

Evaluation of research impact and academic discourse – a comparative approach (Poland, UK, Norway)

Consider the significance of writing an autobiographical text. How does narrating the story of your personal or professional experience affect how you perceive it, value it and situate it within a broader life narrative? Think of how our perception of ourselves is changed when we draft our curriculum vitae, a journal, a memoir, or, for that matter, a Facebook post about an achievement which we are proud of.

This project looks at a new genre of academic text – impact case study. These documents are submitted by academic staff to a periodic evaluation exercise. Writing these documents impels scholars to reflect on the influence of their work beyond academia and to narrate this influence in a convincing way. 'Impact' has become a key concept in the evaluation of science over the last decade. It may account for as much as 25% of the assessed unit's final score.

There exist various models of impact evaluation but currently the most widespread one is the case study approach. This approach was introduced in the UK as part of the cyclical evaluation of research (Research Excellence Framework) and is often emulated in other countries. Among them are Norway and Poland. As part of the evaluation of Polish scientific units completed in 2022, "societal impact" was one of three evaluation criteria, alongside quality of scientific activity and research results.

The research project looks at the process of introducing "impact" as a criterion of evaluation in three countries: Great Britain, Norway and Poland. It uses the approach called "discourse analysis" to trace how the new, influential concept of "impact" is socially constructed and how it influences communicative patterns of scientists. A key concept in the analysis is "genre". The emergence of a new type of academic text – impact case study – will be examined from a linguistic perspective. Three types of data will be collected and examined: impact case studies, interviews with social actors involved in the process of evaluating impact (scientists, university executives, panellists), and questionnaires sent to academic institutions.

The study will show how a new academic "value" is discursively constructed by the many members of a discourse community. It will look at how this process differs depending on the broader academic system. The results of the study will be of interest for scholars of higher education, evaluation and discourse. They will also have practical value for those involved in the process of assessing the impact of research: authors of case studies, university managers, and evaluators. Finally, the empirical findings will constitute a base for broader philosophical reflections on the nature of governing academic subjects.