Introduction

World class universities create and use knowledge generated within academia to make a difference to the wider society. In this regard, the University of Aberdeen has a strong tradition of promoting knowledge generated through its research to make a difference. The University was originally established in 1495 to meet the local need for teachers, doctors and clergy and it has retained its focus on ensuring that its research, whilst maintain the highest standards of excellence, must also generate knowledge for societal use. University of Aberdeen research currently impacts on a wide range of sectors including the economy, public policy, health, the environment and culture.

An impact strategy for the IAHS

Research undertaken by staff in the Institute of Applied Health Science (IAHS) at the University of Aberdeen informs decision-making in healthcare. As an Institute, the IAHS focuses its research activity particularly on:

- investigating the determinants and diagnosis of common symptoms and conditions;
- evaluating health and healthcare interventions; and
- delivery and organisation of healthcare.

IAHS research is thus directly relevant to a range of stakeholders who make decisions about the provision of healthcare. These include the public, patients, health care practitioners, healthcare professional bodies, healthcare managers, policy makers, non-government organisations and governments.

Research (including the IAHS’s long-standing programme of research on methods for optimal implementation of evidence and behaviour change) has shown consistently that passive dissemination of research findings is insufficient to ensure that results of research are adopted into practice or have impact. Active dissemination and knowledge transfer strategies are required.

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1 University of Aberdeen Strategy for Research and Knowledge Exchange 2013-2015
Approach to impact within the IAHS

Researchers in the IAHS are encouraged to adopt the following 3-point plan for maximising the reach and significance of their research:

1. focus on identifying the questions that matter most to stakeholders (relevant research).
2. develop and apply the best methods to answer these questions (excellent research) and
3. tailor the dissemination and implementation of results to the needs of specific stakeholder groups (accessible research).

Figure: 3-point plan

Implementation of the strategy

In order to facilitate the adoption of the three-point plan, the IAHS adopts a multi-faceted approach to implementation, including:

- Ensuring close liaison with health care providers and policy makers such that IAHS research addresses known evidence gaps
- Promoting integrated working with professional associations ensuring that IAHS research can respond quickly to emergent priorities:
- Engaging directly with clinical and policy-making organisations to promote the uptake of IAHS research findings:
- Engaging directly with the public to promote understanding of IAHS research:
- Making IAHS outputs freely available and accessible
- Training IAHS staff to put impact at the heart of their day-to-day activities
- Providing infrastructure to enable impact activities and training
Ensuring close liaison with health care providers and policy makers such that IAHS research addresses known evidence gaps

Close interaction between health care providers and policy makers and IAHS researchers facilitates the development and delivery of applied research that provides definitive answers to important issues. This also supports the subsequent dissemination of results into clinical practice or policy.

The IAHS strongly promotes the undertaking of research in response to direct evidence gaps highlighted by government agencies — for example research commissioned by the NIHR Commissioning Boards (these are topics that have been prioritised as having high NHS need) and the reviews commissioned by NICE.

The IAHS will also continue to promote active engagement and participation of health care managers/policy makers in our research. IAHS strongly supports the inclusion of policy makers/managers as co-applicants on IAHS research whenever possible, ensuring research is grounded in the needs and reality of the health service.

The IAHS will also continue to promote engagement with the Universities Policy Affairs Team who remit is to advise and assist researchers in promoting their research to political and civic audiences.

Promoting integrated working with professional associations ensuring that IAHS research can respond quickly to emergent priorities:

Active engagement with professional associations enables key clinical issues for specific disciplines to be ascertained quickly.

The IAHS strongly recommends that its researchers work directly with professional associations (eg specialty-specific associations such as the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the British Orthopaedic Association) such that emergent priorities for these disciplines informs the research undertaken in the IAHS, but also ensures that the results of IAHS research has a direct route into clinical practice guidance.

Engaging directly with clinical and policy-making organisations to promote the uptake of IAHS research findings

Formal interaction with bodies responsible for clinical and policy guidance (eg NICE, SIGN) allows research to directly inform practice.

