The Research Excellence Framework

Assessment framework, guidance on submissions and panel criteria

Presentation outline

- Overview
- REF panels
- Staff
- Outputs
- Impact
- Environment
Purpose of the REF

- The REF is a process of expert review.
- It replaces the RAE as the UK-wide framework for assessing research in all disciplines.
- Its purpose is:
  - To inform research funding allocations by the four UK HE funding bodies (approximately £2 billion per year).
  - Provide accountability for public funding of research and demonstrate its benefits.
  - To provide benchmarks and reputational yardsticks.

Overview:

The assessment framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall quality</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Impact</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Maximum of 4 outputs per researcher</td>
<td>Impact template and case studies</td>
<td>Environment data and template</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20%</td>
<td>15%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Overview:

Purpose of the REF

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- Its purpose is:
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  - To provide benchmarks and reputational yardsticks.
Overview:

Guidance and criteria

Comprehensive information and guidance is set out in:

- **Assessment framework and guidance on submissions (July 2011):**
  - Sets out the information required in submissions and the definitions used

- **Panel criteria and working methods (Jan 2012):**
  - Sets out how panels will assess submissions
  - Refined following consultation in 2011

The above documents set out the official guidelines for the REF. These slides provide a summary of key points but do not provide or replace the official guidelines.

Overview:

Submissions

- Each HEI may submit in any or all of the 36 units of assessment (UOAs)

- Each submission in a UOA provides evidence about the activity and achievements of a ‘submitted unit’ including:
  - Staff details (REF1a/b/c)
  - Research outputs (REF2)
  - Impact template and case studies (REF3a/b)
  - Environment data (REF4a/b/c)
  - Environment template (REF5)

- A submitted unit may, but need not, comprise staff who work within a single ‘department’ or organisational unit
Overview:

**Multiple and joint submissions**

- Institutions will normally make one submission in each UOA they elect to submit in.
- Joint submissions are encouraged where this is an appropriate way of describing collaborative research.
- Multiple submissions may be made in a UOA only by exception and with prior permission:
  - Where an HEI also makes a joint submission in that UOA.
  - Where HEIs have merged.
  - In SP28 where one submission is in Celtic studies.
  - Where a sub-panel considers there is a case, given the nature of the disciplines covered. These sub-panels are listed in the panel criteria statements.

Overview:

**Publication of results**

- The primary outcome of the REF is an ‘overall quality profile’ to be awarded to each submission:
  - Using the same scale as RAE2008, but in steps of 1%.
- Further reports and feedback will be provided:
  - Overview reports by panels.
  - Concise feedback on submissions, to the heads of HEIs.
  - The output, impact and environment sub-profiles for each submission will be published.
  - A report by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel.
- Submissions will be published (except for confidential or sensitive information).
Overview:

Example of a quality profile

The overall quality profile is comprised of the aggregate of the weighted sub-profiles produced for outputs, impact and environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>% of Research Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4*</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3*</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Outputs

- 4*: 8
- 3*: 2.8
- 2*: 4.3
- 1*: 1.4
- U: 0

Overall Quality Profile: 65%

Impact

- 4*: 20
- 3*: 40
- 2*: 36
- 1*: 0
- U: 0

Overall Quality Profile: 20%

Environment

- 4*: 0
- 3*: 40
- 2*: 20
- 1*: 0
- U: 0

Overall Quality Profile: 15%

Overview:

Timetable

2011
- Panels appointed (Feb)
- Guidance on submissions published (Jul)
- Draft panel criteria for consultation (Jul)
- Close of consultation (5 Oct)

2012
- Panel criteria published (Jan)
- HEIs submit codes of practice (by Jul)
- Pilot of submissions system (Sep)
- HEIs may request multiple submissions (by Dec)
- Survey of HEIs’ submission intentions (Dec)

2013
- Launch REF submissions system (Jan)
- Additional assessors appointed to panels
- Staff census date (31 Oct)
- Submissions deadline (29 Nov)

2014
- Panels assess submissions
- Publish outcomes (Dec)
REF panels

Main and sub-panel roles

There are 36 sub-panels working under the guidance of 4 main panels. Membership is published at www.ref.ac.uk

