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CeADAR
Ireland's Centre for AI

UCD School of Computer Science
Scoil na Ríomheolaíochta UCD

Impactful and Future-Proof Research

CyclOps WINTER SCHOOL

Bolzano, 13 January 2026

CyclOps

Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Commission as the granting authority. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them

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Why Care About Impact?

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Why Impact is Now Non-Negotiable

CORE FUNDING CRITERION

MANDATORY AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS RESEARCHERS

LONG-TERM RESEARCH RELEVANCE AND CAREER IMPACT

Not only for innovation programmes, also research funding programmes want to see the potential generated impact (e.g. Research Ireland)

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Outsourcing Your Impact Section: A Big Mistake

Impact is **not marketing;** it's a research activity.

Writing it yourself shows you understand:

- Who benefits and how
- Barriers and risks
- Credible pathways to outcomes

Generic or outsourced text is prone to **gaps or inconsistencies** and **undermines credibility** with evaluators.

If your impact section is vague or copied from templates, risks and assumptions **may not align with your methodology**

Defining Impact is like **designing an experiment for the future**: you know best the assumptions and evidence.

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Why you must own the Impact

Career & Funding Impact

- Builds skills for:
  - future (continuation) proposals
  - collaborations with industry and other stakeholders
  - policy engagement
- Evaluators reward researchers who understand the societal, economic, and policy impact
- Opens opportunities for jobs beyond Academia

Credibility

- Assumptions align with methodology
- Pathways to impact are realistic and evidence-based

Practical Advice:

- Treat impact like an experiment: collect evidence, identify pathways, test assumptions
- Use logic maps or stakeholder analysis to structure your thinking
- Reach out for support and consult advisors, **but define the main points yourself**

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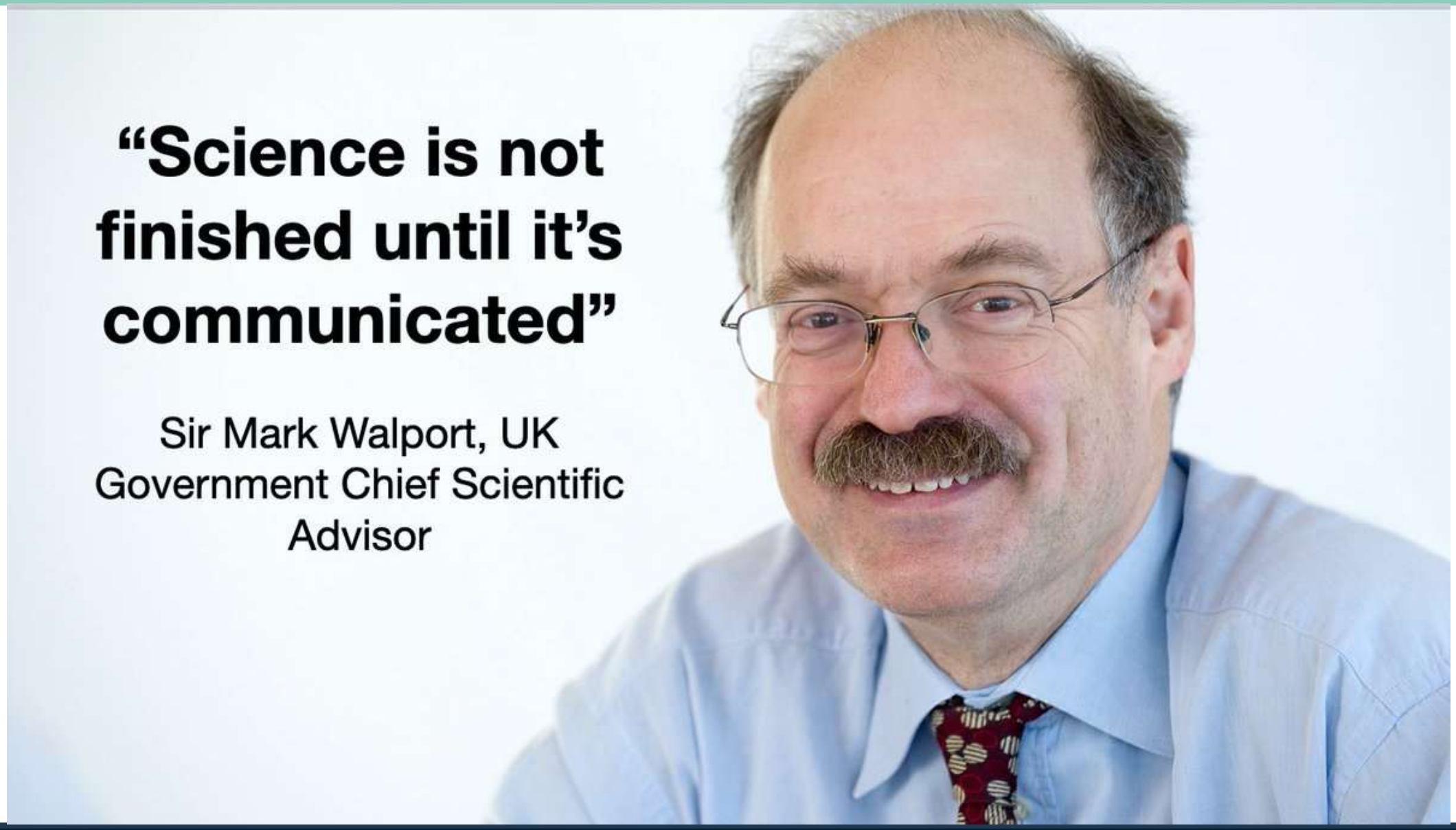

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Policy Contributions as part of your Research

Special Eurobarometer 557:

68% of Europeans agree that **scientists** should intervene in political debate to ensure decisions take into account scientific evidence.

Source: Sharing scientific evidence with policy makers. A starter kit for EU-funded research and innovation projects (European Commission, 2025, DOI 10.2848/8625431)

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The Virtuous Cycle of Research Impact

Source: Sharing scientific evidence with policy makers. A starter kit for EU-funded research and innovation projects (European Commission, 2025, DOI 10.2848/8625431)

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Why Impact Matters for Researchers

65% Increase in number of FTE Researchers in EU between 2005 and 2023 (from **1.30** to **2.15** million).

