

## SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

**Action number: CA15137 European Network for Research Evaluation in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (ENRESSH)**

**STSM title:** Comparative study of Norwegian and UK impact case studies

**STSM start and end date:** 05-23.11.2018 + 10-14.12.2018

**Grantee name:** Marta Wróblewska

### **PURPOSE OF THE STSM:**

(max.200 words)

The research carried out within the STSM consisted in studying a corpus of Norwegian impact case studies submitted to the Norwegian research evaluation (Humeval). The researcher studied the documents from the point of view of linguistic resources used, accounting for the dimensions of grammar, rhetoric, narrative patterns and other relevant discursive resources. The findings were compared to the results of a previous study carried out by the same researcher on a corpus of British impact case studies, in order to point to the differences, peculiarities and suggest ways in which future authors of such documents could creatively approach these templates. The findings aspire to help research managers of the submitting institutions, the researchers who face the task of drafting an impact case study and possibly the policy-makers who create the forms and interpret the results of the evaluation. They also aim to feed into the ongoing debate on the future evaluation protocol for Norwegian HEIs. Therefore the study has relevant implications both for theory and practice.

### **DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS**

(max.500 words)

The first part of the STSM focused on data collection in Oslo (05-10.11.2018) and the analysis of the data (in home office in Warsaw between 12-23.11. 2018), while the second part of the study consisted in presentation of analysis and the preparation of a report on the research findings (10-14.12).

Two sets of data were used in this study. The first includes the impact cases submitted to the Humeval evaluation to Panel 4. This includes 31 documents, amounting to around 35 thousand

words. The documents were coded using categories previously applied to the study of the British corpus and some additional ones created in a bottom-up analytical process, using MAX Qda software. The purpose of this procedure was to compare the data set to its British counterpart – 78 case studies submitted to Panel 28 – Modern Languages and Linguistics – in the REF 2014, amounting to around 105 thousand works). The two sets were compared in terms of the use made by the authors of the template, narrative and argumentative patterns, vocabulary etc.

The second set of data includes semi-structured interviews (no=10) with two groups of social actors involved in the establishment of a new procedure of impact evaluation: 1) employees (no=4) of RCN who oversaw the Humeval evaluation on different stages and in different roles, 2) authors (no=6) of impact cases submitted to the Humeval evaluation to panel 4. The interviews together amount to about 10 hours of recordings, which were partially transcribed word for word and partially summarised by the researcher. This data set was put in context through a comparison with a corpus of interviews conducted earlier with social actors who have taken part in REF 2014 – 20 academics, 3 administrators/managers, 2 policy-makers.

While the impact cases can be considered the *product* of evaluation, the interview data was useful in shedding light on the *process* which lead to their generation. This includes, firstly the establishment and introduction the new criterion of evaluation (interviews at RCN), secondly, the response to it within the institutions, and thirdly – the longer-term consequences for academic realities (interviews with academics, authors of impact cases).

Two talks were given during the STSM, the first to present the background of the study and its aims, and the second to present and discuss preliminary results:

- "Writing about research impact – a new a new academic challenge. A view from linguistics". Talk for employees of Research Council of Norway (RCN), Oslo, 07.11.2018
- "Impact evaluation in Norway and in the UK. A progressive change in academic culture and discourse?". Talk for employees of Research Council of Norway (RCN), Oslo, 11.12.2018

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED**

### **The findings of the study are in two areas**

#### **1) Comparison of British and Norwegian impact case studies**

Compared to the British impact cases which give a clear impression of belonging to one coherent and well-defined academic genre, the Norwegian case studies are strikingly diverse. This is visible on the level of document structure and length, narrative patterns, grammatical forms, use of meta content and overall focus of the texts. This shows that the genre of impact case study is not yet established in Norwegian academic culture. The relative immaturity of the genre results in the documents being less suited for the purpose of evaluation: they can be chaotic and sometimes include irrelevant information, while failing to address the key requirements and providing crucial information.

Many ICs focus on dissemination activities, while neglecting to address impact. When presenting impact, the authors often do not provide reliable evidence to corroborate the impact. When this evidence is present it is often not efficiently 'signalled' to the reader. Hence, while presenting excellent research and interesting engagement activities, many of the impact cases fail to realise

the pragmatic aim of the document, i.e. convincing the reader of the impact of the presented research, defined as ‘change or benefit...’.

These shortcomings, together with the relative succinctness of the documents (including authors leaving template boxes empty) and a presence of typographical errors may point to a lower perceived status of the exercise, compared to the UK.

The document provides a checklist which can be helpful in writing more efficient impact narratives.

### **The experience of writing and submitting impact cases**

Most respondents describe their experience submitting the IC as positive: they considered the invitation an acknowledgement for their work, an opportunity for reflexion on their broader engagement and to learn about new tendencies in research evaluation. They also saw the exercise as rising the profile of the humanities. Several objections and critiques were nevertheless raised, some fundamental (the ethical aspect of measuring impact, the compatibility of the exercise with research in the humanities), some related to the implementation of the policy (lack of clear definition of impact, lack of guidance and training, too short notice).

Academics seem to recognise the need to valorise and evaluate research impact and many are happy to have had the opportunity to document their impact. However, there seems to be a general dissatisfaction with the process of evaluating impact, particularly in terms of communicating the goals of the exercise, the definition of impact and guidance on writing the document.

These results have been extensively described in a report prepared for the Research Council of Norway (50 pages, in final edits phase on the day of submission of this report).

### **FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)**

The grantee will publish the report in an online venue, which will make the findings easily accessible to all parties interested: researchers writing impact case studies, policy-makers and scholars in the area of research evaluation. The Research Council of Norway will make use of the findings and advice in the design of future evaluation exercises. The grantee remains open to future possibilities of exchange with the Research Council.