“Building a Scientific Narrative on Impact and Societal Value of Science”

Setting the Scene

Ola Erstad, Head of Department of Education, Oslo University, Norway
Science & Society

- Different conceptions of ‘societal impact’ and the broader value of research:
  - The importance of excellent fundamental research
  - The impact of research upon society

- Measuring issues:
  - Quantitative indicators,
  - Growing qualitative approaches during the last decade (Miettinen et al., 2015)

- Differences across scientific disciplines
The Narrative: A Dynamic Understanding of Societal Impact

**Challenge**: a narrow linear understanding of impact, from research upon society (economic indicators/output).

- Impact is much more **dynamic and relational** (‘productive interactions’).
  - A political discourse broadening the concept of impact reflecting the complex relationship between scientific and societal needs.

**Example**: PISA-study (OECD, longitudinal)
- Based on fundamental research
- Policy implications
- Refined research instruments based on new research
6 Main Themes

1. Societal impact of science can be found everywhere

2. Need for a very broad understanding of societal implications of science fields (mobilisation and co-creation of knowledge)

3. Trust as a pre-condition of societal impact

4. Timescale of societal impact

5. Importance of translational dimension of research

6. Advancement of knowledge and its intrinsic value
Key Messages to Foster further Discussion

1. The value of **unexpected impact** should not be underestimated!

2. **Co-creation/knowledge exchange** result from **translational processes** from fundamental research to social/political knowledge and back.

3. Different stakeholders as part of the **trust-in-science** building process.

4. To **assess** impact, one should do it **forward, backwards and continuously**

5. Scientific research may not produce immediate, ‘useful’ results’ (risk of short-termism). **Pushing scientific frontiers for the ‘unknown unknowns’ to emerge** and help society answering future questions and new unforeseen problems.