



AN ESRC & HEFCE  
INVESTMENT

# Launch of the Centre for Global Higher Education

**Conceptual issues in measuring  
the impact of higher education**

Paul Ashwin  
Lancaster University  
[p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk](mailto:p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk)

#CGHElaunch

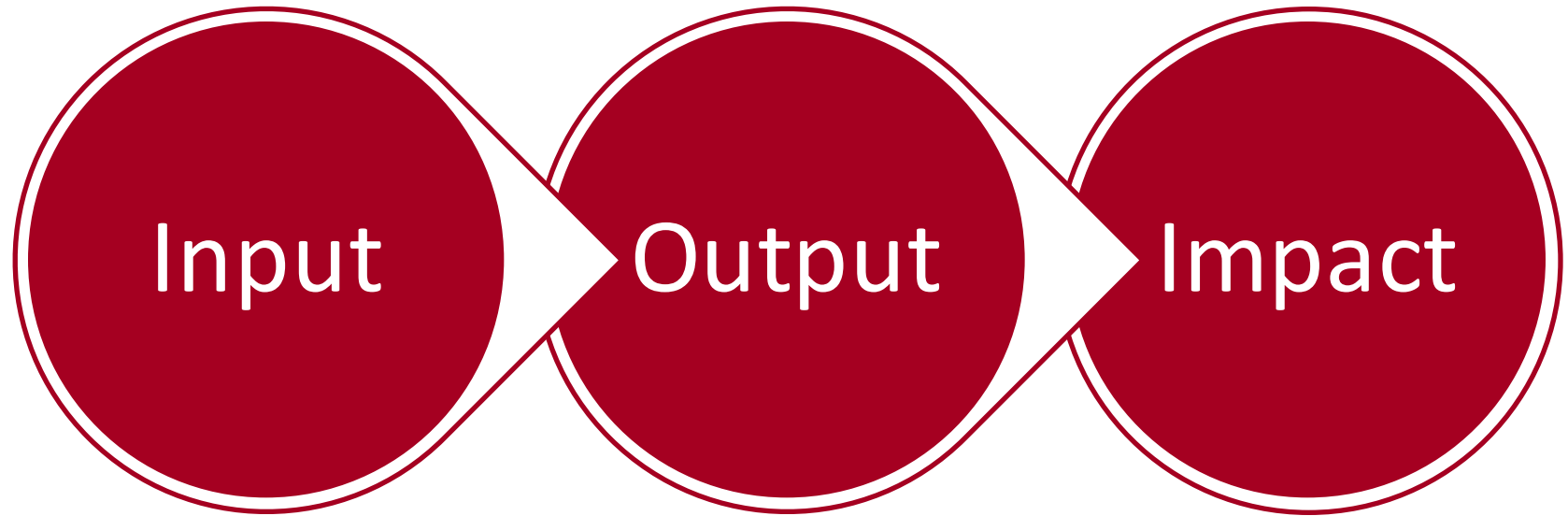
# Introduction

- A look at impact debates from the perspective of research into teaching and learning in HE;
- Until recently debates about measuring impact focused much more on research than teaching;
- I want to consider how ways of conceptualising relations between teaching and learning might help us to think about the impact of teaching and research.

# Measures of Institutional Impact

- The most established measures of institutional impact are national and international HE rankings;
- Focus on impact in relation to research, industry, teaching, regional;
- Largely focused on bringing together input and output measures;
- Offer no sense of the mechanisms by which impact occurs because this is not what they are designed to do.

# Institutional Impact

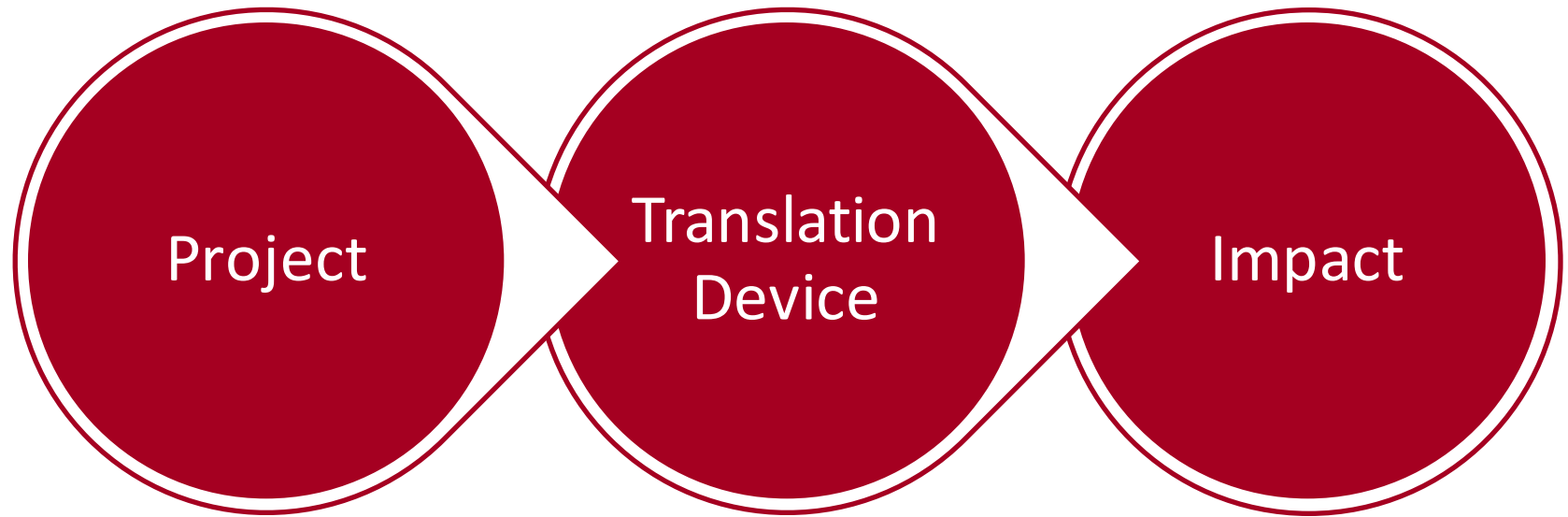


# Measures of Research Impact

In relation to research, there are measures that are designed to focus on mechanisms of impact.