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub-panel responsibilities</th>
<th>Main panel responsibilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Contributing to the main panel criteria and working methods</td>
<td>• Developing the panel criteria and working methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Assessing submissions and recommending the outcomes</td>
<td>• Ensuring adherence to the criteria/procedures and consistent application of the overall assessment standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Signing off the outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REF panels:

Main Panel A

1. Clinical Medicine
2. Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care
3. Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
4. Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
5. Biological Sciences
6. Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science

REF panels:

Main Panel B

7. Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences
8. Chemistry
9. Physics
10. Mathematical Sciences
11. Computer Sciences and Informatics
12. Aeronautical, Mechanical, Chemical and Manufacturing Engineering
13. Electrical and Electronic Engineering, Metallurgy and Materials
14. Civil and Construction Engineering
15. General Engineering
### REF panels:

#### Main Panel C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16</th>
<th>Architecture, Built Environment and Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Geography, Environment Studies and Archaeology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Economics and Econometrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Business and Management Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Politics and International Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Social Work and Social Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Anthropology and Development Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Sports-related Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### REF panels:

#### Main Panel D

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>27</th>
<th>Area Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Modern Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>English Literature and Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Classics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Theology and Religious Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Communications, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main panel working methods

- Each main panel has developed a consistent set of criteria for its group of sub-panels
- Each main panel will guide its sub-panels throughout the assessment phase, ensuring:
  - Adherence to the published criteria
  - Consistent application of the overall standards of assessment
- Main panels will undertake calibration exercises and keep the emerging outcomes under review
- Main panel international and user members will be engaged at key stages across the sub-panels

Sub-panel working methods

- Sub-panels will review their expertise to ensure appropriate coverage
- Work will be allocated to members/assessors with appropriate expertise
- Each sub-panel will run calibration exercises for outputs and impacts, guided by the main panels
- All outputs will be examined in sufficient detail to contribute to the formation of the outputs sub-profiles
- Each case study will normally be assessed by at least one academic and one user
- Graduated sub-profiles will be formed for each aspect of submissions
Additional assessors

Additional assessors will be appointed to extend the breadth and depth of panels’ expertise:

- Both ‘academic’ assessors (to assess outputs) and ‘user’ assessors (to assess impacts) will be appointed

- Assessors will play a full and equal role to panel members, in developing either the outputs or impact sub-profiles. They will be fully briefed, take part in calibration exercises and attend the relevant meetings:
  - Some appointments will be made in 2012 where a clear gap has already been identified
  - Further appointments to be made in 2013, in the light of the survey of institutions’ submission intentions

Interdisciplinary research

- UOAs do not have rigidly defined boundaries and sub-panels expect submissions to include work that is interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or spans boundaries between UOAs

- Panels are committed to assessing all such work on an equal basis:
  - Members have experience of such work, and where appropriate assessors will be appointed to augment their expertise (in some cases, working across UOAs)
  - The sub-panels prefer to assess all work submitted within their UOAs but may, exceptionally, cross-refer specific parts of submissions to other sub-panels for advice. The original sub-panel remains responsible for recommending the quality profile.
Staff selection

- HEIs are responsible for selecting eligible staff whose outputs are to be included in their REF submissions

- Each HEI is required to develop, document and apply a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff:
  - Guidelines for the codes are based on good practice found in the 2008 RAE
  - The code must be submitted to the REF team by 31 July 2012 at the latest
  - The REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel will examine all codes for adherence to the guidance
  - Codes will be published alongside submissions, at the end of the assessment process
Codes of practice on staff selection

- **Codes** should demonstrate fairness to staff by addressing the principles of:
  - **Transparency**: clearly setting out the procedures for staff selection, and communicating these to all eligible staff
  - **Consistency**: applying consistent procedures across the institution
  - **Accountability**: clearly defining responsibilities for decisions, with appropriate training for those involved
  - **Inclusivity**: promoting an inclusive environment, with robust procedures for staff to disclose individual circumstances

Staff:

Individual staff circumstances

- **Up to four outputs** must be listed against each individual.
- **This can be reduced** without penalty where an individual’s circumstances have constrained their ability to work productively or produce four outputs in the REF period:
  - A wide range of circumstances will be taken into account
  - With as much clarity as possible about the permitted reductions
  - To be treated consistently across the exercise
  - With robust procedures and confidentiality arrangements to enable staff to disclose sensitive information
Clearly defined circumstances

- Early Career researchers
- Part-time working, career breaks and secondments outside of HE
- Periods of maternity, adoption and additional paternity leave

- These are circumstances involving a clear ‘absence’ from work
- ‘Tariffs’ define the number of outputs that may be reduced without penalty
- These will be applied consistently by all REF sub-panels
- Circumstances can be combined up to a maximum reduction of three outputs
- Where an individual has a combination of clearly defined and complex circumstances, these should be submitted collectively as ‘complex’

Complex circumstances

- Disability
- Ill health or injury
- Mental health conditions
- Additional constraints related to bringing a child into the family
- Other caring responsibilities
- Gender reassignment
- Other circumstances related to legislation

- For these circumstances a judgement is needed about the appropriate reduction
- The EDAP will consider all these cases on a consistent and confidential basis, and recommend the appropriate reductions to the Main Panel Chairs
- Sub-panels will be informed of the decisions and will not have access to further details
- ECU has published worked examples (www.ecu.ac.uk)
Outputs

Research outputs

- Outputs may include but are not limited to: printed or electronic publications, materials, devices, images, artefacts, products, buildings, confidential or technical reports, patents, performances, exhibits or events

- All types of research and all forms of research output shall be assessed on a fair and equal basis

- Panels will assess outputs through a process of expert review. Where stated in the ‘panel criteria’, panels will take account of additional information and/or citation data to inform judgements based on expert review

- Panels will not use journal impact factors, rankings or lists or the perceived standing of the publisher
Outputs:

**Co-authorship**

- A co-authored output may be listed against one or more individuals that made a substantial research contribution to it.
- It may be listed against any or all such co-authors returned in *different submissions*; and a maximum of two such co-authors within the *same submission*.
- In very specific situations the panels require information to confirm that the author made a substantial research contribution.
- Once this is accepted, panels will assess the quality of the output, not the individual author’s contribution.

Outputs:

**Double-weighting**

- Institutions may request ‘double-weighting’ for outputs of extended scale and scope.
- Sub-panels will consider the request for double-weighting separately from assessing the quality of the output.
- If a sub-panel accepts a request, the output will count as two outputs in the calculation of the outputs sub-profile.
- Institutions may submit a ‘reserve’ that will be assessed only if the double-weighting request is rejected.
Citation data

- The following sub-panels will make use of citation data:
  - Main Panel A: Sub-panels 1-6
  - Main Panel B: Sub-panels 7-11
  - Main Panel C: Sub-panel 18
- Citation data will be used as a minor component to inform peer-review
- HEIs will be provided access to the Scopus data via the REF submission system
- The funding bodies do not sanction or recommend that HEIs rely on citation data to inform the selection of staff or outputs for their REF submissions

Assessment criteria

- The criteria for assessing the quality of outputs are originality, significance and rigour
- Each panel provides further explanation of how they will interpret these criteria
- Panels will assess the quality of outputs, not the contribution of individual researchers to the submission
- They will examine all outputs in sufficient detail to contribute to the formation of a robust outputs sub-profile that represents all the outputs listed in a submission
The criteria for assessing the quality of outputs are originality, significance and rigour*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four star</strong></td>
<td>Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three star</strong></td>
<td>Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two star</strong></td>
<td>Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One star</strong></td>
<td>Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unclassified</strong></td>
<td>Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each main panel provides descriptive account of the criteria
Definition of impact

- Impact is defined broadly for the REF: an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.
- Panels recognise that impacts can be manifest in a wide variety of ways, may take many forms and occur in a wide range of spheres, in any geographic location.
- Panels provide examples of impact relevant to their disciplines, intended to stimulate ideas - not as exhaustive or prescriptive lists.

Some examples of impact:

- Improved health or welfare outcomes
- Enhanced quality, accessibility or efficiency of a public service
- Changes to the design or delivery of the school curriculum
- Improved production costs
- Research has enabled stakeholders to challenge conventional wisdom
- Policy debate or decisions have been influenced or shaped by research
- Organisations have adapted to changing cultural values
- Enhanced corporate social responsibility policies
- A new product has been commercialised
- New forms of artistic expression or changes to creative practice
- The policies or activities of NGOs or charities have been informed by research
- Levels of waste have reduced
- Research has informed public understanding, values, attitudes or behaviours
- Improved access to justice, employment or education
- Improved management or conservation of natural resources
- Improved management or conservation of cultural heritage
- Changed professional practice
- Changes in professional practice
- Improved technical standards or protocols
- Research has enabled stakeholders to challenge conventional wisdom
- Public debate has been shaped or informed by research
- A new product has been commercialised.
Submission requirements

- **Impact template (REF3a)**
  - 20% of the impact sub-profile
  - Sets out the submitted unit’s general approach to supporting impact from its research:
    - Approach to supporting impact during the period 2008 to 2013
    - Forward strategy and plans

- **Case studies (REF3b)**
  - 80% of the impact sub-profile
  - Specific examples of impacts already achieved, that were underpinned by the submitted unit’s research:
    - 1 case study per 10 FTE staff submitted (plus 1 extra)
    - Impacts during 2008 to 2013; underpinned by research since 1993

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**Case studies**

- Each case study should:
  - Clearly describe the underpinning research, who undertook it and when
  - Provide references to the research and evidence of quality
  - Explain how the research led/contributed to the impact
  - Clearly identify the beneficiaries and define the impact
  - Provide evidence/indicators of the impact
  - Provide independent sources of corroboration

- All the material required to make a judgement should be included in the case study

- Submitted case studies need **not** be representative of activity across the unit: pick the strongest examples
Underpinning research

- Each case study must be underpinned by research that:
  - was produced by staff while working in the submitting HEI
  - is evidenced by outputs published between 1 Jan 1993 to 31 Dec 2013
  - meets the quality threshold of at least equivalent to 2*
  - made a material and distinct contribution to the impact (there are many possible ‘routes’ to impact, but in each case a distinct and material contribution must be shown)

- Once the panel is satisfied that these criteria have been met, it will assess and grade the case study in terms of the ‘reach and significance’ of the impact

Evidence of impact

- Case studies should provide a clear and coherent narrative linking the research to the impact
- Including evidence most appropriate to the case being made
- Evidence may take many different forms, including quantitative (where possible) and qualitative. Panels provide examples, which are not exhaustive or prescriptive
- Key claims should be capable of verification. Independent sources of corroboration should listed, to be used for audit purposes
Impact:

Assessment criteria

- The criteria for assessing impact are **reach and significance**

- In assessing a case study, the panel will form an overall view about the impact’s reach and significance taken as a whole, rather than assess each criterion separately

- ‘Reach’ is not a geographic scale. Sub-panels will consider a number of dimensions to the ‘reach’ as appropriate to the nature of the impact.

- In assessing the **impact template**, the panel will consider the extent to which the unit’s approach is conducive to achieving impacts of ‘reach and significance’

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Impact:

Assessment criteria

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Four star</strong></td>
<td>Outstanding impacts in terms of their reach and significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Three star</strong></td>
<td>Very considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Two star</strong></td>
<td>Considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>One star</strong></td>
<td>Recognised but modest impacts in terms of their reach and significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unclassified</strong></td>
<td>The impact is of little or no reach and significance; or the impact was not eligible; or the impact was not underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitted unit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each main panel provides descriptive account of the criteria
Environment

Environment template

- Each submission to include a completed template:
  - Overview
  - Research strategy
  - People, including:
    - staffing strategy and staff development
    - research students
  - Income, infrastructure and facilities
  - Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base

- The ‘panel criteria' request specific types of evidence under each heading, and indicate how much weight they will attach to each component
Environment data

- All submissions to include data on:
  - Research doctoral degrees awarded (REF4a)
  - Research income (REF4b)
  - Research income in-kind (REF4c)

- Definitions are aligned with HESA returns; the data relate to the ‘whole unit’ - not just submitted staff

- Sub-panels 8, 9, 19, 25 and 26 request specific additional data, to be included within the environment template (REF5)

- Data will be considered by panels alongside the information provided in the environment template

Environment:

Assessment criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Star</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four star</td>
<td>An environment that is conducive to producing research of world-leading quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three star</td>
<td>An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally excellent quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two star</td>
<td>An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally recognised quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One star</td>
<td>An environment that is conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality, in terms of its vitality and sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>An environment that is not conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Each main panel provides a descriptive account of the criteria
Further information

www.ref.ac.uk
(includes all relevant documents)

Enquiries from staff at HEIs should be directed to their nominated institutional contact
(see www.ref.ac.uk for a list)

Other enquiries to info@ref.ac.uk