



REF 2021 & Impact

Maria Prince – Impact Manager

Impact Team
Dept. Research & Impact

impact@ulster.ac.uk





Overview

- What is the REF
- REF 2021 intro
- Impact in REF 2021
- Timeline & key dates
- Support available
- Q&A



What is the REF?

REF2021



- UK's world leading system for assessing the excellence of research in higher education institutions
- First carried out in 2014, replacing the previous Research Assessment Exercise
- It is a process of expert review, carried out by expert panels for each of 34 subject based units of assessment (UOAs), under the guidance of four main panels
- For each submission, three distinct elements are assessed: the quality of outputs, their impact beyond academia, and the environment that supports research

Who runs the REF?

The REF is undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies:



The funding bodies' shared policy aim for research assessment is to secure the continuation of a world class, dynamic and responsive research base across the full academic spectrum within UK higher education

What is the purpose of the REF?



Accountability

To provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment



Reputation

To provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information



Funding

To inform the selective allocation of funding for research
Ca £2bn p.a.

Background: UK Research Assessment





The Stern Review

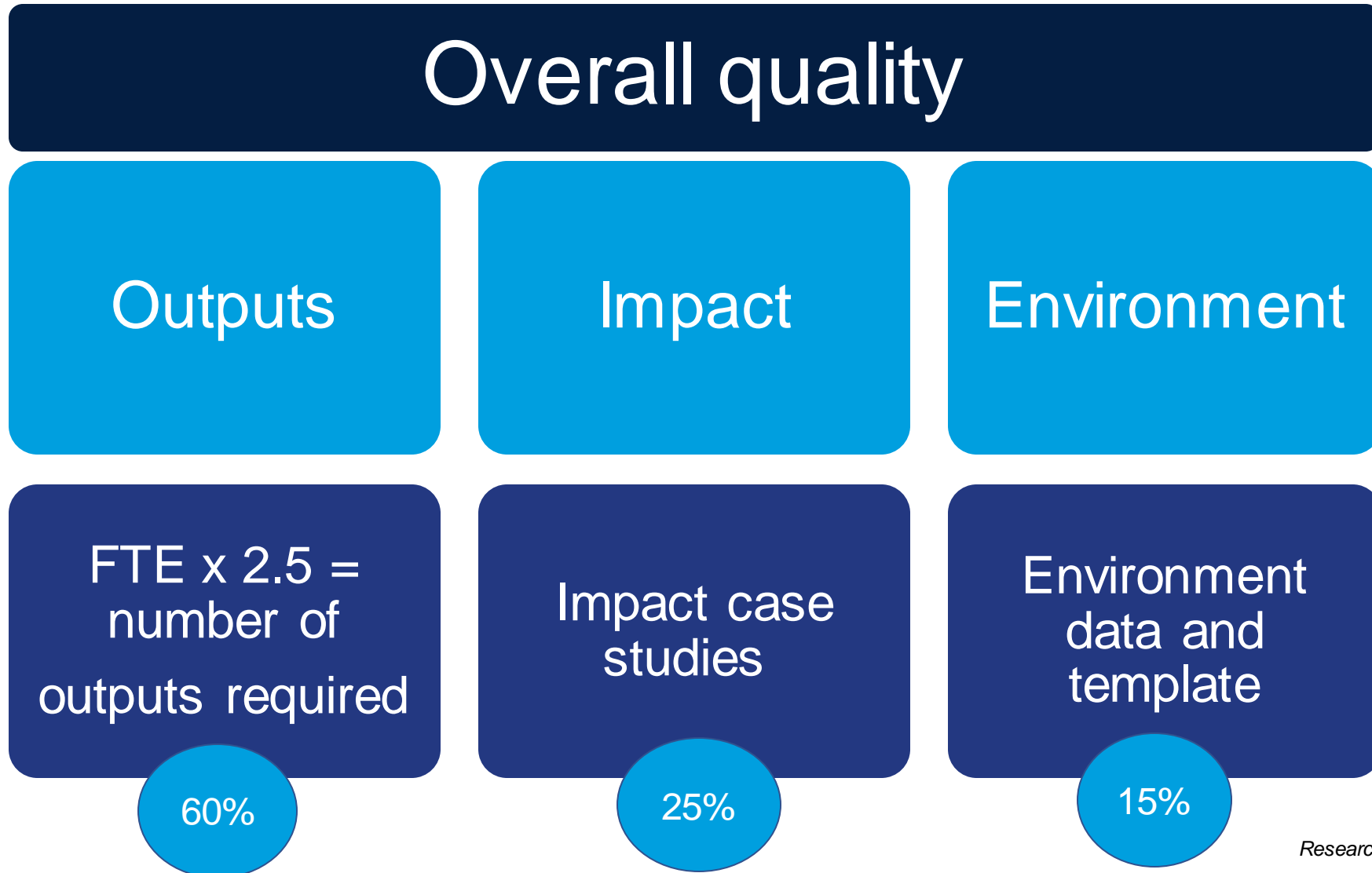
Independent review of REF commissioned by Minister and led by Lord Nicholas Stern. Reported in July 2016.