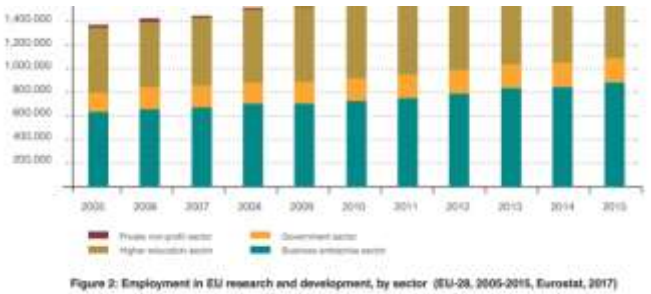
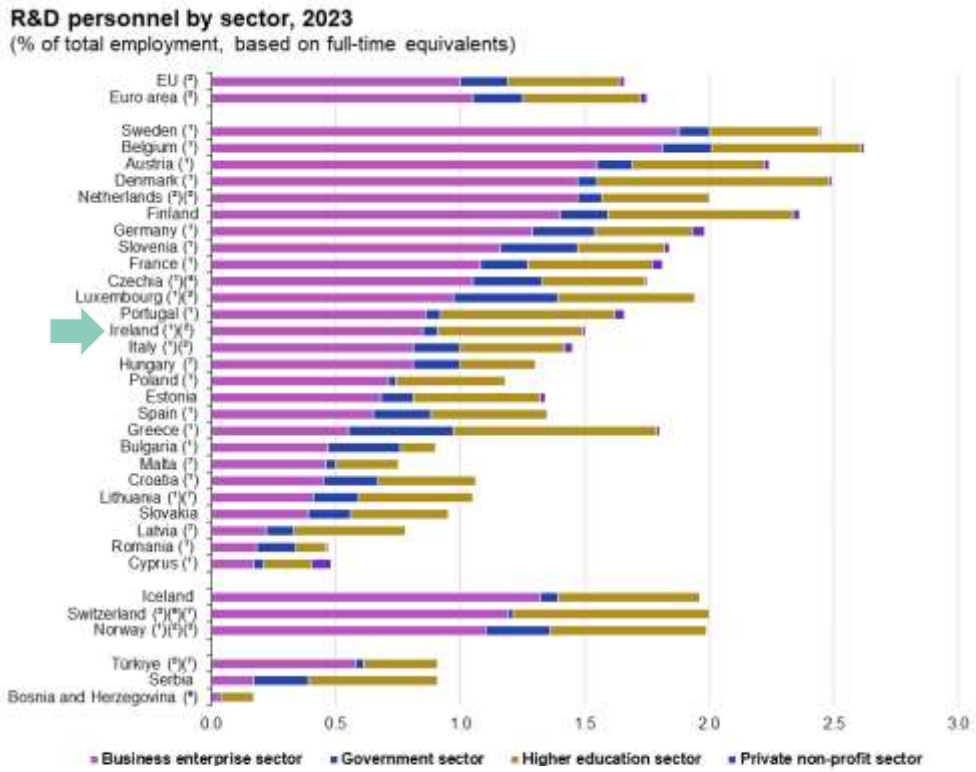


Figure 2: Employment in EU research and development, by sector (EU-28, 2005-2015, Eurostat, 2017)



FTE Researchers in the EU in 2023

57% worked in Business Enterprises

32% in Higher Education (HE)

10% in the Government sector

eurostat

Source: Eurostat (online data code rd_p_perslf)

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Widening Horizons

Researchers' transferable skills open multiple opportunities within and beyond HE

Nearby	Still close	A little further	Away from research	Anything goes
			Legal or patents	Any 'graduate level' job - Accounting - Law - Marketing - Production - Admin
		Government lab	Teaching schools/ colleges	Personnel
	Research Fellow	Museum/gallery	Scientific /public policy advisor	Private sector
	Technical support	Research Institute	Government 'desk researcher'	Not-for-profit sector
Research staff – new contract	Lecturer	Research Council, Charity, private company	Publishing	Self-employment
	Administrator	Small or medium enterprise, Research and Development	Research Councils	Small or medium enterprise
	Entrepreneur	Consultancy firm or Independent consultant	Clinical advisor	Large organisation
		Your own 'spin-off' business	Pharmaceuticals	Service sector
			Production manager	Manufacturing
			Technical sales/ marketing	Government
			Consultancy	Start your own business
Narrow horizon – known and safe but secure	A little wider – but still university based	Still research but transferring research skills to another setting	Using knowledge and understanding but not research	Using transferable skills rather than specific knowledge

Increasing 'risk' and research effort to investigate

Increasing breadth of opportunity

Increasing likelihood of some kind of retraining (but not always)

Increasing wide horizons, the world is your oyster!

