



hefce

Higher Education Funding Council for England





The Research Excellence Framework

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25 November 2010

The purpose of the REF

- to secure the continuation of a world-class dynamic and responsive research base in the UK through
 - funding: selective funding allocations informed by quality assessment
 - benchmarking and information: establishing reputational yardsticks
 - accountability: demonstrating that public investment in research is effective and delivers public benefit

Aims of the REF

- Supporting and encouraging excellent research of all kinds, driving up quality across the UK HE research base
- Supporting innovative and curiosity-driven research including new approaches, new fields and interdisciplinary work
- Rewarding and encouraging the effective sharing, dissemination and application of research findings leading to benefits to the economy and society
- Comprehensible quality assessments benchmarked against international standards, which identify the very best HE research, wherever this is carried out.

The REF – key features

- A process of expert review, informed by indicators
- Assessment at the level of coherent bodies of work (units of assessment)
- Three distinct elements:
 - Outputs
 - Impact
 - Environment
- Fewer UOAs operating more consistently

The REF Framework

Overall excellence profile

Outputs (60%?)

Maximum of 4
outputs per
researcher

Impact (25%?)

Case studies

Environment (15%?)

Narrative
template +
income and
student data

Assessing outputs

- Staff and outputs selected by the HEI
 - Research-active staff employed by the submitting institution
 - Other research-active staff with a clear, defined relationship with the submitted unit
 - Four outputs per member of staff
- All types of outputs eligible
- ‘Originality, rigour and significance’
- Statements of user significance where relevant

Assessing outputs

- Expert review informed by citation information in certain UOAs
 - Decision by panels
 - Simple metrics
 - One approach
- Open access

