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Assessing the impact of research on policy: what can we learn from the literature?

Annette Boaz

King's College London

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Outline

- Models of the relationship between research policy and practice
- Rationales for assessing impact
- Reviewing the literature assessing impact
- What can we learn from the literature?
- Moving forward

Models

Linear – relay race

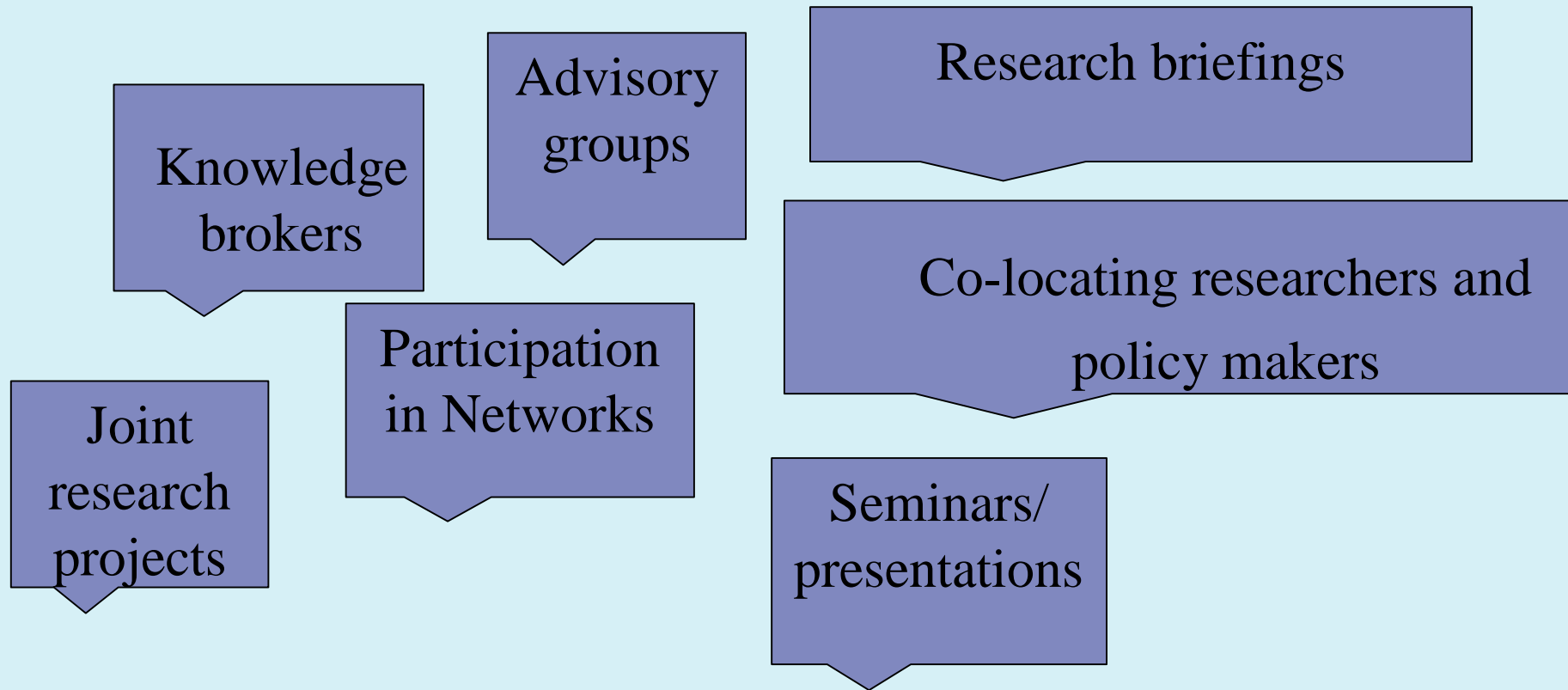
Relationship – two communities

Diffusion

Engineering

Systems – co-production

Activities designed to promote research impact



Models

Research briefings

Linear – relay race

Advisory groups

Relationship – two communities

Joint research projects

Systems – co-production

Moderating between
stakeholders

Performance

Learning

Why do it?