Source: Vitae, 2013 The Career-Wise Researcher

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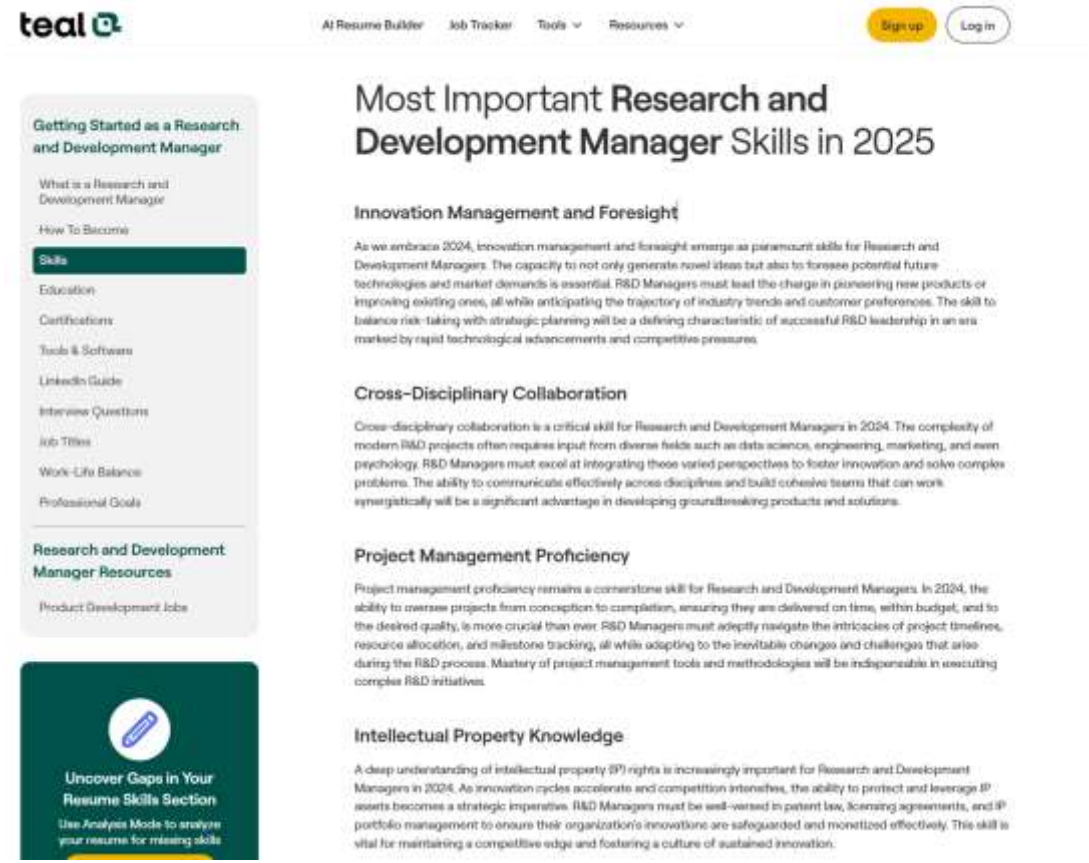
Why Impact Matters for Researchers



Hard Skills

Soft Skills

1. **Innovation** Management and Foresight (Future Technologies and **Market** Demand)
1. Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration
2. PM Proficiency
3. **Intellectual Property** Management
4. Resourcefulness and Budgeting Acumen
5. **Regulatory** Compliance and QA
6. **Strategic** Thinking
7. **Environmental** and Social Governance (**ESG**)

Source: Teal (https://www.tealhq.com/skills/research-and-development-manager)

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Why Impact Matters for Researchers

HIGHER GRANT SUCCESS RATES

STRONGER PROMOTION & TENURE CASES

INCREASED VISIBILITY & LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

EXPANDED INTERNATIONAL AND INDUSTRY NETWORKS

CAREER RESILIENCE IN A VOLATILE FUNDING LANDSCAPE

Why Impact Matters for Research Managers and Administrators

More competitive proposals

Clearer narratives, higher evaluation scores

Clearer alignment with funder priorities

Proposals speak the funder's language *and help shape it*

Contributions to work programme drafts & consultations

Institutions with strong impact insight influence future funding calls

Enhanced institutional reputation

Recognition for delivering meaningful results

Deeper partnerships

Trusted relationships with funders, industry & policy stakeholders

Sustainable funding pipelines

Long-term success across calls and programmes

The "Impact Partner" Advantage

More invitations • More strategic roles • More influence

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Impact as Career Insurance

Researchers and Institutions that embed Impact:

- **Adapt faster** to new funding priorities
- **Survive** policy shifts and budget constraints
- Remain **fundable and relevant**
- Build **long-term trust** with funders and partners

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Impact in EU Projects

Learning to Love the "Dreaded" Section 2 in Horizon Europe Proposals

Evaluation criteria (RIAs and IAs)

Research and innovation action (RIA)

Activities to establish new knowledge or to explore the feasibility of a new or improved technology, product, process, service or solution.

This may include basic and applied research, technology development and integration, testing, demonstration and validation of a small-scale prototype in a laboratory or simulated environment.

Innovation action (IA)

Activities to produce plans and arrangements or designs for new, altered or improved products, processes or services.

These activities may include prototyping, testing, demonstrating, piloting, large-scale product validation and market replication.

EXCELLENCE

- ✓ Clarity and pertinence of the **project's objectives**, and the extent to which the proposed work is ambitious, and goes beyond the state-of-the-art.
- ✓ Soundness of the proposed **methodology**, including the underlying concepts, models, assumptions, inter-disciplinary approaches, appropriate consideration of the **gender dimension** in research and innovation content, and the quality of **open science practices** including sharing and management of research outputs and engagement of citizens, civil society and end users where appropriate.

IMPACT[1]

- ✓ Credibility of the **pathways** to achieve the expected **outcomes and impacts** specified in the work programme.
- ✓ Suitability and quality of the **measures to maximize expected outcomes and impacts**, as set out in the dissemination and exploitation plan, including communication activities.

QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION

- ✓ Quality and effectiveness of the **work plan**, assessment of risks, and appropriateness of the effort assigned to work packages, and the resources overall.
- ✓ Capacity and role of each **participant**, and extent to which the **consortium** as a whole brings together the necessary expertise.

NEW! (1) Simplification of evaluation of impact from WP2026/7 onwards: Scale and significance of contributions are no longer considered.

Proposals aspects are assessed to the extent that the proposed work is within the scope of the work programme topic

European Commission

Source: European Commission, Horizon Europe Proposal Evaluation Standard Briefing (2025), Version 13.0

Evaluating the impact criterion (1/2)

Following questions are adapted to RIA and IA type of actions (ToA). Similar questions will be asked for other ToAs, in line with the instructions in the specific applications forms.

Assess the proposed pathways towards impact:

- Is the contribution of the project towards the 1) expected outcomes of the topic and 2) the wider impacts, in the longer term, as specified in the respective destinations of the WP, credible?
- Are potential barriers to the expected outcomes and impacts identified (i.e. other R&I work within and beyond Horizon Europe; regulatory environment; targeted markets; user behavior), and mitigation measures proposed? Is any potential negative environmental outcome or impact (including when expected results are brought at scale, such as at commercial level) identified? Is the management of the potential negative impacts properly described?

