



Higher Education Funding Council for England

*hefce*



# HEFCE's role in assessing the impact of research through the REF

Cliff Hancock  
International Relationships Manager

# Research Excellence Framework Mechanisms

- Open to all UK HEIs, run by HEFCE
- Peer review based quality assessment processes via expert panels
- Universities decide who to submit
- Retrospective look at research output
- Researchers submit up to four outputs
- Quality assessment published as a (departmental) profile:
  - 4 (5) grades: 1\* recognised nationally, 2\* recognised internationally, 3\* internationally excellent, 4\* world leading



They made **1,911** submissions including:

- **52,061** academic staff
- **191,150** research outputs
- **6,975** impact case studies

The **overall quality** of submissions was judged, on average to be:

★★★★★ **30%** world-leading (4\*)

★★★☆☆ **46%** internationally excellent (3\*)

★★☆☆☆ **20%** recognised internationally (2\*)

★☆☆☆☆ **3%** recognised nationally (1\*)



# REF 2014 – How impact was assessed

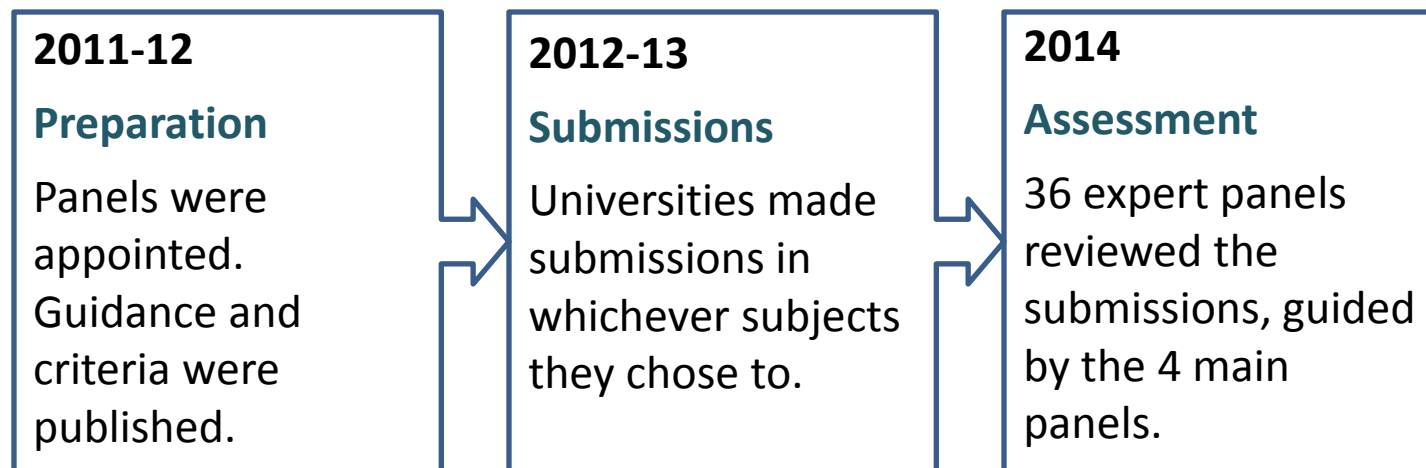
REF assesses the quality of research in all UK universities, in all disciplines. It was carried out by 36 expert panels, grouped into 4 main panels.

Main Panel A: **Medical and life sciences**

Main Panel B: **Physical sciences and engineering**

Main panel C: **Social sciences**

Main Panel D: **Arts and humanities**



# What was assessed

Panels judged the **overall quality** of each submission

**65%**

Quality of research  
**outputs**

**191,150** research  
outputs by **52,061**  
staff were reviewed

**20%**

**Impact** of research  
on society

**6,975** impact case  
studies were  
reviewed

**15%**

The research  
**environment**

The review was  
based on data and  
information about  
the environment

# Impact: Definition for REF 2014

- 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** an effect, change or benefit to:
  - An activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
    - In any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally
- It **excludes** impacts on research or the advancement of academic knowledge within HE; and impacts on teaching or other activities within the submitting HEI

# Impact: Case studies (REF3b)

- Each case study is limited to 4 pages and must:
  - Describe the underpinning research produced by the submitting unit
  - Reference one or more key outputs and provide evidence of the quality of the research
  - Explain how the research made a ‘material and distinct’ contribution to the impact (there are many ways in which this may have taken place)
  - Explain and provide appropriate evidence of the nature and extent of the impact: Who / what was affected? How were they affected? When?
  - Provide independent sources that could be used to verify claims about the impact (on a sample audit basis)

