

Impact for REF 2021: Final/Confirmed Information

The final '[Guidance on submissions](#)' (GOS) and '[Panel criteria and working methods](#)' (PCWM) documents for REF 2021 were recently published.

This briefing pulls together and summarises key dimensions of the now confirmed information on impact case studies (REF 3).

1. Key periods and thresholds

Impact period: the depicted impact must have occurred between 1 August 2013 and 31 July 2020 (GOS 304).

Underpinning research window: impact must be underpinned by research of at least 2* quality produced at the submitting higher education institution (HEI) between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2020 and within the scope of the relevant unit of assessment (UOA) descriptor (GOS 304).

Number of case studies required: determined by the FTE of Category A submitted staff, as set out in the table below (GOS 309).

FTE	No. of case studies required
0-19.99	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 one further case study per additional 50 FTE

2. Template and definitions

Expanded impact case study template: the generic impact case study template has been expanded for REF 2021 to include additional mandatory data fields to assist the assessment and post-REF evaluation process; a new 5-page limit also applies (this includes space for staff names, roles and periods of service, restricting space for gradable material for larger teams) (GOS 327-9 and Annex G).

Expanded definition of impact: the definition of impact has been expanded for REF 2021 to include impacts on students, teaching and other activities both within and beyond the submitting HEI (GOS 297-300).

Case studies ‘continued’ from REF 2014 - definition: continued case studies must meet the same eligibility criteria as other case studies; a continued case is defined as that which has the same underpinning research as a 2014 case study, i.e. no new significant research since REF 2014; and, ‘significant overlap’ in the impact depicted, i.e. ‘broadly the same’ impact types and beneficiaries (GOS 314-17).

All panels encourage units to submit their strongest case studies irrespective of whether they encompass new or continuing impact. With the exception of panel A, panels do not wish to receive information on how a given continued case study relates to that submitted in REF 2014 (PCWM 293).

3. Submission process

Impact eligibility: impacts are eligible for submission by the HEI(s) in which the underpinning research was undertaken (GOS 311).

Submitting impact to different UOAs: a given researcher’s outputs and impact may be submitted to different UOAs provided the underpinning research is within the scope of the UOA in which the impact is submitted (GOS 319). In its environment statement, the unit submitting the case study must describe how the latter ‘relates’ to the unit’s approach to achieving impact (GOS 310).

Submission of identical descriptions of impact: more than one submitted unit (within the same HEI and/or in different HEIs) may include the same impact within their respective case studies provided the research of each unit has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact. This may include submission of identical descriptions of impact (GOS 313).

4. Underpinning research

Producing/publishing: while, as noted, impact must be underpinned by research of at least 2* quality produced by staff at the submitting HEI between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2020, unlike REF 2014, there is no requirement that the work must also be published while the staff are at the institution. Category C staff may be included.

Examples: examples have been provided of the different ways in which research may underpin impact (GOS 325).

Quality indicators: sub-panel guidance has also been given on indicators of quality for underpinning research (PCWM 318-323).

5. Impact typology

Eligibility: any type of impact is admissible that complies with the definition of impact for REF (GOS 311).

Illustrative examples: sub-panels have provided illustrative examples of both impact type and indicators of reach and significance; this is not exhaustive (PCWM Annex A).

Pedagogic impacts: it is expected that impact on teaching within the submitting unit's own institution will be 'most convincing' when integrated into a broader case study encompassing impact beyond the institution (PCWM 302).

Impact from advisory roles: for impact associated with advisory roles, it must be shown that the role or advice given 'was at least in part based on the submitted unit's research and drew materially and distinctly upon it' (GOS 325).

Public engagement impact: where depicted impact is associated with public engagement, it must be demonstrated that said engagement was 'at least in part based on the submitted unit's research and drew materially and distinctly upon it' (GOS 325)

6. Evidence and indicators

Evidence typology: all panels anticipate that impact case studies will feature a diversity of evidence (quantitative, qualitative, 'tangible' and 'material') - accepting all forms without pre-judgement - underlining that 'no type of evidence is inherently preferred over another' (PCWM 309).

Corroborating audit evidence: sub-panels have provided guidance on evidence to corroborate claims of impact for audit purposes; this is not exhaustive (PCWM 304-112 and Annex A). Corroborating evidence must be submitted by 29 January 2021 (GOS 94).

Testimonials: although it is emphasised that testimonials should represent statements of fact, it is also recognised that opinion-based testimonials may be appropriate in certain circumstances; it must be indicated whether the source is a participant in the impact delivery process or a 'reporter' on said process (PCWM 310).

Quantitative indicators in case studies - standardisation recommended: guidance has been suggested for standardising the use of quantitative indicators, to promote greater consistency in data presentation and enhance post-REF evaluation (GOS 306 and Annex G).

7. Further information

For more information on impact and REF 2021 visit <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/internal/research/researchimpact/training/ref-2021>. For information on all other aspects of REF 2021 visit <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/ref/home>.

Contact:

Impact Team: impact@ulster.ac.uk

Prepared by Dr Caroline Walsh, Impact Officer.