Promoting organizational
achievements

Irish Research Council for the Humanities and
Social Sciences allocated 12.5 million Euro by
the Department for Education and Science in
2007

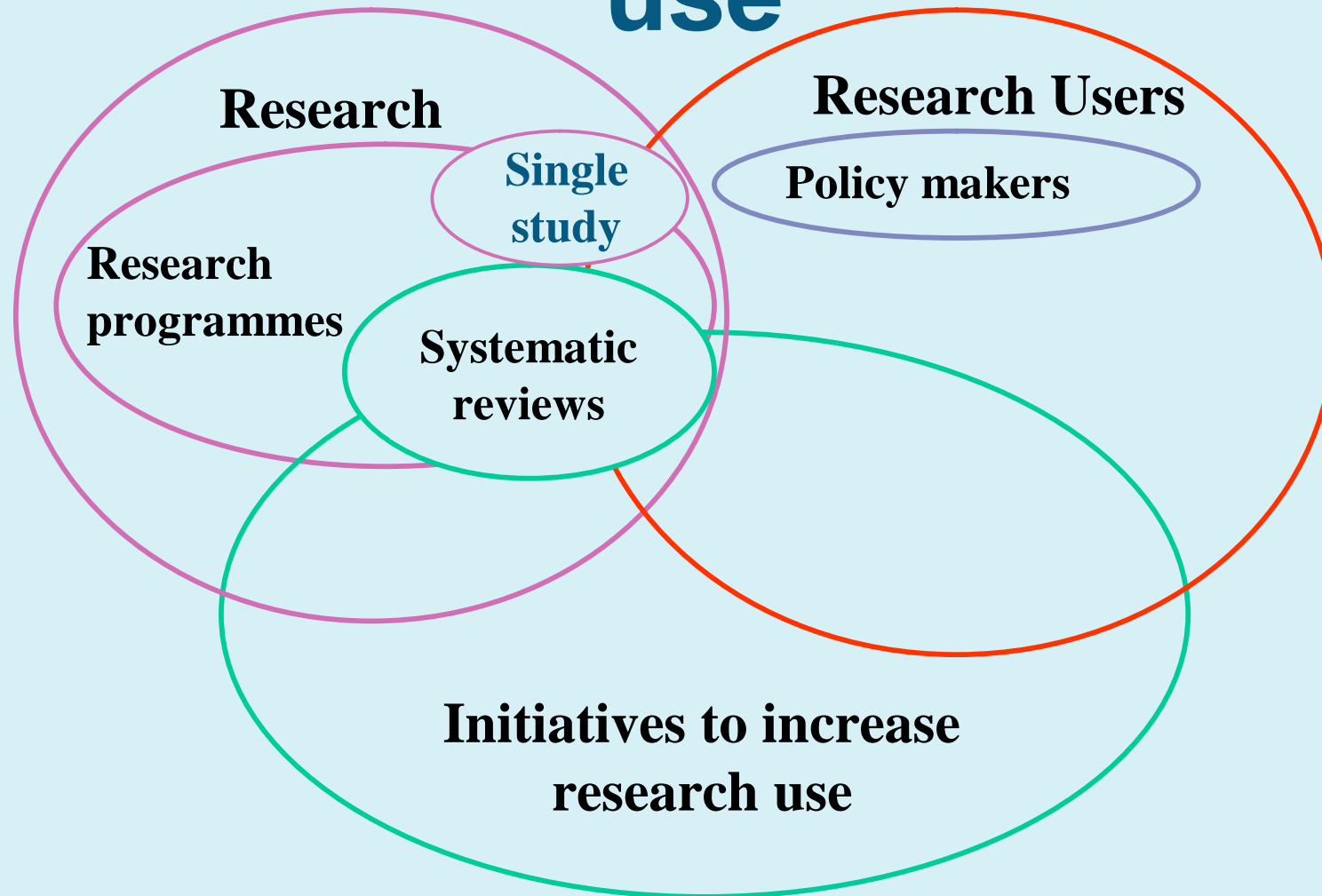
Accountability

Review question: How do you (best) evaluate the impact of research on policy?

