

## Guidance on providing testimonies for REF 2021 impact case studies

### What is REF 2021?

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It is jointly conducted by the four UK HE funding bodies: Research England, the Scottish Funding Council, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland.

The REF is a process of expert review, carried out by expert panels for each of the 34 subject-based units of assessment. For each submission made into each unit of assessment by an HEI, three distinct elements are assessed: **outputs** (e.g. publications, performances and exhibitions), their **impact** beyond academia, and the **environment** that supports research.

The outcomes of REF 2021 will be used to inform block grant funding provided through the four UK funding bodies from academic year 2022-23.

More information can be found here: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/what-is-the-ref/>

### What is impact in REF 2021?

Impact is assessed in REF 2021 through the submission of impact case studies that describe specific examples of impact outside academia that have been underpinned by excellent research. These impact case studies are assessed in terms of their 'reach' (i.e. the extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, not geography or location) and 'significance' (i.e. the degree to which the impact has enabled change, either positive or negative). Each case study must describe impacts that have occurred between 1 August 2013 and 31 December 2020.

Impact is broadly defined for REF 2021 to mean 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 includes the reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects.

### Why am I being asked to provide a testimonial for an impact case study?

Institutions must provide as part of each case study evidence of the reach and significance of the impact claimed, and evidence alongside the case study that can corroborate specific claims made, which may be reviewed in the event of audit. This evidence may include a wide range of types, including qualitative, quantitative and tangible evidence.

HEIs will often seek testimonials from research and impact partners as part of their corroborating evidence. Testimonies can be provided by key users and beneficiaries (whether individuals or groups) of the research and impact.

### What should I include in the testimonial I provide for an impact case study?

Testimonies provided to HEIs as corroborating evidence for impact case studies should be factual statements that corroborate the specific impact claims made in the case study. There are some occasions where opinion-based testimonials may be appropriate, e.g. where impact is on public understanding of an issue. The following checklist provides a guide for developing the content of testimonies. This list should be used flexibly and is not exhaustive:

- Discuss with the researchers what they have contributed and its impact, to provide a basis for you to provide feedback and testimonial.
- Provide your testimony directly to the researchers in written form (this may be electronically). Where possible, you should consider providing this on headed paper with a signature. Include your name, role, organisation and contact details.
- Include specific details of the names, roles and institutions of the researchers that you have engaged with as well as specific details of their research that you have engaged with (e.g. titles of research outputs and dates of publication).
- Provide an explanation of the context for your engagement with the researchers and their research. What was the issue? What was the input you sought? How did you engage with the researchers/research?
- Describe the contribution the researchers and their research made. E.g. did they provide expert advice? Did they provide a specific piece of research? Did they synthesise existing research? Did they develop a new output or product?
- Describe the impact this research had. How did their contributions create change? To what extent did the research influence change (i.e. was it the main piece of evidence or one of many)? What specifically changed as a result of the research, and who benefited? What was the timeframe for changes? What was the reach and significance of the changes?

Where possible, you may also wish to include some or all of the following in your testimony:

- Quantitative evidence of the impact to accompany the qualitative testimony
- References to any related impact assessments

### How will information about me be used?

Any testimonials you provide may be sent by the institution to UKRI for the purpose of REF 2021. In addition, UKRI may pass your data, or parts of it, to any of the following organisations that need it to inform the selective distribution of public funds for research and to carry out their statutory functions connected with funding higher education:

- Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE)
- Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)
- Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

UKRI will require that anyone who has access to your data, held in UKRI's records, paper or electronic, will respect its confidentiality and will only process it in accordance with instructions issued for the purposes specified by UKRI. Parts of your data may be passed to the REF expert panels and the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (whose members are independent of UKRI) for the purpose of corroborating claims made in impact case studies. All panel members are bound by confidentiality arrangements.

Those parts of submissions that contain factual data and textual information about research activity will also be published by UKRI, on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies, and will be made available online. Published information is likely to include textual information including impact case studies in which you may be referenced. Your name and job title may be included in this textual information. Other personal details will normally be removed.