

University libraries have always contributed to and supported research impact, but their contribution has largely been invisible. Now, as Australian universities grapple with the next round of the Engagement and Impact Assessment exercise in 2024, and with professional services in most universities decimated by staffing cuts due to COVID, **Eleanor Colla and Joann Cattlin** argue that university librarians need to be part of discussions surrounding research impact.

REAL IMPACT

University libraries support researchers in numerous ways, including enabling research impact, which is the change that research makes in the real world. In Australia these expectations have been increasing: many funders now require researchers to plan for and document their research impact, with universities being assessed based on case studies of impact. This involves the implementation of new processes for data collection, along with training researchers in practices that enable research impact. With professional services in most universities decimated by staffing cuts following the loss of income during the COVID pandemic, resourcing impact activities is a real issue. Librarians are well placed to support this work, but will they be invited to the table?

In the UK, where research impact assessment has existed for longer under the Research Excellence Framework (REF), some have highlighted the missed opportunity for information professionals to contribute. Dominic Walker writes in his article 'Libraries and the REF: how do librarians contribute to research excellence?' that the involvement of libraries in the REF is largely invisible and library professionals' contributions go unrecognised. A 2021 report by the Research Libraries UK, *The role of academic and research libraries as active participants and leaders in the production of scholarly research*, identified the untapped

potential for libraries to contribute to research through collaborations and partnerships.

Libraries have long supported researchers by adapting to new policies, requirements and technological advances that support the changing practices and priorities of researchers, institutions and funders. From online databases and referencing software through to bibliometrics and open research, academic libraries have adapted their services to meet the needs of researchers. Many of these new services already support research impact. Information professionals have become scholarly communications specialists, advocated for research data management and the role of repositories, and worked with researchers to adopt researcher profiles and online engagement into their workflows.

For university libraries, playing a more active role in capability development and data collection for impact assessment is a natural next step. Librarians can contribute to the development of case studies by setting up researcher profiles, offering publishing advice, providing bibliometric and altmetric data to support impact claims, and assisting with searching grey literature, policy documents, media databases and legal documents. Recently, librarians have further broadened their skills of supporting impact by providing data

associated with research aligning with UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Universities across Australia have formed committees, working groups and development units to define what 'impact' is. Largely, as with the UK, librarians have not been included in discussions. To effectively address their impact goals, universities must work with the skilled workforce on offer at libraries. On the library side, we need to revise and reconfigure service charters, realign with new priorities and further integrate librarians into the research life cycle.

We must create a succinct narrative of what services can be offered, when and by whom. Part of this conversation is the role of recognised industry bodies such as ALIA and the Council of Australian University Librarians. These professional bodies must support and advocate for research support librarians in creating this narrative. 🌱

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