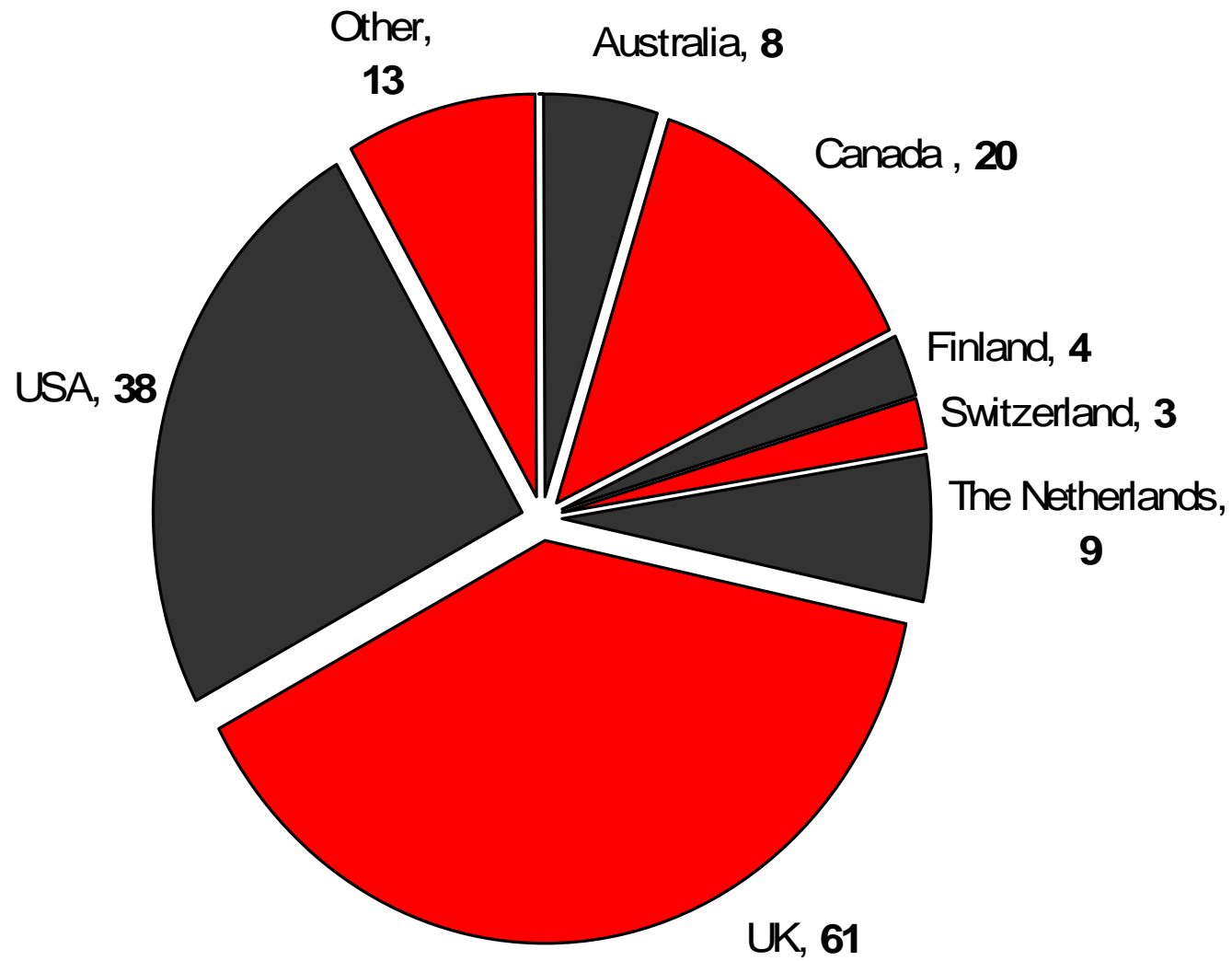
- Search of 10 research databases
- 1987-2007
- UK and international sources
- Explored the websites of 30 organizations
- Hand search of selected journals and reference lists
- Search of SPRU and IDS library catalogues

