# A FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH IMPACT IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

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With: Sally Gross (Westminster), Verity McIntosh (University of the West of England), George Musgrave (Goldsmiths), George Ogola (Nottingham), Jon Swords (York) and Melanie Hoyes (BFI).

EACH YEAR, THE INSTITUTE FOR SCREEN INDUSTRIES RESEARCH (ISIR) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM HOSTS A SYMPOSIUM ADDRESSING MAJOR CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS IN CONTEMPORARY SCREEN INDUSTRY STUDIES, TO IDENTIFY CUTTING EDGE THEMES IN THE DISCIPLINE AND DRIVE THEM FORWARD. THE 2023 EVENT FOCUSSED ON 'ETHICAL APPROACHES TO KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND IMPACT'.

Questions around impact relate more than ever on a fundamental level to contemporary academic practice. Impact can be considered as the drive to create a (positive) transformation of society through research. In creative industries research, as elsewhere, this drive has been simultaneously imposed from above in the form of REF, the Impact Case Study, research funding requirements and other structural forms, and produced from below from the desire to do meaningful and socially relevant work, and to engage with issues arising from civil society. Clearly, there are many ways of creating and contributing to social change through academic work. However, there is only limited research[1] interrogating impact activities themselves, in creative industries research and beyond, which is the fundamental problematic that underpins this report: how and why should academics engage with the creative industries? What normative values are attached to impact work, explicitly and implicitly? Who should we be impacting? Can we develop a shared framework that promotes better impacts?

**This report outlines 'Ethical Approaches to Knowledge Exchange and Impact'. It is intended as a step towards more detailed investigation of these issues in order to develop a more widely applicable framework for ethical engagement and impact, to improve the quality and sustainability of our impact/s and knowledge exchange activities.**

In the first section, we pose a number of questions that encapsulate academic concerns around impactful reseach. In section two, we introduce ideas developed in response to these problematics. The final section contains our framework for ethical impact and KE.

Symposium participants: Sally Anne Gross (University of Westminster), George Musgrave (Goldsmiths), George Ogola (University of Nottingham), Verity McIntosh (UWE), Jon Swords (University of York), and Melanie Hoyes (BFI). The session was convened by Helen W. Kennedy and Jack Newsinger (both University of Nottingham).

[1] Savigny, H. (2020). The Violence of Impact: Unpacking Relations Between Gender, Media and Politics. Political Studies Review, 18(2), 277-293. https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929918819212

Yelin, H., & Clancy, L. (2021). Doing impact work while female: Hate tweets, 'hot potatoes' and having 'enough of experts'. European Journal of Women's Studies, 28(2), 175-193. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506820910194

# PART 1: INTERROGATING THE ETHICS OF IMPACT AND KE

"There are some researchers I just won't work with anymore because they just use me and my organisation as 'bid bait' – they invite us to participate in some big project as collaborators, get us to develop a letter of support and then basically just drop us when they get the funding.."[1][2]

**What *kinds* of impacts are positive for the creative industries?**

We must acknowledge that not all impacts are positive and desirable, and research can have unintended, implicit as well as explicit impacts.

**Is the partnership/collaboration underpinned by a shared set of intentions and ambitions? Might there be an underpinning theory of change, and if so, this been grappled with and discussed in detail? Whose priorities and visions are defining this relationship and any potential view of 'change'?**

The creative industries are hierarchical, unequal, potentially exploitative and too often closed to those outside white middle-class heteronormative identities. How can we ensure that these hierarchies (which also exist in academic structures) are not reproduced and reinforced through impactful research?

**Who are we doing impact for? Is it for ourselves, for funders, for partners, or for some combination of these?**

What kind of unequal power relations might underpin our engagements with the creative industries, and how do these effect impact in positive and negative ways?

**How can we decolonise impactful research? Are global North scholars truly collaborating with partners in the South, or extracting?**

How do the institutional and structural demands of REF and the Impact Case Study enable and limit positive impact? How can we define the success of impact beyond these constraints? What are the ethical implications of different models?

**How do we reconcile the urgency of some of the problems we aim to address with the structures and rhythms of academia?**

How can we identify and mitigate the divides and assymetry between industry, society and university?

**How can we make research more accessible, in the broadest sense possible, whilst still maintaining scholarly quality and institutional recognition?**

How are ethical concerns moderated and mediated by different contexts of collaboration and engagement?

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[2] Anonymous contributor to a KE funding development activity in 2022.