NEW! Simplification of evaluation of impact from WP2026/7 onwards: Scale and significance of contributions are no longer considered.

Always provide well-supported reasons to justify your evaluation. For instance, if you think that the contribution of the project towards the expected outcomes of the topic is (or is not) credible, **add always the rationale behind your opinion.**

Source: European Commission, Horizon Europe Proposal Evaluation Standard Briefing (2025), Version 13.0

Evaluating the impact criterion (2/2)

Following questions are adapted to RIA and IA type of actions (ToA). Similar questions will be asked for other ToAs, in line with the instructions in the specific applications forms.

Assess the measures to maximise impact – Dissemination, exploitation and communication :

- Are the proposed dissemination, exploitation and communication measures suitable for the project and of good quality? All measures should be proportionate to the scale of the project, and should contain concrete actions to be implemented both during and after the end of the project.
- Are the target groups (e.g. scientific community, end users, financial actors, public at large) for these measures identified?
- Is the strategy for the management of intellectual property properly outlined and suitable to support exploitation of results?
    - If exploitation is expected primarily in non-associated third countries, is it properly justified how that exploitation is still in the Union's interest?

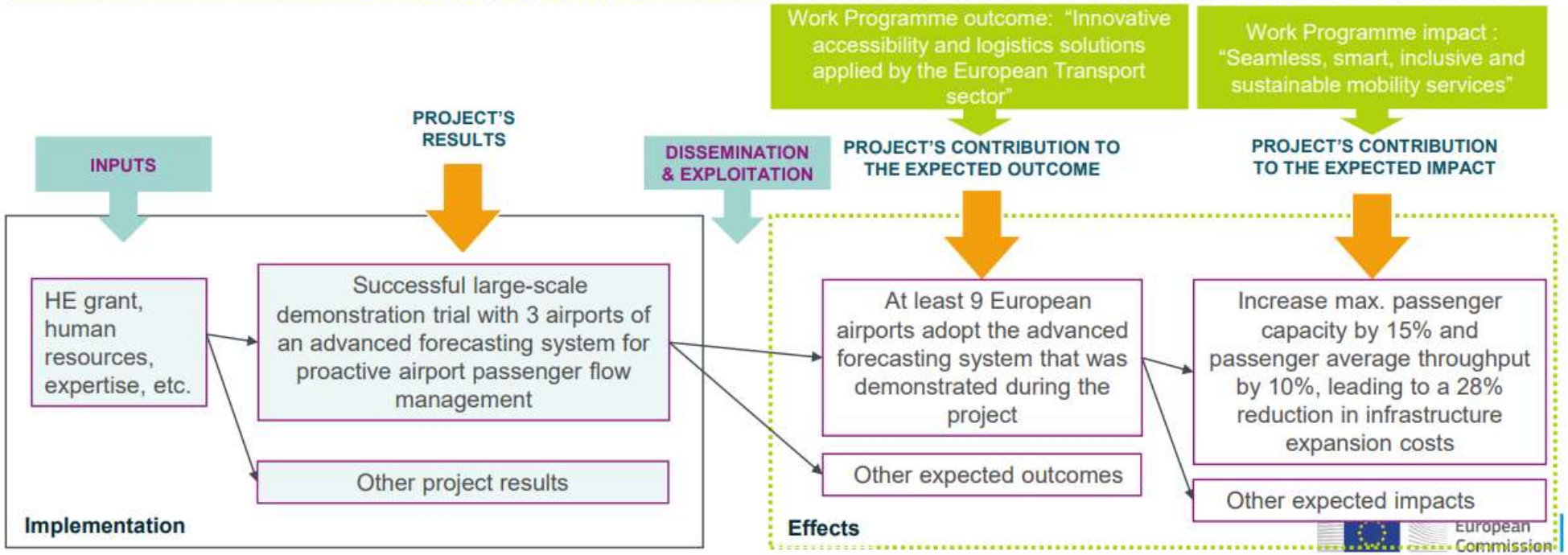
Always provide well-supported reasons to justify your evaluation. For instance, if you think that the dissemination, exploitation and communication measures are (or are not) suitable for the project and of good quality, **add always the rationale behind your opinion.**

Source: European Commission, Horizon Europe Proposal Evaluation Standard Briefing (2025), Version 13.0

How applicants describe the impact

Project's pathway towards impact

…by thinking about the specific contribution the project can make to the expected outcomes and impacts set out in the Work Programme.



Source: European Commission, Horizon Europe Proposal Evaluation Standard Briefing (2025), Version 13.0

Impact is 1/3 of the Score (at least!)

Scores and weighting

Evaluation scores will be awarded for the criteria, and not for the different aspects listed in the table. For full applications, each criterion will be scored out of 5. The threshold for individual criteria will be 3. The overall threshold, applying to the sum of the three individual scores, will be 10.

To determine the ranking for 'Innovation actions', the score for 'Impact' will be given a weight of 1.5.

Proposals that pass the individual threshold AND the overall threshold will be considered for funding, within the limits of the available call budget. Other proposals will be rejected.

For each group of proposals with the same score, starting with the group achieving the highest score and continuing in descending order:

1) Proposals that address aspects of the call that have not otherwise been covered by more highly ranked proposals will be considered to have the highest priority.

2) The proposals identified under 1), if any, will themselves be prioritised according to the scores they have been awarded for 'Excellence'. When these scores are equal, priority will be based on scores for 'Impact'. In the case of 'Innovation actions', priority will be given to the score for 'Impact', followed by that for 'Excellence'.

