

Please note that the REF guidelines are still being formalised. The REF Guidance on Submissions document is due for release in July 2011. As such, answers to questions held within this document may change.

Q1) What is the current HEFCE definition of 'impact' in the context of the REF?

A1) 'The impact element will include all kinds of social, economic and cultural benefits and impacts beyond academia, arising from excellent research, that have occurred during the period 1 January 2008 to 31 July 2013'¹.

The different types of impacts beyond academia are shown in Figure 1.

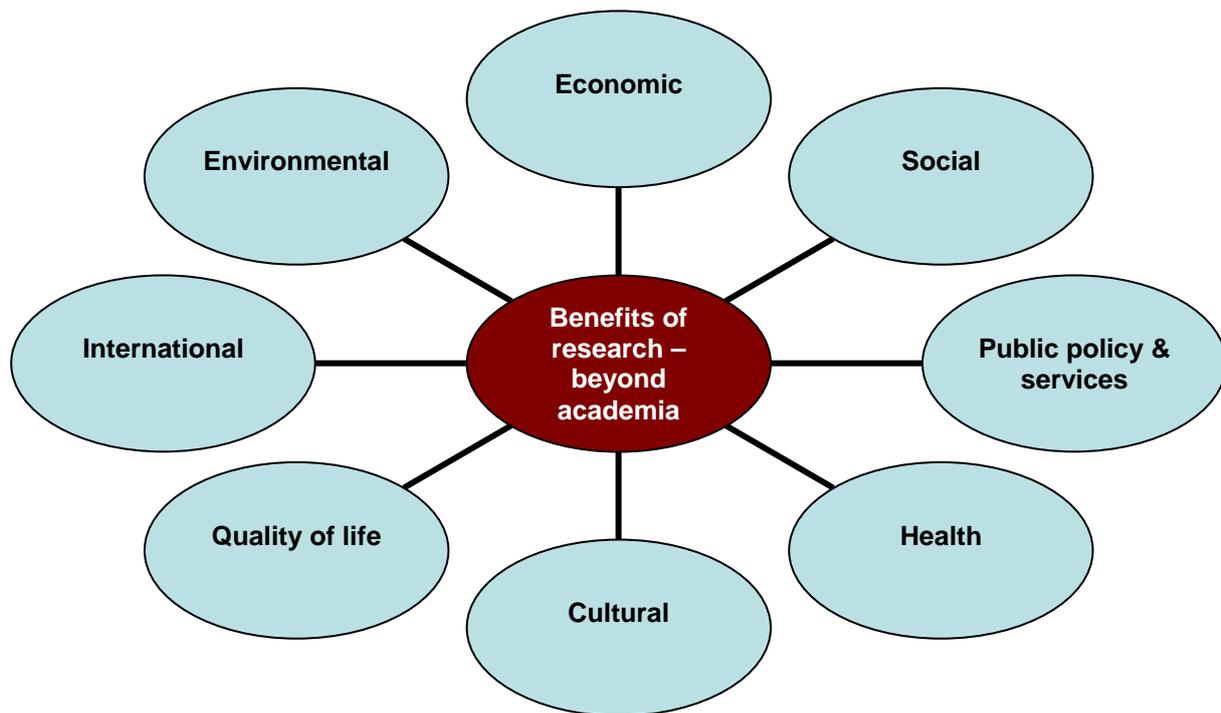


Figure 1: Impact types

Q2) What will be the weighting of impact in the REF?

A2) There will be three distinct assessment elements in the REF, one of which is impact. The weightings will be as follows:

Outputs 65%

Impact 20%

Environment 15%

These weightings will be the same across all units of assessment (UOAs).

¹ 'Decisions on Assessing Research Impact', HEFCE, March 2011, pp. 4.

Q3) How will impact be assessed in the REF?

A3) Institutions will be required to submit impact case studies (the number required will be dependent on the number of staff submitted) and an impact statement.

Units will submit case studies using a generic template with word limits. The template will require information about:

- the underpinning research and evidence of its quality
- the way in which the submitting unit's research contributed to the impact
- the nature and extent of the impact
- references to independent sources that could be followed up to verify claims made.

The case studies are intended to show the strongest impacts achieved by the unit's research, and will be assessed against the criteria of reach and significance of the claimed impact.

The impact statement will require units to provide information on how, during the assessment period, the unit (and the institution) has supported and enabled the achievement of impact. The impact statement will also be a generic template with word limits.