- At a broadly departmental level the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) examines impact that is “underpinned by excellent research” produced at the submitting institution.
- At a project level, the UK research councils focus on “demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy”.
- EU Horizon 2020 projects expected to contribute to public debate and the tackling of societal challenges and be disseminated in a useable form to policy makers and the wider public.
- All focus on the impact of individual projects.

# Research Impact



# Measures of Teaching Impact

Measures of teaching impact are less clearly established:

- An aspect of rankings information, in terms of graduate salaries.
- OECD's Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project seeks to compare the quality of what students learn in different institutions and countries.
- In the UK, HEFCE's Learning Gain projects looking for ways of measuring what students gain from their undergraduate degrees.
- The focus in such projects tend to shift to focus on generic skills development, as a discipline-free measure of teaching impact.

# Teaching Impact





# The Pedagogic Device

- Bernstein's (2000) notion of the 'pedagogic device' can be seen to relate to three versions of knowledge:
  - Knowledge-as-research;
  - Knowledge-as-curriculum;
  - Knowledge-as-student-understanding(see Ashwin 2014 for an exploration of these distinctions).
- Knowledge is transformed as it moves between these three forms.
- Emphasises the power struggles as knowledge is transformed into student understanding

Knowledge

Transformational interactions

Curriculum

Transformational interactions

Student understanding

Knowledge

Transformational interactions

Translation device

Transformational interactions

Societal impact

# Teaching Impact



# Teaching Impact

Collective  
Body of  
Knowledge

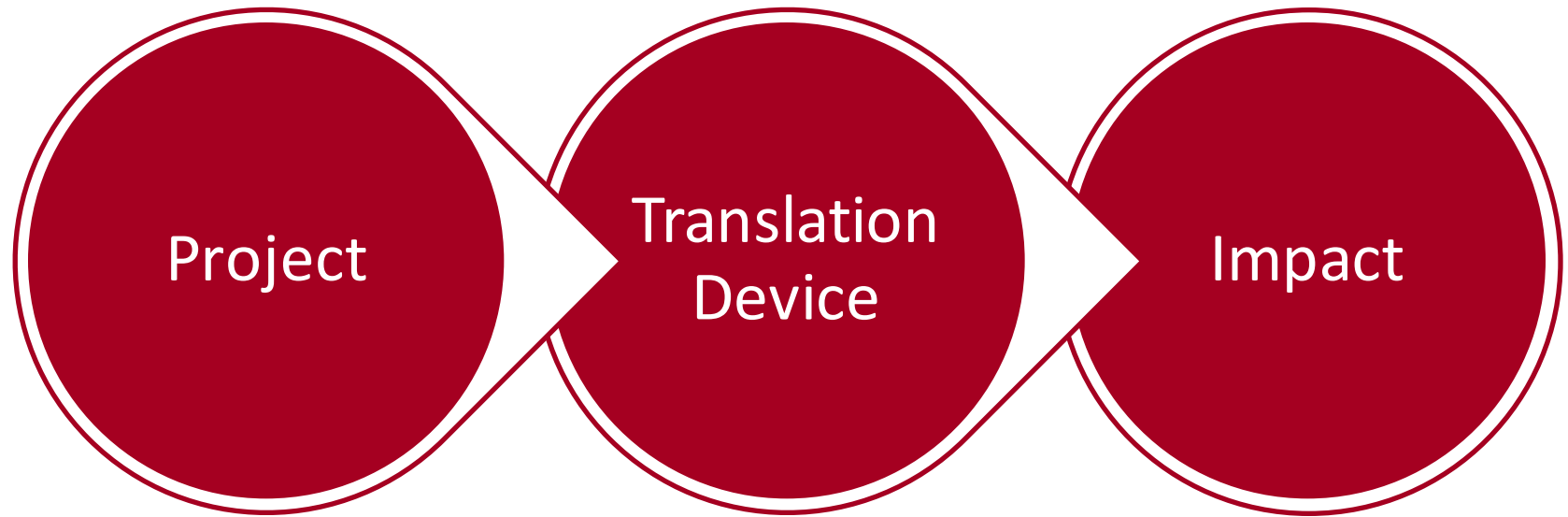
Curriculum

Teaching &  
Learning  
Interactions

Student  
Understanding

Impact

# Research Impact



# Research Impact



# So what?

- Current approaches to impact tend to obscure the crucial roles played by :
  - Collective bodies of knowledge;
  - The collective transformation of these bodies of knowledge into usable material;
  - Contestation and power in shaping what is recognised as impact and who is seen as 'owning' it.
- This tends to shape an individualised, ahistorical approach to impact. The game is to claim ownership of impact.
- It would make much more sense to examine impact at the level of the system rather than the project or programme level.

# References

Ashwin, P. (2014) Knowledge, curriculum and student understanding. *Higher Education* 67 : 123-126.

Bernstein, B. (2000) *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity: Theory, Research and Critique*. Revised Edition. Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers.