

REF2029 'Initial Decisions': REF2021 Impact Element versus Proposed REF2029 Iteration

Purpose and overview

This briefing sets out **key headlines** pertaining to the **proposed impact element of the 2029 Research Excellence Framework (REF)**, as detailed in the **high-level 'Initials decisions'** document¹ recently produced by the 4 UK higher education funding bodies, resulting from analysis and consultation undertaken by the Future Research Assessment Programme.

Fig. 1 below comparatively captures the **proposed changes** to the impact element for REF2029 against the REF2021 iteration.

The stated **overarching rationale** for these changes is to effect consistency with a **'more inclusive'** research assessment exercise characterised by an **'expanded', more holistic understanding of excellence** and **'greater understanding** of the importance of **research culture** in underpinning excellent research with **wider social impacts'**, as exemplified by a **'rethink'** of what should be **recognised and rewarded**, 'capturing the **valuable contributions** of a **wider range** of researchers and research-enabling staff'.

Next steps: some (see **Fig. 1**) aspects of the proposals will be subject to further **sectoral consultation**, with **draft REF2029 guidance** anticipated **autumn/winter 2024**.

¹ Research England, et al., '*Research Excellence Framework 2028: Initial decisions and issues for further consultation*' (REF 2028/23/01). Swindon: Research England, 2023.

Fig. 1: REF2021 Impact Element versus Proposed REF2029 Iteration

Impact sub-profile item	REF2021 guidance	REF2029 'initial decisions'	Stated rationale for change	Areas of further consultation
Name of impact element (sub-profile)	Impact	Expanded to 'engagement and impact'	'In order to recognise and reward a wider range of impact-enabling activities'...	N/a
Weighting of impact element within overall quality profile	25%	25%	N/a	N/a
Number of required cases studies		Revised/ reduced (see Fig. 2 below)	To ' reduce the burden ' of submissions	Consultation focus: views sought on impact of reducing minimum to 1 and revising thresholds
Supporting impact statement	Not included	Reintroduced (weighted on sliding scale - proportionate to number of required ICSs - at minimum of 20% of sub-profile)	'[T]o ... recognise and reward approaches to maximising the impact of research... set[ting] out the wider contribution research activities to society and the economy'...	Initial consultation focus: views sought on sliding scale weighting Further consultation planned around appropriate content for statement: metrics/data/ indicators
Assessment criteria	Reach and significance	Reach, significance and rigour	'To ensure that appropriate focus is placed on the process of delivering impact ... [a]nd given the increased focus on engagement '...	Not directly referenced in current consultation plans However, panels to be asked to 'consider developing and operationalising

				an additional criterion'...
Underpinning research minimum 2* quality threshold	Pertained	Removal of 2* requirement (NB: but requirement remains to demonstrate impact results from research activities)	(i) 'To understand excellence more holistically ... encouraging the submission of a wider range of impacts based on a broader base of underpinning research'... (ii) Reduce submission burden	N/a

Fig. 2: Number of case studies required in REF2029 submission

FTE of volume-contributing staff	Required number of case studies	Weighting of impact statement
Up to 9.99	1	50%
10 to 19.99	2	33.33%
20 to 39.99	3	25%
40 to 59.99	4	20%
60 to 89.99	5	20%
90 to 119.99	6	20%
120 to 169.99	7	20%
170 or more	8, plus one further case study per additional 50 FTE	20%