Q4) How many impact case studies will be required per submission?

A4) Submissions will require one case study, plus one further case study per up to ten FTE staff returned. Submissions will therefore include a minimum of two case studies. It is unknown yet whether the number of case studies required will be rounded up or down to the nearest 10 FTE staff submitted. This decision will be included in the REF Guidance on Submissions in July 2011.

Q5) What is the impact pathway?

A5) The impact pathway is the stages through which research findings pass before reaching final impact. This is shown in Figure 2.

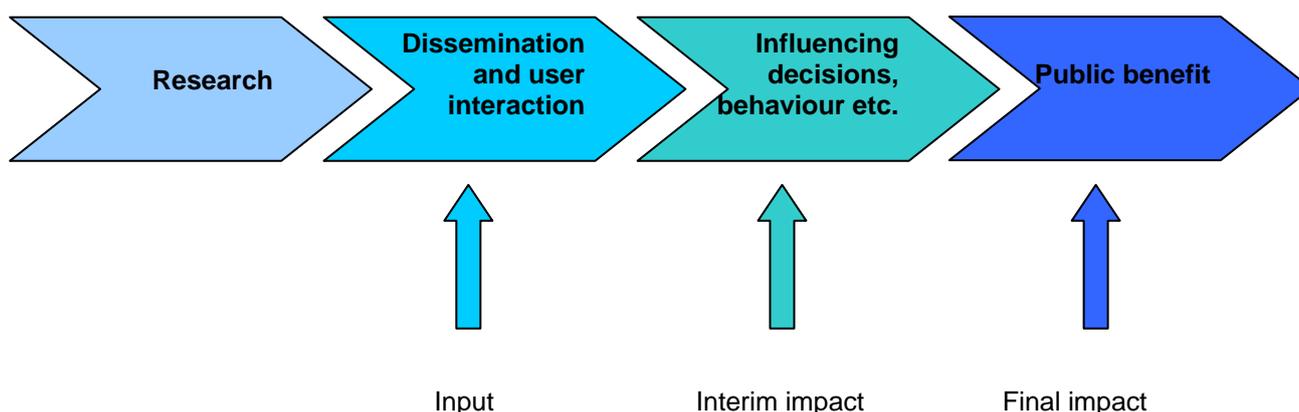


Figure 2: The impact pathway

Q6) At what stage along the impact pathway are impacts eligible for submission to REF?

A6) The REF is interested in impacts that have been realised, not impacts that are aspirational, future or potential impacts. Impacts submitted to the REF can be at any stage of development or maturity (i.e. interim or final impact), providing there has been some change or benefit (impact) beyond academia during the assessment period. Impact that is still at the dissemination stage

(input), without evidence of its benefits, will not be considered as impact in the context of the REF and will not be scored.

Q7) How can final impact best be evidenced and disseminated?

A7) The model impact case study would have achieved final impact, and ideally evidence final impact through further research demonstrating the benefits/impact of the research on the economy, society, etc. This would be written up in high quality, peer reviewed outlets to evidence the quality of the research and the validity of the impact. This cycle is shown in Figure 3.