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



2021 Framework



Units of Assessment

34 Units of Assessment are organised by 4 Main Panels A, B, C, D

Ulster returns to 17 UoAs:

3	Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
4	Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
11	Computer Science and Informatics
12	Engineering
13	Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
14	Geography and Environmental Sciences
17	Business and Management Studies
18	Law
20	Social Work and Social Policy
23	Education
24	Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
26	Modern Languages and Linguistics
27	English Language and Literature
28	History
32	Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
33	Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies
34	Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

Impact for 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.

Impact eligibility

- *Each submission must include impact case studies that describe a specific impact:*
 1. *that meets the definition*
 2. *occurred during period 1 Aug 2013 to 31 Jul 2020*
 3. *was underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitting unit (2*+)*
- *Number of case studies required relates to submitted FTE of unit*
- *All the material required to make a judgement should be included in the case study*
- *Doesn't need to be representative of activity across the unit*

Impact criteria

Reach:

The extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact. (It will not be assessed in geographic terms, nor in terms of absolute numbers of beneficiaries.)

Significance:

The degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness or well-being of beneficiaries.

Impact criteria

- Case studies describing **any type(s)** of impact welcomed (extensive – but not exhaustive – list of examples of impact and indicators at Annex A)
- Case studies describing impacts through public engagement welcomed
- Case studies must provide a **clear and coherent** narrative supported by **verifiable evidence and indicators**
- Panel expectations in relation to receiving continued case studies (PCWM)
- Additional guidance on impacts on teaching within the submitting HEI (go beyond)

Underpinning Research

Underpinned
by...

Research made a
distinct and material
contribution to impact

Can be indirect or
non-linear

Impact is clearly
linked to research in
case study

Excellent
research...

Research as a whole
is at least 2*

Include indicators of
quality e.g. evidence
of peer-reviewed
funding, prizes or
awards for individual
outputs

May be a body of
work produced over a
number of years or
may be the output(s)
of a particular project

Produced
when and by
whom...

January 2000 to
December 2020

Can include Cat. C
staff but not research
students

Case study can be
returned to different
UoA from the outputs
that underpin it

New for REF2021

- **Continued case studies:** same underpinning research as 2014 **AND** significant overlap in impact types and beneficiaries
- **Impact on teaching** within HEI now eligible (caution required about significance and reach – go beyond HEI)
- **Enhanced guidance on public engagement;** *‘Sub panels will welcome, and assess equitably, case studies describing impacts achieved through public engagement, either as the main impact described or as one facet of a wider range of impacts. Panels expect that case studies based on public engagement will **demonstrate both reach** (e.g. through audience or participant figures) **and significance**, and will take both into account when assessing the impacts.’*

What makes a strong case study

Panel overview reports from 2014:

High-scoring

- Clear & compelling narrative
- Clearly identified beneficiaries
- Explicit links between research & impact
- Self-contained
- Verifiable evidence of reach & significance
- Evidence of unit's contribution to research
- Distinguishes between dissemination & impact

Low-scoring

- Lack of objective evidence
- Superficial impacts
- Vague description of impacts and/or their relationship to research
- Focus on dissemination without explaining outcomes ('so what?')

More info

- REF 2014 impact case study database: <http://impact.ref.ac.uk>
- Compare with <http://results.ref.ac.uk>
- Guidance on Submissions and Panel Criteria and Working Methods: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance>
- REF 2014 Panel Overview Reports: www.ref.ac.uk/2014/panels/paneloverviewreports/
- Ulster impact resources: <https://www.ulster.ac.uk/internal/research/researchimpact>

Timeline



https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/376381/ulster-university-ref-timeline.pdf

Contact Freda Casey for hard copy: f.casey@ulster.ac.uk

Key dates

- Impacts must have occurred between **1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020**
- Impacts must be underpinned by research in the period **1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020**
- Deadline to notify REF of case studies requiring security clearance **December 2019**
- Submissions deadline **20 November 2020**
- Case study evidence must be submitted before **29 January 2021**

Support available

1. Resource for collection of evidence
2. Support for drafting & reviewing content
3. Advice on REF guidance
4. Impact Development Series (Impact30 & UCommunicate)
5. Pathways to Impact Statements
6. Civic / Commercial Impact Fund

Impact Team



Supporting the research impact agenda at Ulster



Maria Prince
Faculty Impact Manager
AHSS



Karen Reid
Faculty Impact Officer
UUBS / AHSS



Sean McCaul
Faculty Impact Officer
CEBE



Caroline Walsh
Faculty Impact Officer
LHS



Thank you.

Questions?

Contact: impact@ulster.ac.uk