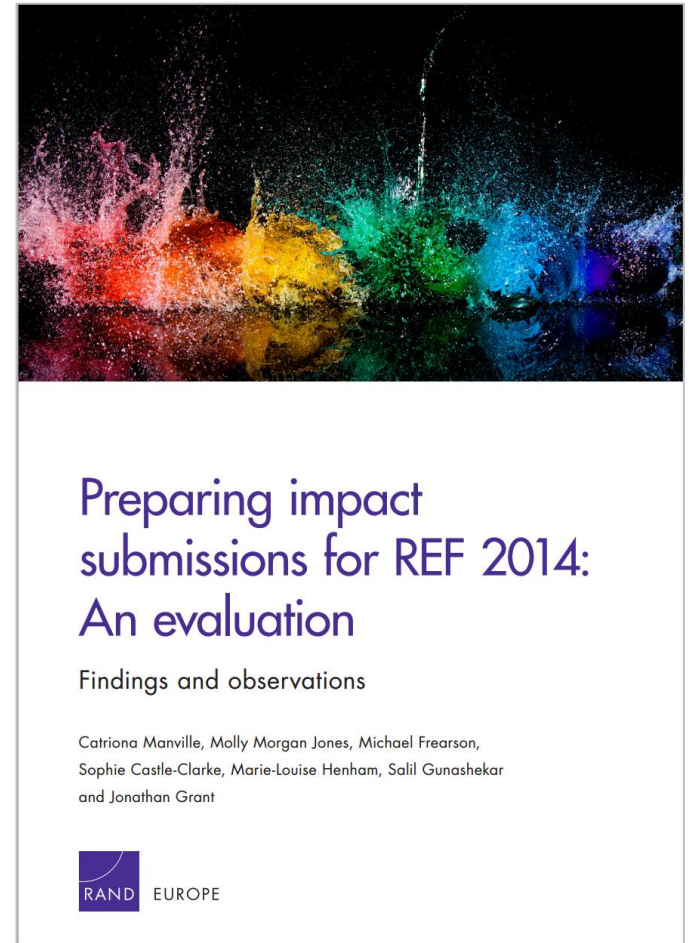


# For the first time, REF has demonstrated the impact of UK research in all subjects

- Over 250 research users judged the impacts, jointly with academic panel members.
- **44%** of impacts were judged outstanding (4\*). A further **40%** were judged very considerable (3\*).
- Impressive impacts were found from research in all subjects.
- REF shows many ways in which research has fuelled economic prosperity, influenced public policy and services, enhanced communities and civic society, enriched cultural life, improved health and wellbeing, and tackled environmental challenges.

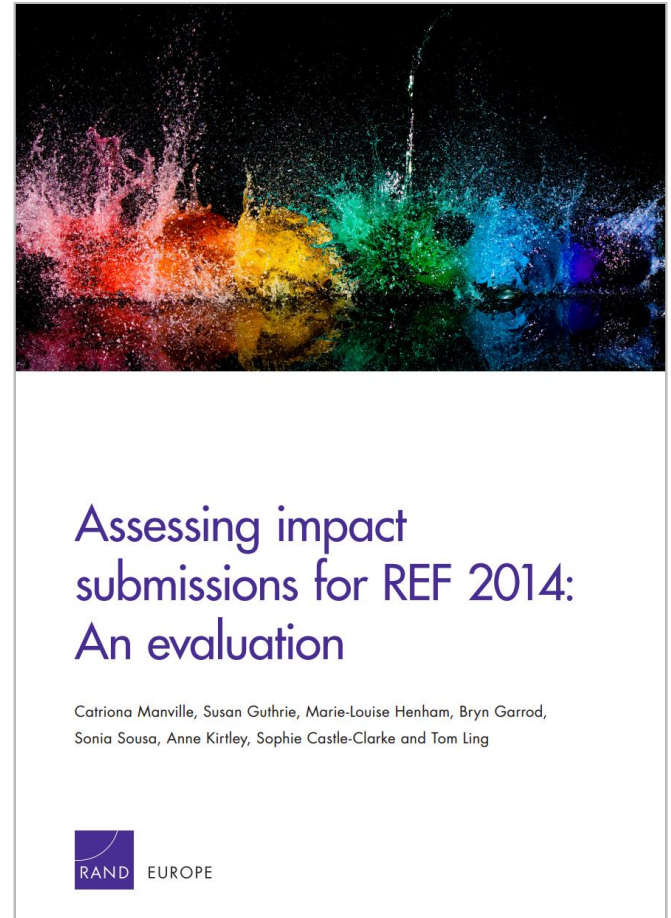
# Evaluation of impact (1)

- Evidence that assessment of impact has led to cultural change within HEIs
- Assessment of impact was a significant new burden for HEIs
- Evidence of economies of scale – costs are less for larger submissions
- Concern that the impact agenda may begin to undermine blue skies research
- Strong desire by HEIs to have clear guidance on the next REF as soon as possible
  - NB Ongoing REF 2021 seminars across the UK in Spring 2017



# Evaluation of impact (2)

- Panel members were able to assess impact in a fair, reliable and robust way
- Bringing together different perspectives of academics and research users was successful and valuable
- Areas identified for improvement
  - Scoring scale
  - Impact template
  - Standardising evidence



# Search REF Impact Case Studies

Browse the index below or search all Case Studies using keywords [e.g. "NHS"].




