

## A brief guide for research users

The UK research sector is ranked second in the world for excellence after the US. And in the G8 countries it produces the most publications and citations per £ of public funding.

### Funding research in UK universities

The four UK higher education funding bodies are responsible for distributing public money to universities to support teaching, research and related activities. As major funders of research – about £2 billion per year – the funding bodies support a dynamic and internationally competitive research sector.

The funding bodies allocate research funding to universities selectively: the amount of money they receive is based on the quality and volume of their research activity.

Currently, around half of research funding is allocated to the top 10 universities.

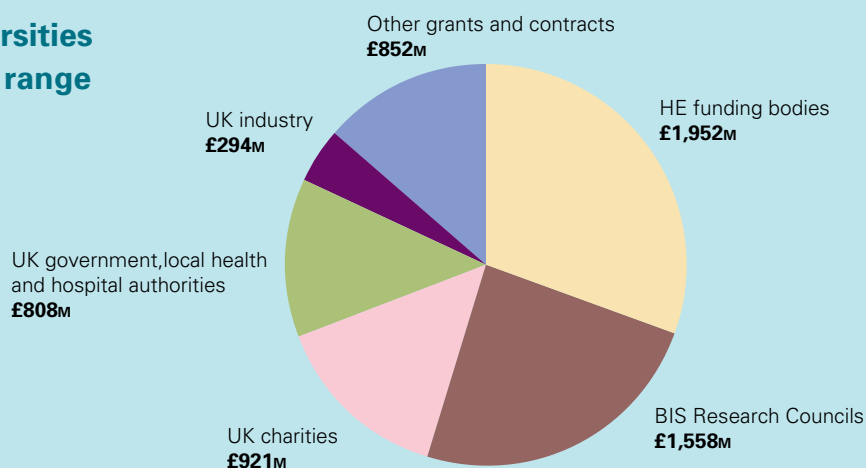
### The Research Excellence Framework

The REF is the new system for assessing UK universities' research. It replaces the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), last conducted in 2008. REF results will be used by the four UK funding bodies to allocate research funding to universities, from 2015-16.

The REF will also:

- provide accountability for public funding of research and demonstrate the benefits of the investment
- establish reputational yardsticks and provide valuable benchmarking information.

### Research in universities is supported by a range of sources



Source: HESA Finance Statistics Return 2010-11 All UK HEIs

## How the REF works

The REF is a process of expert review. It is carried out across all research disciplines, broken down into 36 subject areas. These areas are referred to as units of assessment, or UOAs.

Universities choose which UOAs to submit in. They can submit all types of research, funded from any source. An expert panel will assess and grade the submissions for each UOA. The expert panels are made up of both practising researchers, and research users.

Each submission will be assessed in terms of three elements:

The quality of research <b>outputs</b>	The <b>impact</b> of research beyond academia	The research <b>environment</b>
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These will be weighted as follows, to produce the overall quality profile:

<b>65%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>15%</b>
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Submissions must contain a standard set of evidence to be assessed:

Up to four research outputs per member of staff (published 2008-2013)	Impact case studies and details of the strategy for achieving impact	Information and data about the research strategy, students, staffing, income, facilities and collaborations
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## What will happen and when?

2012-13	Universities prepare REF submissions
2014	Expert panels assess submissions
Dec 2014	Results published
2015 onwards	REF results determine funding allocations

### REF results

REF results will be published in December 2014 in the form of a **quality profile** awarded to each submission.

Quality profiles show the proportion of each submission that is rated:

- 4\* World-leading
- 3\* Internationally excellent
- 2\* Internationally recognised
- 1\* Nationally recognised
- U Unclassified

## The impact of research

The REF will for the first time explicitly assess the impact of research beyond academia, as well as assessing the academic excellence of research. One purpose of the REF is to reward research departments in universities that engage with business, the public sector and civil society organisations, and carry new ideas through to beneficial outcomes.

### Submitting evidence of impact

Universities are responsible for gathering and submitting evidence of the impact of their research. Each submission must include:

- Case studies (see box) of impacts that took place during 2008-2013. The underpinning research must be of high quality, and carried out by the university since 1993. Each submission must include one case study for every ten members of staff in the submission.
- An impact strategy to set out how the university engages with users and facilitates impact from its research.

### Assessing impact

Impact will be assessed jointly by academics and research users on the REF expert panels. **All of the expert panels include some research users. More will be appointed to the panels during 2013.**

### Case studies

Impact case studies must set out:

- What the research was
- How it led to the impact
- What the impact was – who benefitted and what changed?
- Evidence of the impact
- How these claims can be verified.

Research users may be asked by universities to help provide evidence or corroborate an impact.

Case studies will be assessed in terms of the **reach and significance** of the impacts. The panels will grade case studies on a scale:

- 4\* Outstanding impact
- 3\* Very considerable impact
- 2\* Considerable impact
- 1\* Recognised but modest impact
- U Unclassified

### What do we mean by 'impact'?

The benefits that can flow from excellent research are many and varied. For the purposes of the REF, impact is defined as:

*“any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.”*

## Research user involvement

To ensure robust assessment of the impact of research beyond academia, research users are encouraged to become involved in two ways:

### 1. Helping provide evidence of impact (during 2012-13)

Universities are responsible for compiling case studies. The claims they make about the impact of their research must be verifiable and backed up by evidence. Universities may therefore ask research users for:

- assistance in identifying how their research was used, what impact it had, or other relevant evidence
- a statement to corroborate part of a case study, or contact details of a research user who would be willing to provide corroboration directly to the REF team.

Universities are likely to make such requests between autumn 2012 and autumn 2013.

### 2. Taking part in assessing impact (during 2014)

Research users on the REF expert panels will assess and judge the impact of university research, working jointly with academic members of the panels.

Each panel already includes a small number of research users. More will be appointed during 2013. To nominate a research user to join the REF panels, please go to [www.ref.ac.uk/users](http://www.ref.ac.uk/users).

### Is the information I provide confidential?

If a university submission to the REF includes any information that a research user provides, it will be treated in confidence by the REF team and the REF panels during the assessment. After the exercise has completed – during 2015 – the submissions will be published.

Universities can redact confidential or sensitive information which will not be published. The REF team will destroy copies of the confidential information.

If you give contact details to provide corroboration directly to the REF team, we may contact you during spring-summer 2014. (Only a sample of research users will be contacted.)

### What will users on the panels be expected to do?

- Attend a briefing day in autumn 2013
- Attend around 3-4 days of meetings during 2014
- Review a set of case studies and impact strategies (approximately 20-40 short documents).

We will cover expenses and provide a flat-rate daily fee to compensate you or your employer for your time.

### More questions?

See [www.ref.ac.uk/users](http://www.ref.ac.uk/users)