

Impact in REF 2021

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Keele University Celebrating Impact Conference



Research
England



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REF 2021

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The Stern Review

REF2021

Purpose of the REF

- Provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment.
- Provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks
- Inform the selective allocation of funding for research.
- Provide a rich evidence base to inform strategic decisions about national research priorities.
- Create a strong performance incentive for HEIs and individual researchers.
- Inform decisions on resource allocation by individual HEIs and other bodies.

The Stern Review

Key principles

- Lower burden
- Less game-playing
- Less personalisation, more institutionally focused
- Recognition for investment
- More rounded view of research activity
- Interdisciplinary emphasis
- Broaden impact

Consistency with 2014

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- Impact remains with institution where research was generated (i.e. not portable)
- Impact must be underpinned by excellent research of minimum 2* quality
- Timeframe:
 - 1 January 2000 - 31 December 2020 for underpinning research
 - 1 August 2013 - 31 July 2020 for impacts

Refinements

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- Weighting increased to 25% (60% for outputs and 15% for environment)
- Impact template to be included as explicit section in environment element
- Required routine provision of audit evidence – will not be routinely provided to sub-panels

Submission requirements

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- Number of case studies determined by FTE of Category A staff submitted.

Category A submitted staff (FTE)	Required number of case studies
Up to 19.99	2
20-34.99	3
35-49.99	4
50-64.99	5
65-79.99	6
80-94.99	7
95-109.99	8
110-159.99	9
160 or more	10, plus 1 further case study per additional 50 FTE

Policy under development

REF2021

- Additional contextual data fields in ICS template (e.g. funder info.)
- Guidelines for standardisation of quantitative data in ICS
- Case studies continued from examples submitted in 2014
- Impact based on research activity and bodies of work
- Impact on teaching within own institution
- Guidance on impact arising from public engagement
- Notes and papers from impact workshops available here: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/events/>.

Policy under development - data

REF2021

- Case studies are valuable resource for funders and HEIs
- Post-REF analysis could be made more effective by:
- Including additional contextual data fields in ICS template
 - e.g. funder name, grant number
- Providing guidelines for standardisation of quantitative data in ICS
 - RAND Europe commissioned to produce report on how quantitative data could be standardised
 - Guidelines will be published along with draft criteria and guidance on submissions.

Continued case studies

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- Overwhelming support (99%!) in consultation for allowing the submission of case studies continued from examples submitted in 2014.
- Continued case studies should be flagged
- Requirement to demonstrate additionality

- How do we identify a continued case study?
- What constitutes additionality?
- How should continued ICS be assessed by the sub-panels?
- What information should the sub-panels see?

Continued ICS – workshop outcomes

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- Flagging recognised as a useful means of evaluating the vitality and longevity of impact arising from UK research
- Opinion divided on whether panels should see this information
- No clear consensus across the groups about the definition of ‘continued’ and the extent to which the funding bodies should establish firm criteria
- Broad agreement that any impact occurring within the REF 2021 assessment period should be regarded as additional to the impacts submitted in 2014
- Majority of participants believed that continued case studies should be assessed in the same way as new case studies with no additional requirements.

Research activity/bodies of work

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Stern Review:

- “we are concerned that the mechanistic linkages made in REF2014 between specific outputs and eventual (often very specific) impact unduly restricted the ability of institutions to submit examples of where an individual or group’s research and expertise had led to impact, but where that impact could not sensibly be traced back specifically to particular research outputs. We think that a richer picture of the impact of research could be developed which encompasses the research expertise, facilities and networks of an individual, group or institution that underpin or lead to the eventual impact of research. **Therefore we recommend that options are explored for linking case studies to research activity and a body of work, as well as to a broad range of research outputs.”**

Research activity/bodies of work

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- How can we ensure that the research took place within the window for underpinning research and at the submitting HEI?
 - How can panels assess whether the work meets the two-star quality threshold if there are no associated outputs?
- Workshop outcomes:
 - Support for broadening underpinning research base (some debate around the term 'underpinning')
 - Identified need to move away from perceived requirement of linear model
 - Sense that list of eligible outputs already broad enough to capture research activity/body of work (but request for accompanying glossary)
 - Concern that broadening definition could blur boundaries between research and engagement & distract from purpose of REF to assess research (and its wider impact)
 - Concerns around equality and diversity

Public engagement

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- Stern review:
 - “we recommend that impacts on public engagement and understanding are emphasised and that impacts on cultural life be specifically included”
- Significant number of respondents highlighted the **need for clearer guidance** on capturing impact arising from public engagement.
- **Support for broadening definitions** to be more inclusive of public engagement activity, but need more info. about how such impacts will be assessed.
- Particular concern raised about providing clarity on the **distinction between dissemination and impact**.
- Similar points were made regarding cultural and societal impacts, which were perceived to be **challenging to evidence and measure**.

Public engagement workshop

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- What should be included in the guidance?
- What should the guidance look like?

- Workshop outcomes:
 - HEIs lack confidence in ICS based on public engagement
 - Evidence is main perceived barrier (privileging of quantitative over qualitative)
 - Call for clear and consistent guidelines from panels
 - Need to balance detail with flexibility – danger that extensive guidance could be perceived as prescriptive & could narrow the range of ICS submitted
 - Lack of agreement of level of detail
 - No consensus on whether guidance should be separate or integrated into general impact guidance (tendency towards integration)

Timetable

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March/April 2018

Round 1 Main and sub-panel meetings (GOS & high level panel criteria)
Round 1 review

May/June 2018

Round 2 Main and sub-Panel meetings (Panel criteria)
Round 2 review

Summer 2018

Launch consultation on draft Panel Criteria
Publish draft Guidance on Submissions

October

Consultation close
Preliminary review of responses

November/December 2018

Round 3 Main and sub-panel meetings
Final review

January 2019

Publication of GOS and Panel Criteria

Consultation

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- Panel Criteria and Guidance on Submissions published for consultation in summer
- Online survey
- Briefing events for HEIs
- Engagement with subject associations and learned societies
- User workshops