Focusing the review on **policy**

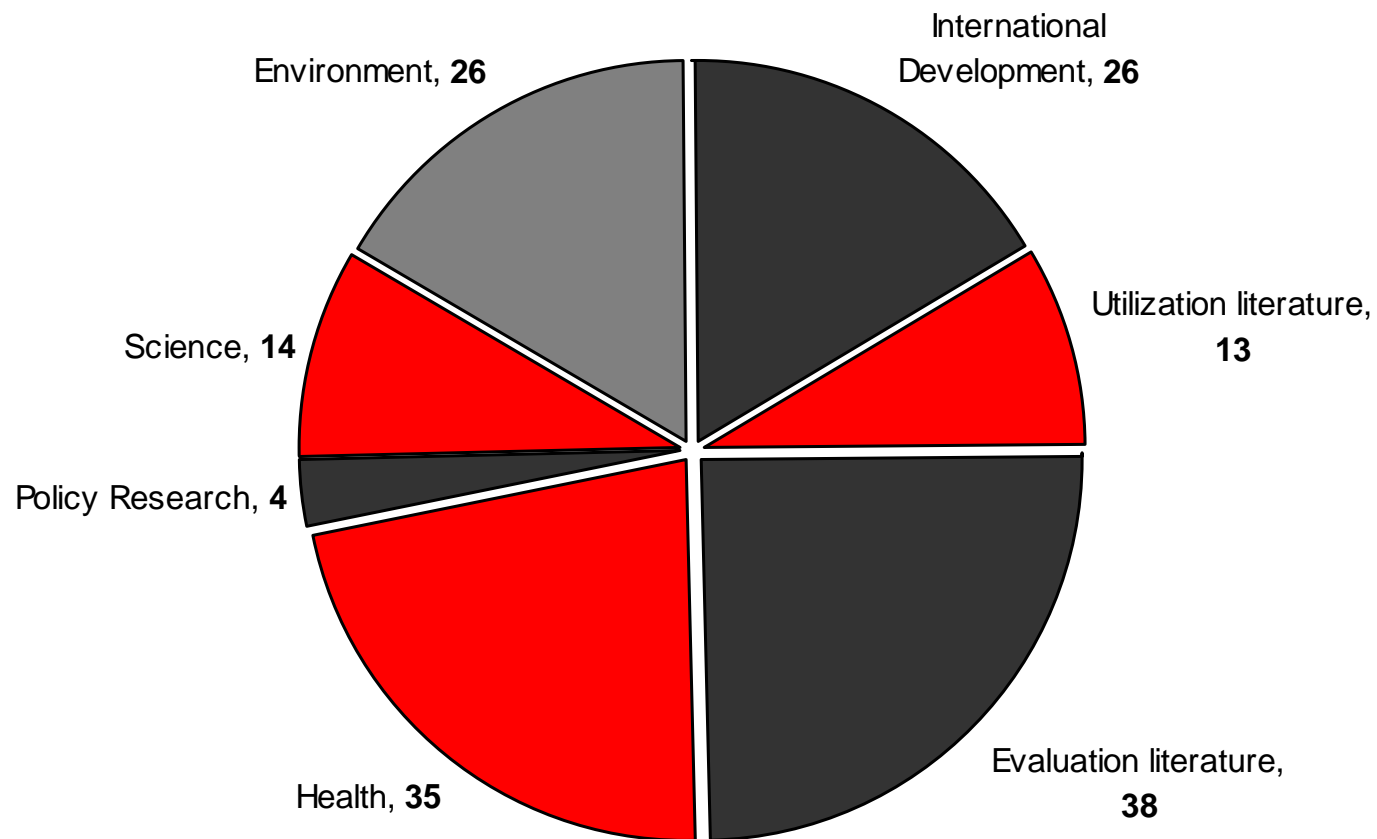
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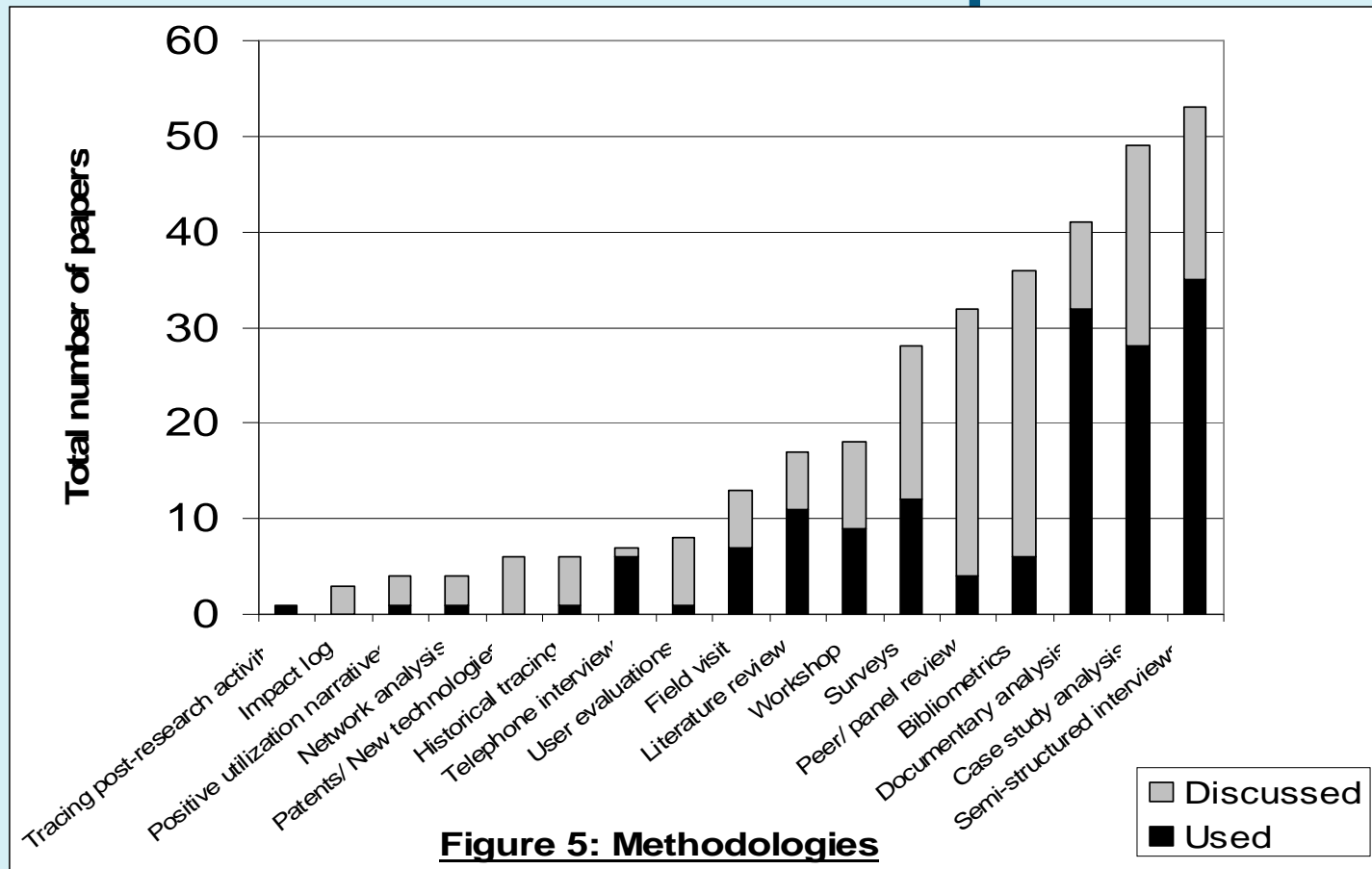
Country of Origin



