Supporting research through research assessment

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The purposes of our funding

- Our funding supports the university sector at the “whole institution” level (rather than project / academic level)

- Over 90% of our funding is provided to institutions in a single annual grant:

- Funding can be used flexibly to support the research and knowledge exchange missions of universities

- Enables universities to invest blue skies research

- De-risks the pursuit of innovative approaches
How universities spend QR

What is the REF (Research Excellence Framework)?

- 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
# What is the purpose of the REF?

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<th>Accountability</th>
<th>Reputation</th>
<th>Funding</th>
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<td>• To provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment</td>
<td>• To provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information</td>
<td>• To inform the selective allocation of funding for research</td>
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How do we evidence value?

Overall quality

Outputs
- E.g. journal articles, monographs, patents, software, devices/products, exhibitions

Impact
- Impact case studies

Environment
- Environment data and template

60%
25%
15%
Peer review - equity

“Panels have been instructed to define criteria and adopt assessment processes that enable them to recognise and treat on an equal footing excellence in research across the spectrum of applied, practice-based, basic and strategic research, wherever that research is conducted; and for identifying excellence in different forms of research endeavour including interdisciplinary and collaborative research, while attaching no greater weight to one form over another.” (REF 2021 Guidance on submissions)

“All forms of output, in any language, will be considered equitably, with no distinction being made between the type of research or form of output submitted. The sub-panels will neither advantage nor disadvantage any type of research or form of output.” (REF 2021 Panel criteria)
Responsible use of research metrics

• No panels will use journal impact factors or any hierarchy of journals in their assessment of outputs
• Some panels have chosen to use citation data
• Data will be provided centrally by the REF team from our approved supplier
• Panels will receive guidance from the Forum for Responsible Research Metrics
• Panels will continue to rely on expert review as the primary means of assessing outputs, in order to reach rounded judgements
**Interdisciplinary research (IDR) (1)**

- **Underpinning principle of the REF is that all types of research across all disciplines shall be assessed on a fair and equal basis, including interdisciplinary and collaborative research.**

- **Procedures for assessing interdisciplinary research were introduced in REF 2014, including:**
  - Broader assessment panels with expertise to assess a wider range of research
  - Additional assessors to extend the depth and breadth of panels’ expertise
  - Procedures for cross-referral of materials assessment to other assessment panels
  - Facility for HEIs to identify those outputs which it considered to be interdisciplinary, to draw this to the panels’ attention.
Interdisciplinary research (IDR) (2)

• Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP):
  o Advises the REF team, REF panel chairs and the UK funding bodies on support of interdisciplinary research
  o Advises on the assessment and calibration processes

• IDR specialists:
  o At least one member to each main panel responsible for providing guidance on IDR
  o At least two IDR advisers on each sub-panel to provide guidance on assessment of IDR in that UOA and to work with advisers in other sub-panels to ensure equitable assessment.

• Developed a definition of IDR to enable HEIs to identify interdisciplinary outputs
• Developed guidance for the sub-panels on assessing IDR outputs according to the generic assessment criteria for outputs
Impact

- Sub-panels assess the ‘reach and significance’ of impacts on the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life that were underpinned by excellent research conducted in the submitted unit.

- REF assesses the impact of excellent research undertaken within each submitted unit, evidenced by specific examples of impacts that have been underpinned by research undertaken within the unit over a period of time.

- Each submission must include impact case studies describing specific impacts that have occurred during the assessment period.
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