

## REF 2028 'Initial Decisions': REF 2021 Impact Element versus Proposed REF 2028 Iteration

### Purpose and overview

This briefing sets out **key headlines** pertaining to the **proposed impact element of the 2028 Research Excellence Framework (REF)**, as detailed in the **high-level 'document'**<sup>1</sup> 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 REF 2028 against the REF 2021 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 REF 2028 guidance** anticipated **summer to autumn 2024**.

---

<sup>1</sup> 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: REF 2021 Impact Element versus Proposed REF 2028 Iteration**

Impact sub-profile item	REF 2021 guidance	REF 2028 'initial decisions'	Stated rationale for change	Areas of further consultation
Name of impact element (sub-profile)	Impact	<b>Expanded</b> to 'engagement and impact'	'In order to recognise and reward a <b>wider range</b> of impact-enabling activities'...	<b>N/a</b>
Weighting of impact element within overall quality profile	25%	25%	N/a	<b>N/a</b>
Number of required cases studies		<b>Revised/ reduced</b> (see Fig. 2 below)	To ' <b>reduce the burden</b> ' of submissions	<b>Consultation focus:</b> views sought on impact of reducing minimum to 1 and revising thresholds
Supporting impact statement	Not included	<b>Reintroduced</b> (weighted on sliding scale - proportionate to number of required ICSs - at minimum of 20% of sub-profile)	'[T]o ... <b>recognise and reward</b> approaches to <b>maximising</b> the impact of research... set[ting] out the <b>wider contribution</b> research activities to society and the economy'...	<b>Initial consultation focus:</b> views sought on sliding scale weighting  <b>Further consultation</b> planned around appropriate content for statement: metrics/data/indicators
Assessment criteria	Reach and significance	Reach, significance and <b>rigour</b>	'To ensure that <b>appropriate focus</b> is placed on the <b>process</b> of <b>delivering impact</b> ... [a]nd given the <b>increased focus</b> on <b>engagement</b> '...	<b>Not directly referenced</b> in current consultation plans  However, panels to be asked to 'consider developing and operationalising

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

**Fig. 2: Number of case studies required in REF 2028 submission**

<b>FTE of volume-contributing staff</b>	<b>Required number of case studies</b>	<b>Weighting of impact statement</b>
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%