Field



Methods for measuring research impact



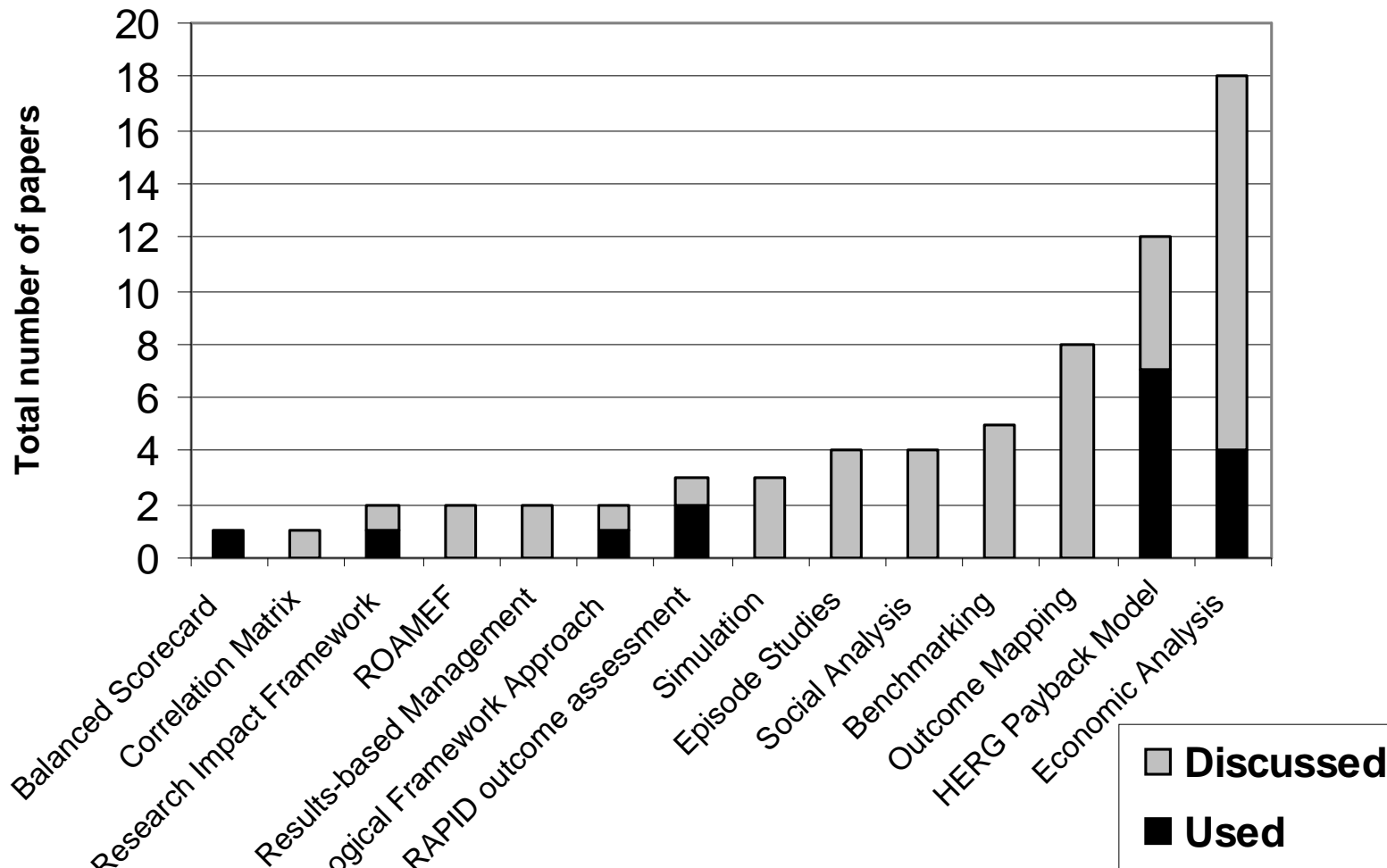


Figure 6: Frameworks for structuring and interpreting data

Some examples

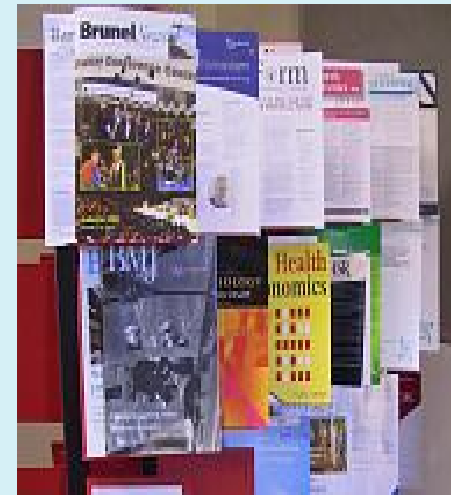
Evaluation of the impact of the UK ESRC Future of Work programme, and reflection on the applicability of the HERG Payback model to the social sciences. Data were collected using document review, key informant interviews, an on-line survey of all Principal Investigators, and four case studies to analyse the pathways to impact (including policy impact) in more detail.

The Netherlands Environment Ministry conducted two surveys (using external evaluators) of all policy makers who had commissioned research in a particular year. The compulsory questionnaire asked how, and the extent to which, the research had been used, and was followed up with interviews.

An example

What has been the impact of the first 10 years of the NHS HTA programme?