Source: Horizon Europe Work Programme 2026-202715. General Annexes (European Commission Decision C(2025) 8493 of 11 December 2025)

UCD Resources

Source: UCD webpage https://www.ucd.ie/impacttoolkit/communicate/writingasuccessfulhorizoneuropeproposal/

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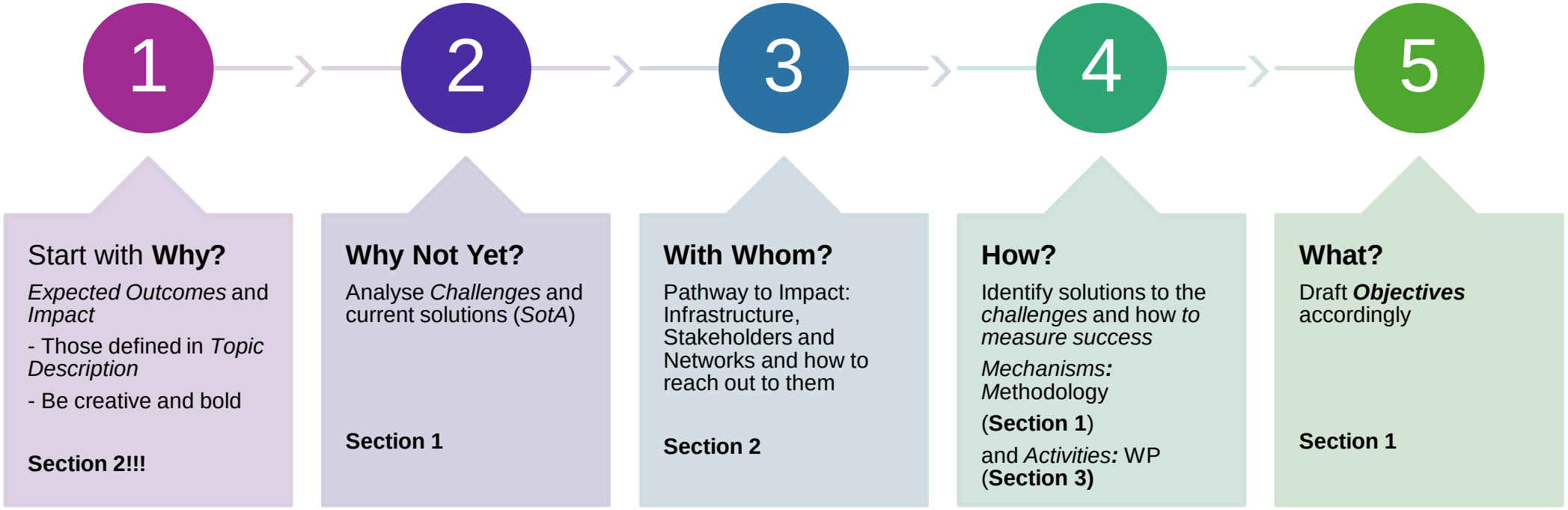
Using the Logic Map



Challenges	Objectives	Outcomes / Results	Pathway to Impact	Expected impact	
C1	O1	R1	P1	For citizens	Vertical-based: **Application 1** xxx **Application 2** xxx
C2	O2	R2	P2	For the research community	
C3	O3	R3	P3	For SMEs	
C4		R4	P4	For decision-makers	
C5	O4	R5	P5		
	O5	R6			
C6	O6	R7	P6		

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Logic Map Example

1 m → 2 → 3 → 4 → 5

Why?

Companies want to leverage the value of data they have or may access (e.g. data spaces)

Why Not Yet?

Lack of agnostic, low-literacy, low-cost, accesible AI tools for small businesses

Available solutions require either big investment without clear ROI or specialist talent

With Whom?

Industry partners (SMEs) in the Project, RTO, technology providers, technological consultancy companies not linked to specific tech stack

How?

Identify bottlenecks in the data processing workflow and develop tools for each and every step.

Two iterations of development of modular tools

What?

Integrated platform

Interoperable modules covering the data pipeline processes

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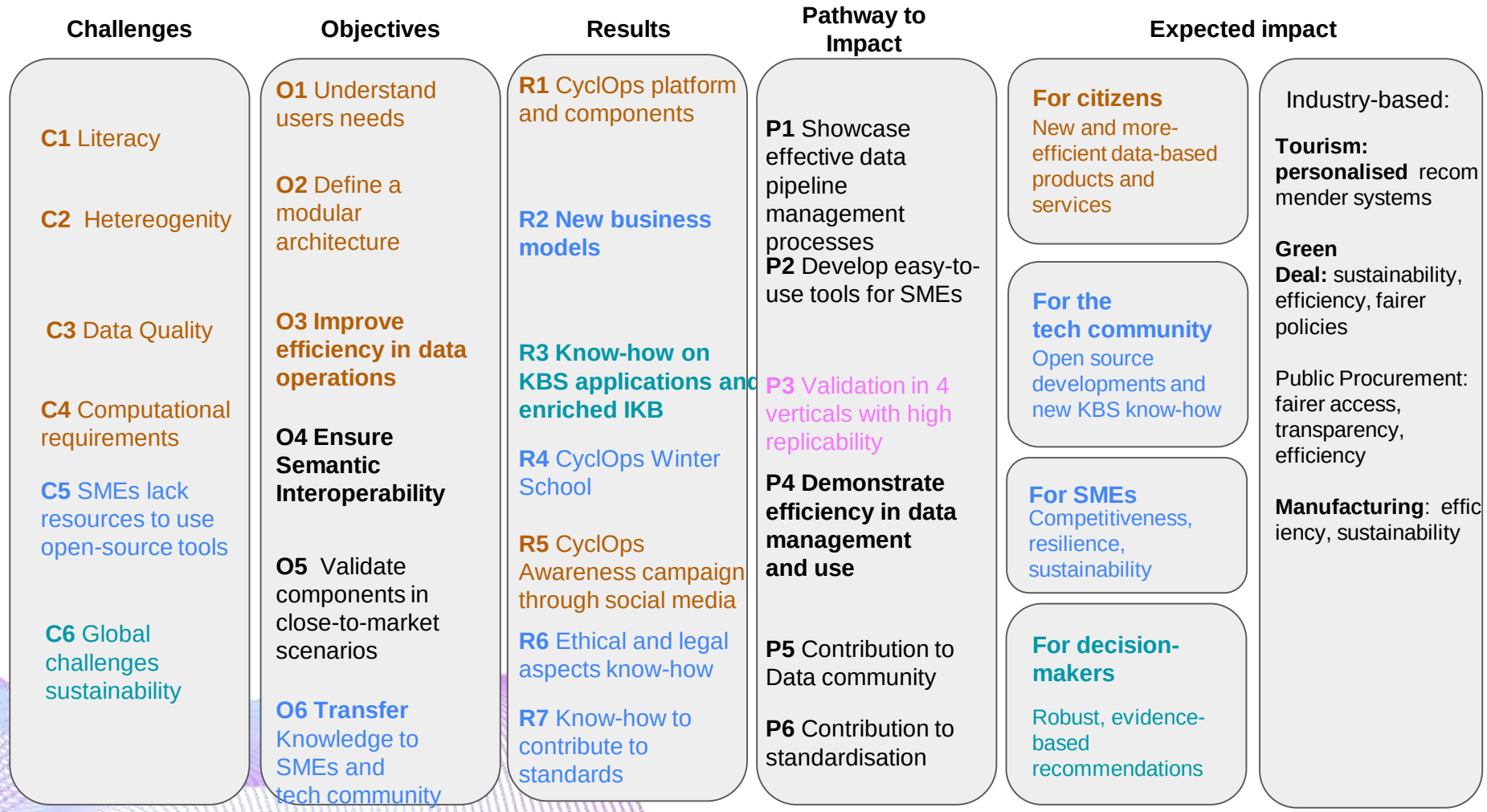
Logic Map Example



