The Research Excellence Framework

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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

Types of impact:
- Economic
- Social
- Environment
- Public policy & services
- International
- Quality of life
- Health
- Cultural
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](http://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.
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)