Methods: documentary analysis, survey of lead researchers and 16 detailed case studies



HERG payback model

5 'payback' domains:

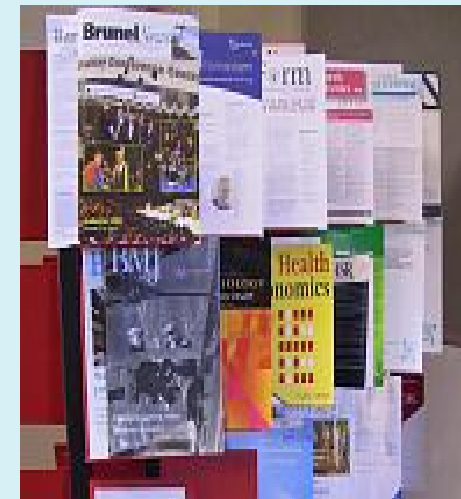
- knowledge production
- research targeting and capacity building
- informing policy and product development
- health (and health sector) benefits
- broader economic benefits



What is impact of the HTA programme?

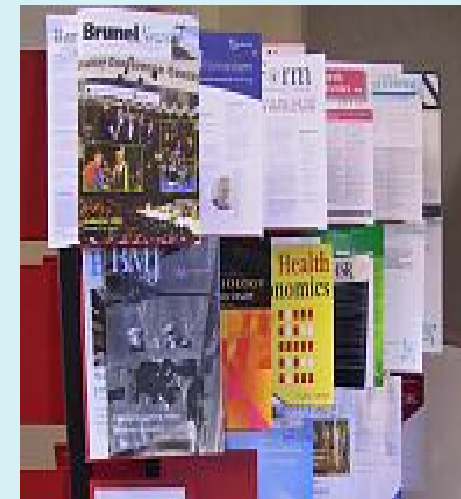
Questionnaires confirmed, corrected and extended NCCHTA bibliometric indicators

- e.g. 25%+ publications were missed by author self report
- some parts of the programme more impactful than others (e.g. NICE Technology Assessment Reviews)