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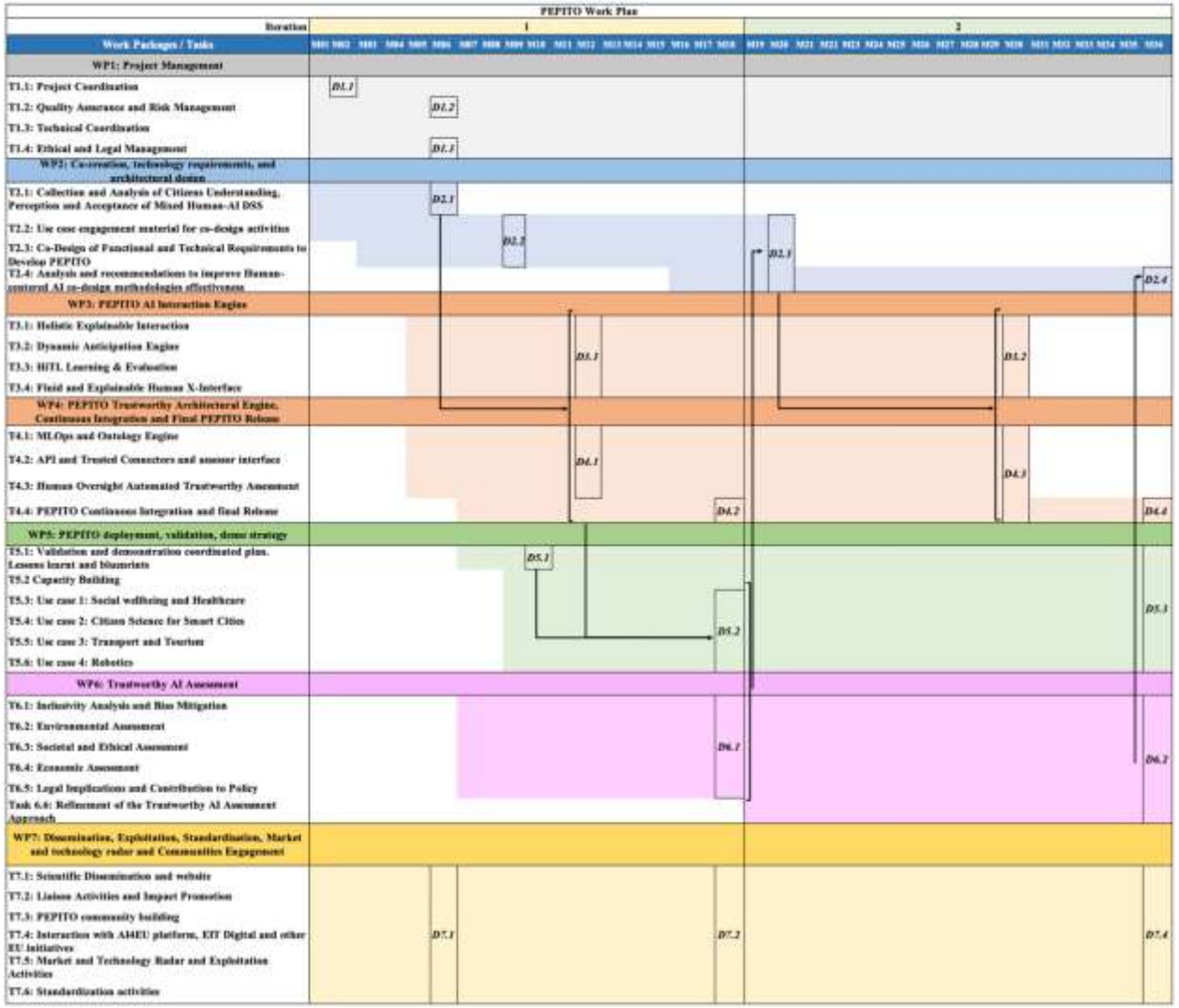
Logic Map and Work Plan

Evaluators will check **coherence** (credibility / suitability)

Impacts must be supported with related **activities** and **budget**



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Defining Impact

inspired by the EIT KPIs

eit European Institute of Innovation & Technology

A body of the European Union

1. Innovation & Knowledge Outputs

How research turns into usable solutions

New products, services and processes

Patents and other intellectual property

Innovations introduced to the market

2. Business Creation & Economic Impact

How ideas generate growth and jobs

Start-ups created and supported

Scale-ups accelerated

Investment attracted (public and private)

