Position Statement on the Societal Value of Science

Proposed by the Science Europe Working Group on Research Policy and Programme Evaluation

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Be alert about concepts and definitions. They circumscribe what matters and how you look at it

Journey 1: From impact to contribution

- ‘Impact’ suggests unidirectional, direct and rather immediate effect of research on society, preferably based on observable ‘change’
- The effects of science on society are multifaceted
- They occur in many different ways
- These processes are complex
- They require the contribution of many different actors

From impact to contribution (2)

- Focus on collaboration, networks and contributions, rather than point-to-point knowledge transfer

- Societal outcomes are the effect of collaboration among diverse actors and the combination of research results with many other inputs
- They take time
- The ways these contributions are channelled are also varied, generating different ‘pathways’ linking research with the applications of its outputs

Putting value back in “evaluation”

Journey 2: From impact to value

- The pursuit of public values as the core rationale for public research, therefore…
- …when assessing research contributions to society
  - Value judgements are necessary
  - We need to consider the value they can generate for future generations
  - We need to consider how research can broaden the options available to society

From impact to value (2)

- Core concept in the Position Statement:
  - Value will be deemed to accrue when research has a *direct or indirect* **influence** on the generation of effects that are valued by society, including the pluralism contributed by academic freedom
- Value depends on what whole societies, or segments thereof, hold as important based on their needs and preferences at a specific point in time

Contestableness, debate and the use of evaluation results

- Evaluating the contribution of science to society is difficult and contestable
  - Different understandings of what is valuable
  - Not everything that is valuable is directly observable (do not be driven by the availability of indicators)
- Applications
  - Are often unanticipated and unplanned
  - Do not depend only on the researchers
  - Could lead to “bad” impacts

- Importance of methodological diversity
- The results of “impact assessments” should not determine, on their own, the allocation of funds
  - Use with care: they may generate unintended effects on research activities