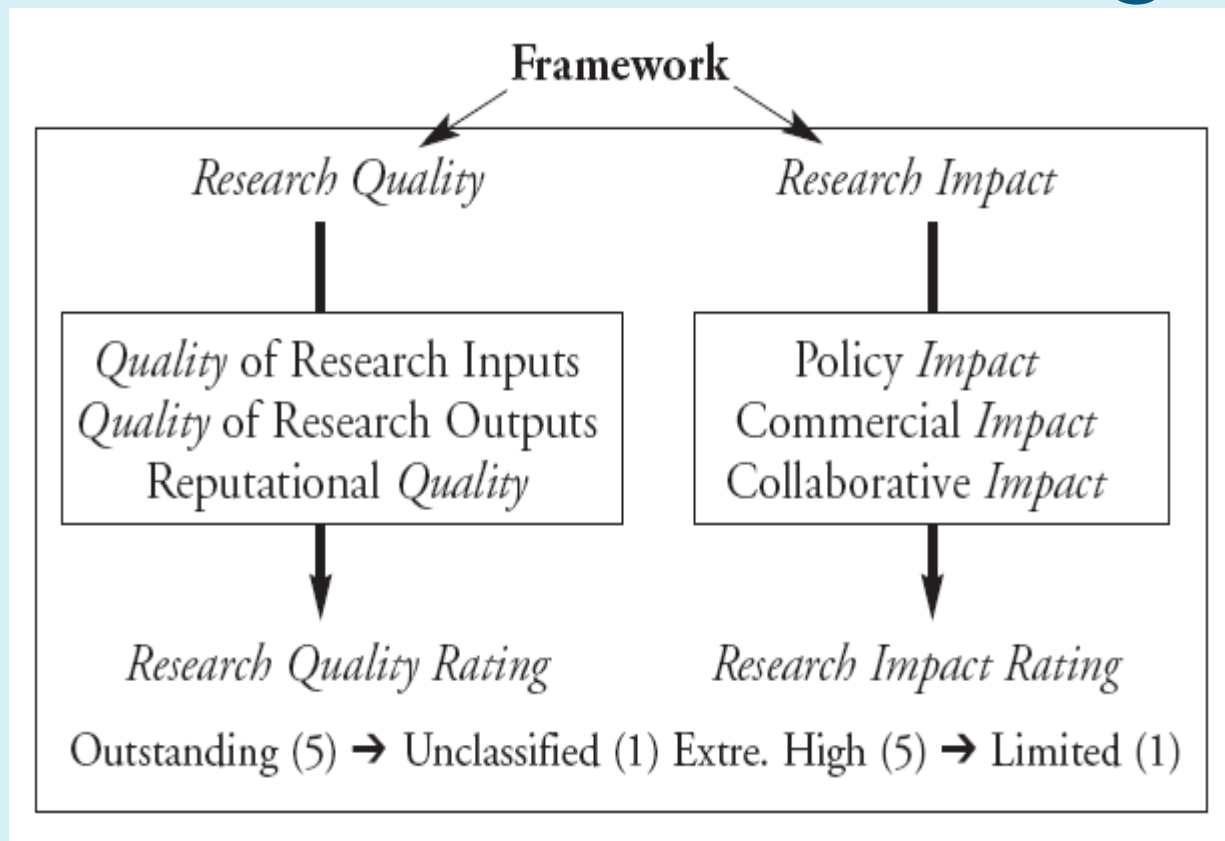


What is impact of the HTA programme?

- Greater impact on knowledge generation (and this is easier to quantify)
- Impacts on policy and practice currently about perceptions of impact
 - need for more detailed case studies/ methods for assessment



The Irish Environmental Protection Agency



How do people evaluate the impact of research programmes?

- Wide range of methods and approaches:
- Qualitative methods: semi-structured interviews, documentary analysis, field visits and observations
- Quantitative methods: surveys, bibliometrics and patent/new technology tracking
- Panels and peer review
- Workshops and focus groups
- Process tracking

What are the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches?

The various approaches have different advantages and disadvantages, depending on the context

Not least in terms of capacity to demonstrate impact

Which methods are most effective?

- Very little evidence to suggest one approach is more effective than another
- Many argue for role for in-depth qualitative methods
- Need for a mixed method approach
- Of the 14 studies two suggest:

Questionnaires have the potential to provide a relatively robust approach to monitoring research, but would benefit from a small number of accompanying case studies (Hanney et al 1999 and 2007)

Which methods offer value for money?

- Very little data on the value for money of the different approaches identified
- Unlikely to be sufficient time or resources to consider the impact of a whole portfolio of research
- Most cost-effective and practicable approaches least likely to yield insights into the utilisation process/ OR
- Value in quicker, more informal approaches?
- Telephone surveys might offer a cost-effective 'middle ground' between postal surveys and in-depth interviews

8 key questions

1. What is your conceptual framework?
2. What are the outcomes of interest?
3. What methods will best explore the outcomes of interest?
4. How do you address attribution?
5. What is the direction of travel for the evaluation?
6. Is this a mixed method approach, providing scope for triangulation?
7. Will the methods selected capture context and the complexity?
8. When might be the best time to conduct the evaluation?

These need to be considered in the light of the time, skills and resources available for the evaluation.

Effective knowledge transfer

depends on

- the nature of the research and its utility
- the personal characteristics of both researchers and users
- the links between researchers and users
- the context for the application of the research

See Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007, pp 81-83,

See also Overseas Development Institute

Some useful references and websites:

-Nutley S, Walter I, and Davies H (2007) *Using evidence: How research can inform public services*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

-O'Leary, G, Boyle, R, Donlon, B and Sheils, L (2008) Providing a framework for accountability and learning in environmental research. *Administration*. 5 (4): 159-170

-The Overseas Development Institute RAPID programme:

<http://www.odi.org.uk/programmes/rapid/>

-Hanney S, Buxton M, Green C, Coulson D and Raftery J (2007) An assessment of the impact of NHS Health Technology Assessment Programme. *NHS Health Technology Assessment Programme*: 11: 53.

<http://www.ncchta.org/fullmono/mon1153.pdf>

- Wooding S, Nason E, Klautzer L, Rubin J, Hanney S and Grant J (2007) *Policy and practice impacts of research funded by the ESRC. A case study of the Future of Work programme, approach and analysis*. Cambridge: RAND Europe.

http://www.rand.org/pubs/technical_reports/2007/RAND_TR435.pdf

My contact details: Annette.boaz@kcl.ac.uk