Jobs created

3. Education & Human Capital

How people become future innovators

Students trained and graduates produced

Development of entrepreneurial and innovation skills

Capacity building for professionals and researchers

4. Networks, Diffusion & Ecosystem

How impact spreads across Europe

New partnerships between academia, industry and society

Geographical reach of innovations

Dissemination of results to users, professionals and citizens

5. Societal & Systemic Impact

How innovation improves society and policy

Uptake of solutions addressing societal challenges

Deployment of solutions in real environments

Influence on policy, practices and behaviour

Cross-Cutting Strategic Dimensions

What ensures sustainable long-term impact

Regional innovation and inclusion

Gender balance and diversity

Long-term monitoring of results beyond project end

Source: Adapted from *EIT Impact Framework 2022 – 2027* https://www.eit.europa.eu/library/eit-simplified-impact-framework

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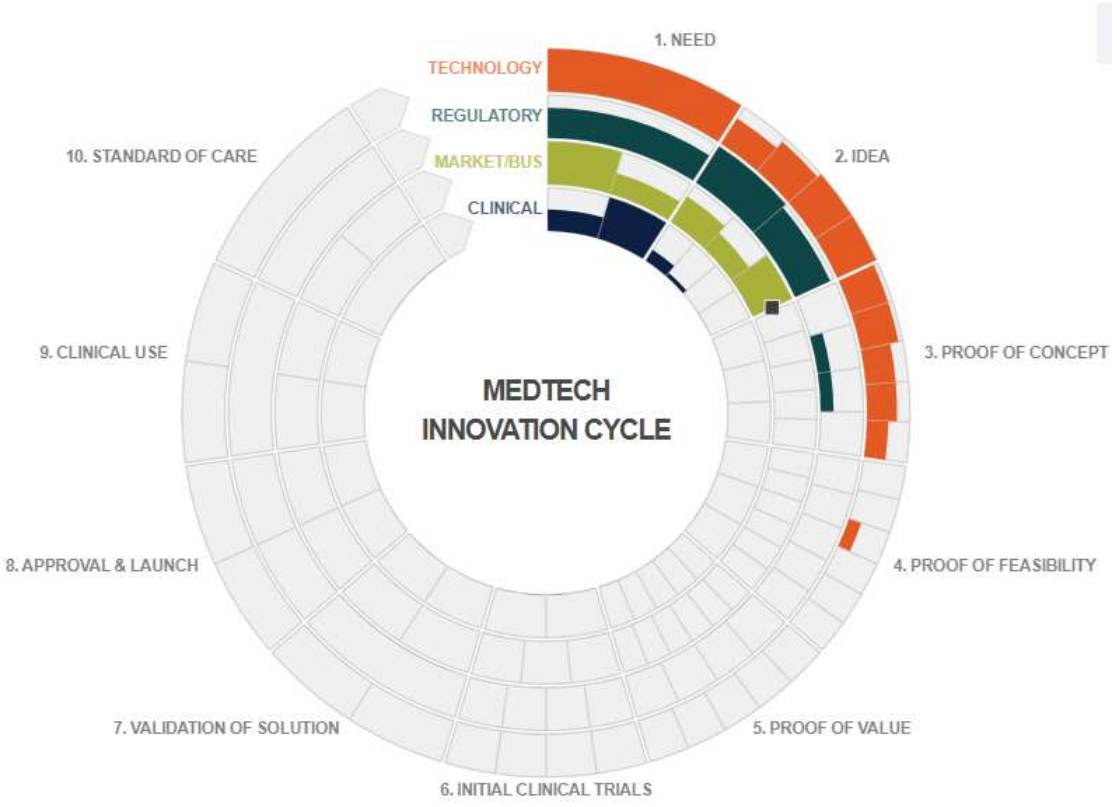
Defining Impact

inspired by the CIMIT GAITS

5. Proof of Value (POV)	The potential of the solution to work and create value for stakeholders is demonstrated	☐ Feedback from 100+ clinical stakeholders ☐ Feedback from 5+ KOLs ☐ Animal/first in/with man experiments ☐ Medical advisory board ☐ Clinical trial endpoints	☐ Key management team committed ☐ Investor ready business plan ☐ Feedback from 20+ economic buyers ☐ Initial seed investment ☐ Incorporation & Founders Agreement ☐ Key relationships formalized	☐ Essential requirements checklist ☐ Application form to competent authority submitted ☐ Clinical Investigation approval(s) ☐ Electronic protected health information (ePHI) plans	☐ "Works Like, Looks Like Made Like" prototypes ☐ Essential technical experiments results ☐ IP search report ☐ Key in-sourcing requirements committed ☐ cGMP compliant pilot manufacturing process
6. Initial Clinical Trials	Regulated production of prototypes and collection of clinical and economic data	☐ Endpoints achieved in pilot clinical trials ☐ Demo feedback from 20+ clinical stakeholders ☐ Peer reviewed publication(s) submitted	☐ Value quantification ☐ Feedback from 20+ economic buyers ☐ 1st Institutional Investment	☐ GDPR/HIPAA compliance ☐ Security and vulnerability certifications ☐ Data requirements confirmation ☐ Pre-submission sent	☐ cGMPs compliant manufacturing plan ☐ Updated specification & experimental validation ☐ All in-sourcing requirements achieved ☐ Full IP application
7. Validtion of Solution (VoS)	The solution is shown to be effective and its value to all stakeholders is validated	☐ Endpoints achieved in pivotal clinical trials ☐ Peer reviewed publication(s) accepted	☐ Purchasing intent from 10+ buyers ☐ Second round of institutional investment	☐ Submission of Technical file to regulatory body	☐ Quality assured process validation (cGMP) ☐ Updated specification & experimental validation
8. Approval & Launch (A&L)	Institutional and regulatory approval received and sales launch	☐ Training materials & Support established ☐ Specialty medical groups review in place	☐ Initial sales ☐ Update regionalization plans	☐ Registration and listing ☐ CMS/Public Coverage and CPT/DRG code determination	☐ Finalized cGMP manufacturing process ☐ IP for improvements filed
9. Clinical Use (Use)	The solution is used successfully in day-to-day clinical practice	☐ Included in local practice guidelines ☐ Peer reviewed publications	☐ Profitable sales ☐ New markets launched	☐ Monitoring/ inspections	☐ Improvement plan ☐ Key patents issued
10. Standard of Care (SoC)	The solution is recognized as the standard of care	☐ Recommended practice by medical specialty	☐ Dominant market share ☐ Health economics study	☐ Product Obsolescence Plan	☐ Component Obsolescence Plan