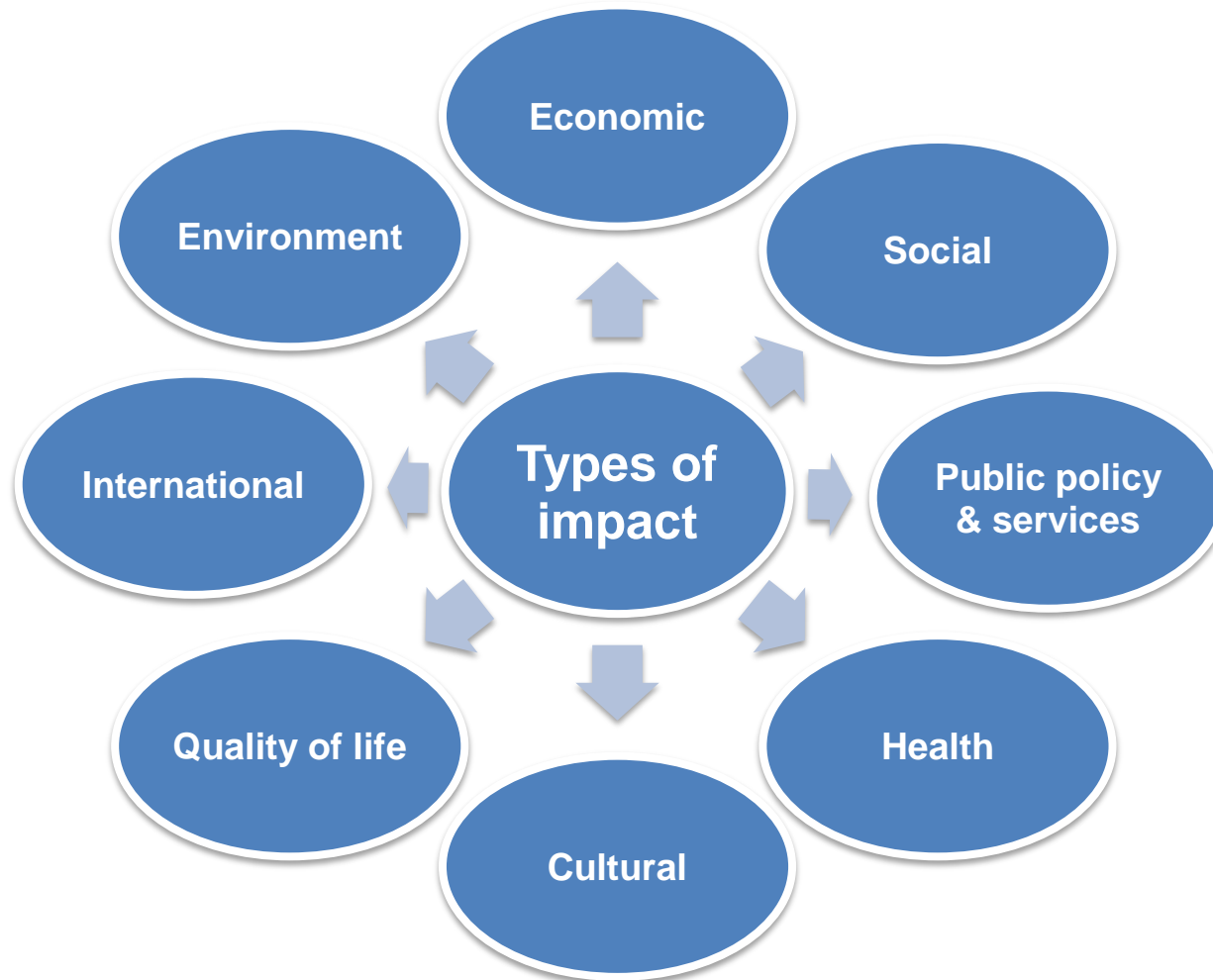
Impact and the REF

- Our starting point is that an excellent submission should provide a portfolio of excellent research **and** build on excellent research to deliver strong benefits to the economy and society

Incorporating impact in the REF

- The aim is to identify and reward the contribution that high quality research has made to the economy and society:
 - Making these explicit to the government and wider society
 - Creating a level playing field
 - Encouraging institutions to achieve the full potential contribution of their research in future

A wide view of impact



The proposals are not about

- Quantifying impact
- Focusing narrowly on economic impact
- Assessing impact of every researcher or output
- Trying to predict future impact
- Discouraging curiosity-driven research
- Trading-off impact and excellence

The impact pilot exercise

- Tested and developed a case study approach to assessing the impact of research
- Five units of assessment (UOAs)
- 29 UK higher education institutions each submitting to 2 UOAs
- Each submission included:
 - An 'impact statement' for the submitted unit as a whole
 - Case studies illustrating examples of impacts achieved (a total of one case study per 10 research staff)
- Impacts that occurred during 2005-09, underpinned by research since 1993

The pilot panels

- Membership drawn from academia and research users from the private, public and third sectors
- The panels tested the methodology by:
 - Assessing the case studies in terms of ‘reach and significance’ of the impacts
 - Considering the wider ‘impact statements’
 - Producing impact profiles
 - Reflecting on the process, identifying issues and making recommendations on how to improve the process

Pilot reports

- Publications on www.ref.ac.uk:
 - The findings of the five pilot panels
 - Feedback from the 29 pilot HEIs (by Technopolis)
 - Examples of good practice case studies
 - A summary of workshops to explore impact in the arts, humanities and social sciences
 - Guidance documents used in the pilot exercise

Key findings

- The process makes explicit the benefits that research in each discipline brings to society
- It is possible to assess the impact of research, through expert review of case studies
- A number of refinements are needed for full implementation
- A generic approach is workable, with scope for REF panels to tailor the criteria as appropriate to their disciplines
- The weighting should be significant to be taken seriously by all stakeholders, and needs careful consideration

Submissions

- 1 case per 10 staff provided an appropriate range of evidence, though further consideration of very small units is needed
- As well as assessing case studies, panels want to know how the unit/institution supports impact. This should be a distinct section of the environment element, replacing the 'impact statement'

Panel recruitment

- First 'official' REF 2014 document published in July – containing:
 - The configuration of units of assessment (UOA) and grouping of sub-panels under main panels
 - The roles and responsibilities of main panels, sub-panels and their members in the assessment
 - The criteria and process for recruiting panel chairs and members
- Main and sub-panel chairs appointed – www.ref.ac.uk
- Membership announced in January

REF Data Collection System

- Built on RAE system
- Support range of import formats, including CERIF
- Full guidance and pilot forthcoming

Timetable

2010

- Initial decisions (Mar 2010)
- Impact pilot
- Recruit panels

2011

- Guidance on submissions (Jul 2011)
- Panel criteria and methods (Jan 2012)

2013

- Submissions (Nov 2013)
- Recruit additional assessors

2014

- Assessment
- Publish outcomes (Dec 2014)