Learn about advanced search options [here](#).

## Browse the index

Submitting Institution

[Unit of Assessment](#)

[Summary Impact Type](#)

[Research Subject Area](#)

[Impact UK Location](#)

[Impact Global Location](#)

## Submitting Institution




<a href="#">East</a>	(457)	<a href="#">East Midlands</a>	(459)	<a href="#">London</a>	(1353)
<a href="#">Anglia Ruskin University</a>	(32)	<a href="#">Bishop Grosseteste University</a>	(6)	<a href="#">Birkbeck College</a>	(43)
<a href="#">University of Bedfordshire</a>	(26)	<a href="#">De Montfort University</a>	(24)	<a href="#">Brunel University</a>	(76)
<a href="#">University of Cambridge</a>	(227)	<a href="#">University of Derby</a>	(21)	<a href="#">City University, London</a>	(49)
<a href="#">Cranfield University</a>	(24)	<a href="#">University of Leicester</a>	(86)	<a href="#">Courtauld Institute of Art</a>	(4)
<a href="#">University of East Anglia</a>	(64)	<a href="#">University of Lincoln</a>	(35)	<a href="#">University of East London</a>	(27)
<a href="#">University of Essex</a>	(48)	<a href="#">Loughborough University</a>	(79)	<a href="#">Goldsmiths' College</a>	(35)

# Case study analysis: Observations

- The societal impact of research UK HEIs is considerable, diverse and fascinating
- The research underpinning societal impacts is multi-disciplinary, and the social benefit arising from research is multi-impactful
- Different types of HEIs specialise in different types of impact
- UK HEIs have a global impact





# Case study analysis: Lessons learned

- The impact case studies provide a rich resource for future analysis
- The quantitative evidence supporting claims for impact was diverse and inconsistent, suggesting the development of robust metrics is unlikely
- The use of standardised lists of information and the definitions in the case studies would aid future analysis



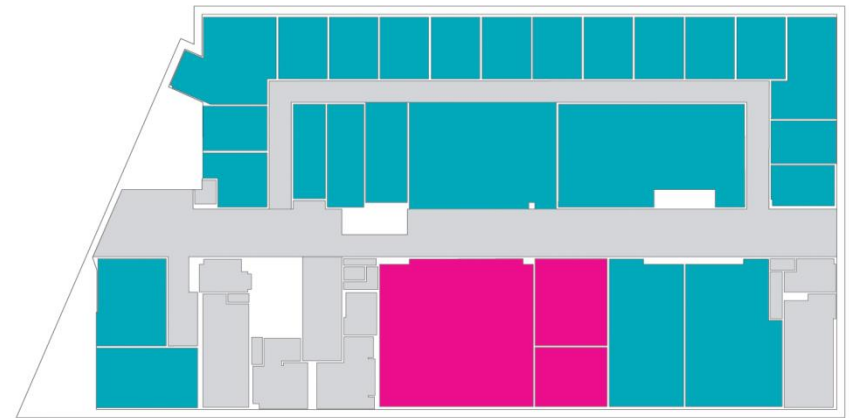
# The link between research quality and funding

- HEFCE R-funding is proportional to volume x type x quality
- Volume measured in the REF – essentially FTE research active staff (with allowance for post docs and PGR students)
- Type is in 3 categories: low cost 1.0, medium cost 1.3 and high cost (STEM etc) 1.6
- Quality weighting is 4:1:0:0 (4\*:3\*:2\*:1\*) for 2015 – 16 up from 3:1:0:0 in 2014 – 15.  
Compare with 7:3:1:0 in 2009 – 10, immediately after RAE 2008
- A result is that around 33% of HEFCE R-funding (Total £1.6 billion per year) goes to 5 universities


# Economic impact of knowledge exchange

- KE income reported by HEIs in HEBCI survey has reached £3.4bn, a real-terms increase of 45% in a decade
- Every £1 of HEIF (£160 m per year from HEFCE) produces £8.20 in economic impact/income
- Strategic commitment to KE by most HEIs
- Development of increasingly long-term and in-depth relationships with business – platform for economic impacts of research and teaching.





 Siemens  
 School of Engineering

 The Institution of  
 Engineering and Technology

Institution of  
**MECHANICAL  
 ENGINEERS**

[www.lincoln.ac.uk](http://www.lincoln.ac.uk)



UNIVERSITY OF  
**LINCOLN**

# Conclusion

- HE bill before Parliament (Royal assent expected early 2017):
  - Replace HEFCE & OFFA with an Office for Students (OfS), the ‘market regulator’, from 1 April 2018
  - Extending Quality Assurance to Quality Assessment through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) – and linking the ability to charge increased student fees to positive outcomes
  - Consolidating research funding under one body (UKRI) that subsumes the RCs’ and HEFCE’s processes
  - HEFCE consultation on REF 2021, published Dec 2016; events across the UK Spring 2017



# Thank you for listening

[c.hancock@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:c.hancock@hefce.ac.uk)