# PART 2: ADDRESSING UNEQUAL POWER RELATIONS

All academic-industry collaborations and impact work engages with the unequal power relations and the asymmetry of the structures, aims, temporal rhythms and rewards that characterise different sectors. Many of these institutional contexts are beyond the influence of academics themselves. Nevertheless, they can create significant imbalances of power and privilege that require awareness, reflection and work to mitigate and counteract.

**Unequal power relations are often enshrined into contracts, IP agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and other collaboration or partnership /relationship structuring forms.**

The ownership of data is critical: standard university contracts often claim all the IP generated in a project. This is an ethical problem which can prove problematic for creative partners. Being aware of these inbalances and striving for fairness and transparency must be key to our engagements with partners.

**Finance is an area in which unequal power relations frequently manifest.**

There is often a mismatch between the cash flow of companies, particularly freelancers, charities, small companies, and universities. Budgets can change during grant application processes, which themselves can be extraordinarily long. It takes a long time to get paid by universities which makes it difficult for creative partners to plan ahead.

**Unequal power relations are particularly pronounced when engaging with partners in the global South.**

This is due to a number of factors: enduring legacies of colonialism, the marginalisation of the South within the global knowledge economy, weak resource capacity in global South partners, and problematic funding regimes. In order to foster a more inclusive, ethical approach to impact in the global South, we need to pay close attention to a number of problems.

**Extractive research: indigenous knowledge is routinely extracted from marginalised nations and communities and appropriated by North-based scholars.**

Partners and other people involved in research are often not acknowledged: this is exploitative. Ensuring that collaborators are acknowledged and credited is critical, if they can also be co-authors of reports or articles – even better. This needs to happen alongside other initiatives to avoid 'extractive' practices.

**We need to think about the misapplication of theories, methodologies and interpretive frameworks that were developed in the North.**

Theories shape our practice as researchers and therefore how we approach knowledge exchange and impact. Many theories and methodologies derive from a problematic positionality which engenders particular hierarchies from the beginning of the relationship. We should aim to deliberately unsettle the assumptions we reproduce through particular theoretical frameworks.

**It is imperative to clarify the expected results of collaborative projects from their very start, to have regular touch points to review, refine, adjust expectations as the project evolves: a clear process can ensure that expectations are met or appropriately adjusted where necessary.**

The definition of a successful project for academics is often different to that for creative partners. This is particularly pertinent when engaging with marginalised communities, which might anticipate problems to be solved by academics, and become disappointed when this does not happen.

**We should take a reflexive and critical approach to how our research might inadvertently contribute to the reproduction of unequal power relationships within the creative industries and beyond.**

# THE *DO'S AND DON'TS* OF ETHICAL IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

THIS CHECKLIST FOR MORE ETHICAL RESEARCH IMPACT IN THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IS BASED UPON THE PRINCIPLES AND VALUES IDENTIFIED AT THE CHALLENGES AND DIRECTIONS IN SCREEN INDUSTRY RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM 2023, HELD AT THE INSTITUTE FOR SCREEN INDUSTRIES RESEARCH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM.

IT IS INTENDED AS A STEP TOWARDS MORE DETAILED INVESTIGATION OF THESE ISSUES IN ORDER TO DEVELOP A WIDELY APPLICABLE FRAMEWORK FOR ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT, TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR IMPACT/S AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE ACTIVITIES.

## DO

- Develop collaborations carefully and thoughtfully, identifying mutual benefit.
- Align collaborative relationships with your values.
- Be attentive to practices and assumptions that may implicitly or indirectly reproduce or support dominant white, male, middle class, heteronormative points-of-view.
- Identify the desired impacts and outcomes of research collaboration.
- Examine and make explicit any Theory of Change underpinning your impact work.
- Consider and where possible mitigate unintended and implicit impacts.
- Clarify expected results, have a process of ongoing review to ensure that you can align outcomes with expectations.
- Fully engage acknowledge and credit collaborators wherever possible and appropriate as co-designers, co-creators, if they can be also be credited as co-authors of any project outcomes, even better.

## DON'T

- Assume that greater prestige and power make for better impact.
- Assume that all impacts are good and desirable.
- Assume that knowledge exchange is a one-way process.
- Assume that theories and methodologies developed in the global North are universally applicable.
- Allow REF and the Impact Case Study framework to define, proscribe or de-limit your ambitions for impact.

# SIGNATURES

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