The IAHS will continue to actively support routine engagement with national guidance bodies. Work with NICE will continue to be prioritised (eg through the support of the Technology Assessment Review contract) and engagement with the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) and the Scottish Medicines Consortium (SMC).

Active engagement with government is also promoted and examples of good practice (eg the bespoke briefing papers provided to government officials by the Health Economics Research Unit for individual projects with particular policy relevance) will be shared across the IAHS.
Engaging directly with the public to promote understanding of IAHS research:
Participation in public engagement is valued as an important component of academic activity. Engaging the public in research activities from research prioritisation to knowledge transfer is known to increase the societal value of research.

The IAHS will continue to promote the development of public engagement activities as a routine part of its activity. The IAHS will work closely with the College of Life Sciences’s Public Engagement Champion to ensure researchers are up to date with college-wide developments in this arena. The IAHS also promotes active engagement with the College of Life Science and Medicine’s “Public Health Interest Group” - a panel of lay people set up to help inform research priorities in the College and to aid the design, execution and interpretation of College research.

The IAHS will also continue to work closely with the University of Aberdeen’s Public Engagement in Research Unit (PERU) which works closely with local, national and international partners to support interactions between the University community and the public. The IAHS will continue to promote the active engagement in PERUs Café series (regular public discussion fora about topical scientific issues).

The IAHS will also continue to promote access to our research findings to the public through social networking media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Making IAHS outputs freely available and accessible
The IAHS (in line with overall University of Aberdeen policy) fully supports the principle of making its research outputs freely available and accessible. The IAHS embraces the principles of open-access publishing and will continue to promote this approach with all staff.

At an individual project level, the IAHS will ensure that all outputs are publicly available, and thus easily accessible, through the University’s AURA (Aberdeen University Research Archive) system.

Training IAHS staff to put impact at the heart of their day-to-day activities
The IAHS seeks to embed the prioritisation of impact of IAHS research beyond academia into day-to-day research activities. The IAHS promotes training to IAHS researchers about the importance of impact and give them the tools and skills to maximise their impact activities (eg through the University’s regular seminar series on how to maximise impact from research, which actively promotes the importance of making research accessible to multiple users).

Providing infrastructure to support these activities
The University of Aberdeen is unambiguously committed to the promotion of impact and the integration and consideration of impact into the day-to-day activities of its staff. It has set up a range of infrastructure to support these activities. IAHS has full access and support from these facilities.

The importance of impact is championed at the highest level through the University’s Committee for Research, Impact and Knowledge Exchange (CRIKE). CRIKE is the senior level research committee in
the University with representation from researchers across all Colleges as well as a member of the University Court. Its aim is to develop and facilitate a research culture throughout the University as part of the Institution’s aim of significantly improving its research profile. The committee oversees research grant income, commercialisation, postgraduate research students, researcher development and is responsible for the institutional impact strategy.

Financial support is also directly available to researchers to promote public engagement activities through the University’s Enabling Fund for Public Engagement with Research and further promoted through the annual Principal’s Prize for Public Engagement with Research.

The University of Aberdeen is also a Centre of Excellence for Public Engagement supported by the Research Councils UK Catalyst scheme, one of only eight such institutions across the UK. Through this, the University has a be-spoke Public Engagement with Research Unit which also trains staff and students in other public engagement activities. The Public Engagement in Research Unit works closely with local, national and international partners to support year round initiatives that forge dynamic interactions between the University community and the public. For example, the Public Engagement with Research Unit coordinates a series of public engagement activities to highlight innovative findings and provides a forum to discuss scientific controversies through the University’s Café Scientifique, Café MED, Café Controversial, and Café Connect talks (the UK’s biggest Cafe discussion series).

The University of Aberdeen also have an active and engaged Communications Team which helps with the production and dissemination of media releases about research findings and with training of staff to work with the media.