Source: CIMIT Guidance and Impact Tracking System (GAITS) https://www.gaits.org/

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Impact on Policy

Source: Sharing scientific evidence with policy makers. A starter kit for EU-funded research and innovation projects (European Commission, 2025, DOI 10.2848/8625431)

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EU EC Resources

Innovation Radar https://innovation-radar.ec.europa.eu/

European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, *Communication, dissemination & exploitation what is the difference and why they all matter*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023 **https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/289075**

European Commission: European Research Executive Agency, *Disseminating and exploiting results – A starter kit for EU-funded research and innovation projects*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2025 **https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2848/1949672**

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Common Impact Killers

Avoid this Evaluator Traps

Common Drawback	Evaluator Comment	How to Fix It
1. Generic Pathways (e.g., "We will engage with policy-makers and industry.")	*"The proposal fails to identify specific stakeholders or explain how engagement leads to adoption."*	Name **specific organizations** (e.g., companies, hospitals…), associations, networks, or EU working groups. Consider including them as partners.
2. Over-Ambitious Claims (e.g., "This project will solve global climate change.")	*"Claims regarding the scale of impact are over-ambitious and lack a credible baseline or calculation."*	Focus on **significance** for a specific target group. Use realistic numbers and a clear baseline.
3. Dissemination = Exploitation (Confusing giving a talk with actual use of results.)	*"The plan describes communication activities rather than how results will be used commercially or socially."*	Define **Use**. Explain who will own the result, if it's open-source, or how it becomes a new service/product.
4. Missing Barriers Analysis (Ignoring hurdles like laws, costs, or trust.)	*"The applicants have not addressed potential obstacles to innovation, such as regulatory hurdles or user reluctance."*	Include a **"Barriers & Mitigations"** table. Address the "Why Not Yet?" factor honestly.
5. The "Ghost" Work Plan (Impact claims in Sec 2 aren't in the Sec 3 budget/tasks.)	*"Lack of coherence; no specific tasks or deliverables are assigned to ensure the exploitation of results."*	Map every **Outcome**/**Result** to a specific Deliverable and Task in the work plan. Allocate enough PMs.
6. No Quantifiable KPIs (e.g., "We will improve trust in AI", "The new process will be more sustainable.")	*"The proposal lacks clear, measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track progress toward outcomes."*	Use **Target Numbers**: "Increase adoption rate by 15%" or "Input provided to 2 specific standards committees". Evaluate baseline and think how to measure progress.
7. Weak IP Strategy (e.g., "We will decide on IP during the project.")	*"Management of Intellectual Property is insufficiently addressed, risking the sustainability of results."*	State existing and new IP and specify access rights for partners, TTO support and potential protection mechanisms (publications, patents, licenses…)

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"Impact-by-design" EU Proposal Checklist

1. The Strategic Foundation (The "Why")

[ ] **Policy Alignment:** Have you identified the specific EU policy goals (e.g., Green Deal, Digital Decade, AI Continent Plan) your project supports?
[ ] **Outcome vs. Impact:** Are the **Outcomes** (short-term benefits) clearly distinguished from your **Impacts** (long-term societal/economic shifts)?
[ ] **The "Why Not Yet?":** Have you clearly defined the "barriers" (legal, social, or technical) that currently prevent this impact from happening?

2. Designing the Pathway (The "With Whom")

[ ] **Stakeholder Mapping:** Have you listed the specific groups (SMEs, policy-makers, citizens) who will actually *use* your results?
[ ] **Credibility Check:** Is the pathway realistic? (Avoid "hype"; focus on how you will bridge the gap between your lab and the end-user).
[ ] **Negative Side-Effects:** Have you identified any potential risks or unintended negative impacts of your research and how to mitigate them?

3. Maximizing Results (The "How")

[ ] **The 3 Pillars:** Do you have distinct plans for:

- **Communication:** Reaching the general public, stakeholders and the media?
- **Dissemination:** Reaching the potential beneficiaries?
- **Exploitation:** Ensuring the results are used commercially or invested, by public authorities or socially?

[ ] **KER Identification:** Have you defined 3–5 **Key Exploitable Results** (e.g., a software tool, a policy white paper, a training module)?
[ ] **IP Management:** Is there a clear plan for who owns the IP and how it will be protected to prevent it from being lost (or stolen!)?

4. Coherence & Budget (The "What")

[ ] **Cross-Section Consistency:** Does every impact claimed in Section 2 have a corresponding activity in the **Work Plan (Section 3)**?
[ ] **Budget Alignment:** Is there a dedicated budget and "Person Months" allocated to impact, communication, and exploitation activities?
[ ] **Measurability:** Do you have **KPIs (Key Performance Indicators)** to prove to the evaluator that you can track your success?

5. UCD & URMAN Final Polish

[ ] **Resource Check:** Have you consulted the **UCD Impact Toolkit** or run your draft by a member of the **URMAN** group?
[ ] **The "Policy Link":** Does your proposal highlight how UCD's research contributes to Ireland's and Europe's strategic autonomy and priorities?

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The "Impact Pitch" Test

Can you finish this sentence in 30 seconds?

“My project solves the challenge of **[X]**, creating the result **[Y]**, which will be used by **[Z Stakeholders]** to achieve the long-term impact of **[A]**."

Start with Impact Today,

Lead the Research of Tomorrow

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EDIH
European Digital Innovation Hubs Network

AIF IRL
EuroHPC
EuroHPC AI Factory Antennas

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