they are independent, and there is meta-data showing their reach, for example in-page visits.	• Web links can show how effective public engagement has been. • They may also be easy to find.	• They do not show what actions have been taken as a result of increased awareness.	• Meta-data about the numbers of views and potentially any purchasing data or data showing take up of specific activities.