

Surviving (and learning from) REF impact submission: an institutional perspective

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Impact as a formal element of assessment

- **REF 2014** – impact 20% of institutional results, with 16% from impact case studies and 4% from impact ‘environment’ (strategy, approach and support for impact in each unit of assessment).
- University of Glasgow investigated 200+ potential case studies and submitted 143 across 32 units of assessment.
- The exercise was retrospective, exhausting and stressful for all – but not without benefit. It was a critical driver for change.
- Impact was not going away. Our landscape was changing and our research culture and activity had to change as well.
- **Key message:** Impact cannot be seen as an afterthought but as an integral part of the research journey from its earliest stages.



The REF as a useful driver for change

- 3-fold approach to supporting researchers – resources (human and financial); systems and structures (IT and organisational); and processes (training, reward/recognition)
- De-linking research impact from REF, support researchers to understand, articulate and plan for impact – everyone benefits, and REF results would reflect the changes.
- Forward-looking review process, drawing on external REF expertise, examining all aspects of units, encouraging them to articulate an impact strategy that built on existing strengths.
- ‘Top Tips’ roadshow – providing tips to address common points identified in reviews plus general advice on impact to address lack of impact ‘literacy’ found (at all levels of seniority).
- **Lessons learned from REF2014 influenced our preparation for REF2021.**



Supporting researchers: human/financial resources

- ❑ Impact officer roles embedded in (line managed by) Colleges but co-located with central impact team (pre-Covid). Post-REF embedded further in College research support teams to bring impact expertise into early-stage research support.
- ❑ Evolving role for (academic) impact champions post-REF (including CPD) to focus on mentoring other researchers rather than just managing submission.
- ❑ Glasgow KE Fund (internal investment), and research council-funded Impact Acceleration Accounts – supporting partnership-building, engagement, collaborative work with external non-academic partners; + application process as learning opportunity for researchers.

Supporting researchers: systems/structures

- ❑ In-house development of KE and Impact repository as extension of system used to store research outputs. Constitutes personal record for staff of externally-facing activity, acts as repository for documentation which could be future evidence of impact.
- ❑ Open-ended structures (ie not tied to REF) recognising impact as a priority: Directors of Impact in Schools, Impact Mentors and Mentor Network, Innovations & Impact Framework, strategic and operational committees aligning practice and sharing information.
- ❑ Comprehensive institutional tracker for engaged research and potential impacts. Builds on 'REF pipeline' but begins at much earlier stages to target support earlier and more effectively, and to monitor participation profile (career stages/genders) on an ongoing basis.



Supporting researchers: processes

- ❑ **Reward and recognition:** revision of performance and promotions criteria for research and teaching staff. Impact now a recognised pathway to advancement and, for earlier career stages, de-linked from inclusion in a REF impact case study. Rewarding behaviours rather than inclusion in REF. Also College and University award schemes.
- ❑ **Training:** formal and informal. Impact as a required module in Researcher Development Programme, and as part of the Early Career Development Programme (also required). Also built into pre-application support for KE and Impact funding schemes.
- ❑ **Multi-phased review process:** Bringing in external REF reviewers (academic and professional) to provide insight and advice on development of impacts.

Case study selection and evidence

- Intensive multi-phased review panels took place 2015-16 and 2017-20) reviewing and scoring developing case studies
- College Assessment Panels reviewed and discussed developing case studies (chaired by Deans of Research)
- Units of Assessment (REF Champions and REF Impact Champions) played lead role in decisions
- Evidence is unique/impact-dependent, but Impact Officers worked out evidence plans for each case study. We provided templates and guidance on how to approach partners, privacy and data protection information, and let academics decide who should initiate contact. Emphasised the need for evidence of change, not simply activity.

Two great resources:



Specifically related to REF2021 and impact case studies

- What does ‘ownership’ mean in context of impact case studies?
- Clearer designation of roles
- Earlier involvement of case study leads in review process
- Don’t make the drafting process too iterative! Don’t circulate drafts in Word!!!
- ‘Impact literacy’ still not at desired levels.
- Comprehensive tracking and ongoing monitoring/impact mapping is essential for REF resilience



Thank you.

Any further questions?

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