

REF2021 Research
Excellence
Framework

Taking part in REF 2021

A guide for research users

October 2017



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The REF results inform strategic decisions

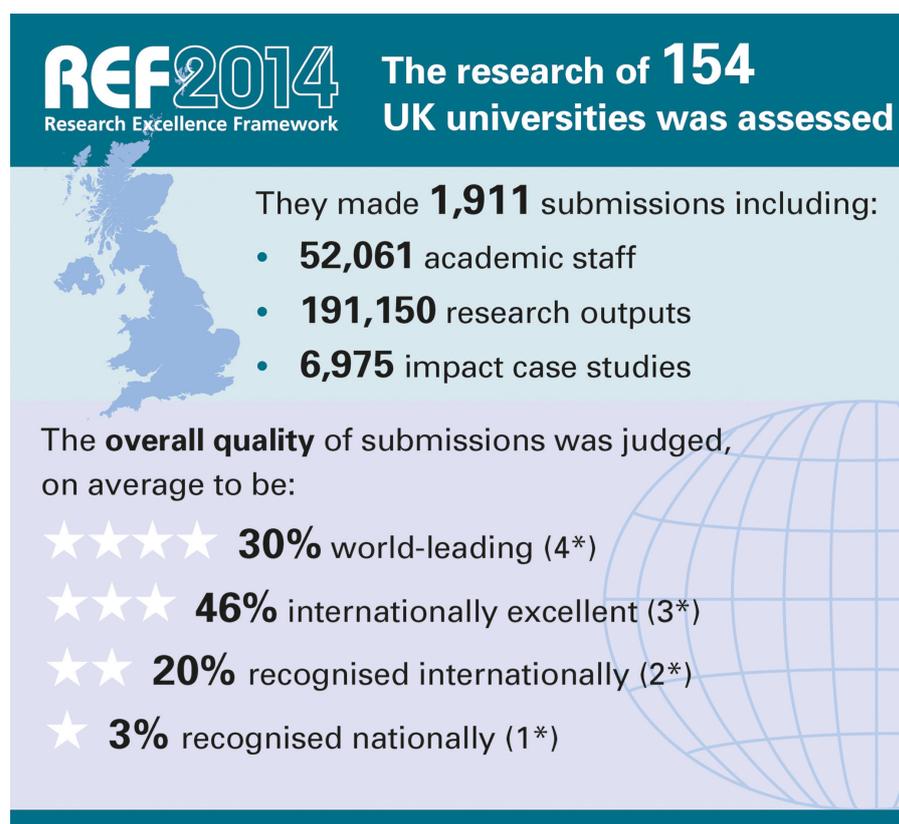
What is the REF?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the UK's world-leading system for assessing the excellence of research in higher education institutions. The REF outcomes are used to calculate about £2 billion per year of public funding for universities' research, and affect their international reputations. The results also inform strategic decisions about national research priorities. The next REF will be undertaken in 2021 by the four UK higher education funding bodies.

The REF was first carried out in 2014, replacing the previous Research Assessment Exercise. It included for the first time an assessment of the broader impact of universities' research beyond academia: on the economy, society, culture, public policy and services, health, the environment and quality of life – within the UK and internationally.

Impact was assessed through the submission of case studies, which described the changes or benefits brought about by research undertaken by researchers at the institution. Across all disciplines, 44 per cent of impacts were judged to be outstanding. This reflects universities' productive engagements with a very wide range of public, private and third sector organisations, and direct engagement with the public.

In 2014, 44 per cent of impacts were judged to be outstanding



What role do research users play?

'Research users' are people outside of academia in the private, public or third sectors, who make use of university research in their organisation or professional activity - by commissioning research or collaborating with academic researchers, for example.

Research users play a key role on the REF's expert panels, sitting alongside senior academics. The expert panels assess submissions, including the quality of research, impacts described, and the research environment. In the 2014 REF, working under the guidance of four main panels, 36 expert panels assessed 1,911 submissions, including almost 7,000 impact case studies.

Research users' expertise and their experience of working with research and researchers play a vital role in the REF. As panel members they ensure that the assessment criteria enable the REF to capture effectively the wider impact of UK research. They work closely with academic panel members and other research users to evaluate the reach and significance of research impacts beyond academia.

As well as participating as panel members, research users will be able to take part in REF2021 as impact assessors. These roles will be filled at a later stage in the process.

In the 2014 REF, the role of research users was highly valued by the UK's research community and their contribution was described as 'hugely beneficial' and 'invaluable to the process'.

What are the benefits for research users of taking part?

Over 250 research users participated in the expert panels in REF 2014. They enjoyed bringing their professional perspectives to the assessment and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to a crucial part of the UK's research funding landscape. According to their feedback, the REF gave them:

- Insight into current developments in research relevant to their professional lives
- Excellent networking opportunities with research leaders and senior professionals in private, public or third sectors
- An enhanced appreciation of the connections that can be made between researchers and stakeholders
- Increased understanding of the potential barriers to engagement with researchers and how to overcome them
- Opportunities to encourage better understanding of organisations' research needs
- A chance to contribute to the allocation of public funds.

**Research users
have a key role
on REF panels**

**Insight into
current
developments
in research**

What is expected?

Research users can participate in the REF panels as main panel members or sub-panel members. The extent and nature of participation varies across roles and phases:

Main panel members	
2018	Develop assessment criteria and panel working methods Consult with other stakeholders Time commitment: 6-8 full-day meetings
2020	Evaluate need for additional panel members Prepare for assessment phase Time commitment: 2-3 full-day meetings
2021	Oversee assessment of impact submissions Calibrate assessment standards across sub-panels Time commitment: 5-6 full-day meetings, plus 10-15 days to review materials
Sub-panel members	
2018	Contribute to the development the assessment criteria and working methods Consult with other stakeholders Time commitment: 6-8 days
2020	Evaluate need for additional panel members Prepare for assessment phase Time commitment: 2-3 days
2021	Participate in all meetings of the sub-panel (initial meetings for briefing, calibration meetings, and all assessment meetings) Produce draft assessment outcomes and feedback Time commitment: 10-12 full-day meetings, plus 20-25 days to review materials

Fees and expenses

Panel members will receive fixed fees covering each of the three periods, to be paid at regular intervals. Travel and subsistence expenses will be reimbursed according to an agreed scheme.

Equality and Diversity

The funding bodies recognise that diversity of thought and experience contributes fundamental insight and value to the work of the REF panels. Nominations are therefore encouraged from diverse candidates, in particular from women, people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT+ people and those with disabilities, as well as international applicants.

How to apply to be a REF panel member

Panel members are appointed through a nominations process. Nominations may be made through any association or organisation with a clear interest in the conduct, quality, funding or wider benefits of publicly funded research except for mission groups and individual UK universities. Information on the nominations process can be found at www.ref.ac.uk/about/nompan

Deadline for nominations: 20 December 2017

Questions? Please contact Gina Reid at info@ref.ac.uk.