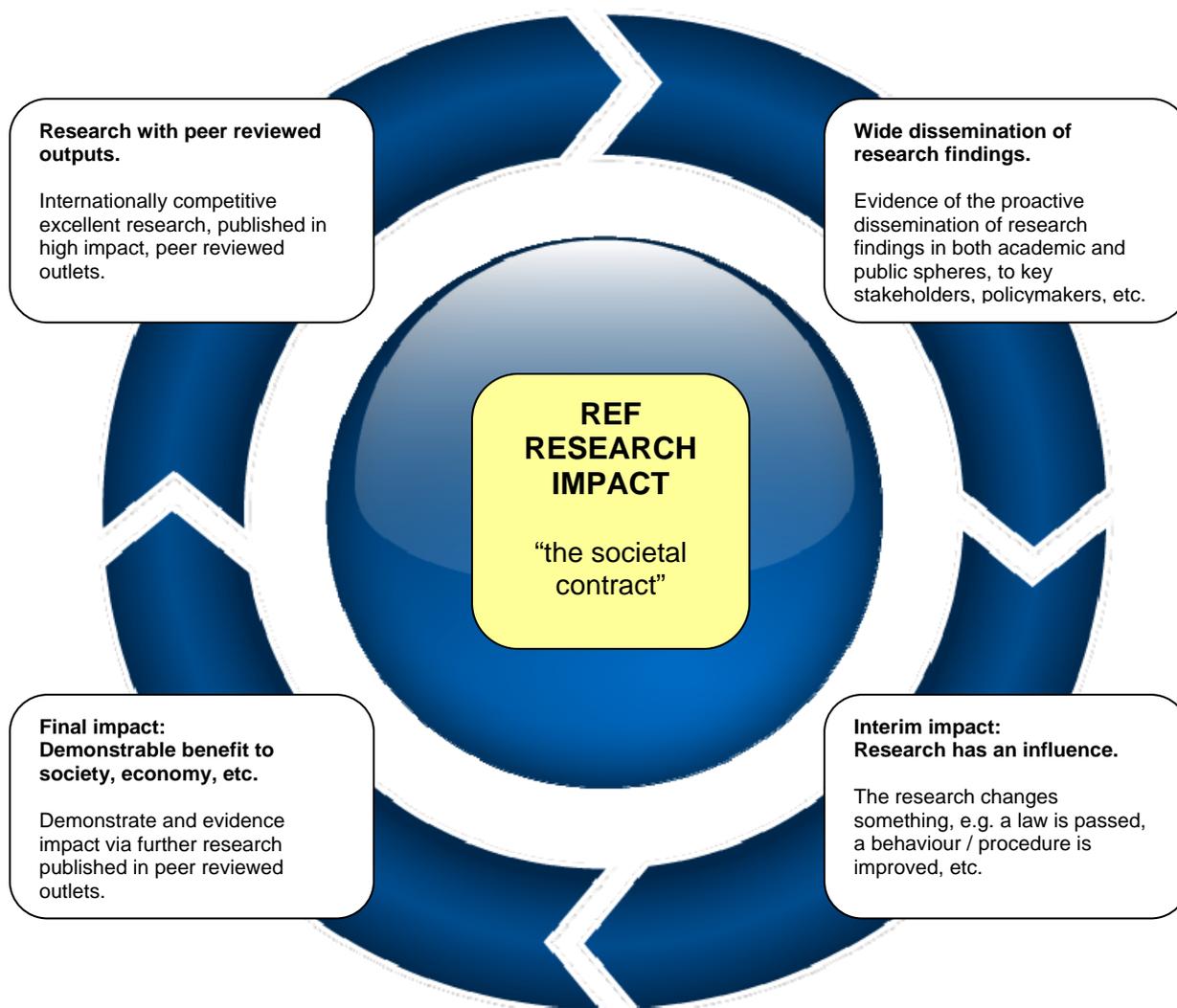


Figure 3: The model impact cycle

Q8) Will impact be submitted at individual or departmental level?

A8) Both the impact case studies and the impact statement will be submitted at department level. The case studies may make reference to the impact achievements of named staff, however, the intention is to show the impact of a body of research. Not all submitted researchers will be expected to submit an impact case study.

Q9) Does the submitted impact need to link to staff submitted to REF2014?

A9) Not necessarily as it is the impact that a unit's body of research has made, rather than an individual's contribution. However, the underpinning research must be of excellent, internationally competitive quality so it is likely that the impact will link to those submitted to REF2014. Exceptions could include staff who have moved to another institution or retired. In these cases, providing the unit is still engaged in research in the field of the impact, then the unit can still submit the impact to REF2014.

Q10) Does impact belong to the individual or to the institution?

A10) Impact belongs to the institution and does not travel with the individual should the individual move to a different institution. The underpinning research must have been undertaken at the submitting institution.

Q11) Who can claim the impact arising from primary research that was undertaken by one individual at more than one institution (e.g. a researcher undertakes research at an institution, transfers institutions and continues this research at the new institution)?

A11) Both institutions may have a case for submitting the resulting impact if primary research was performed at both institutions, and this can be evidenced.

Q12) Who can claim the impact arising from collaborative research involving multiple institutions?

A12) To be credited with an impact, the submitting unit must evidence that it undertook research that made a distinctive contribution to achieving the impact. The particular role of the institution in the research must be made clear in the impact case study. It is possible for more than one institution to claim one impact, with each institution making a distinctive, significant contribution to the research.

Q13) If the underpinning research was undertaken at a non-UK institution or a non-HEI UK organisation prior to the researcher joining a UK HEI, is the resulting impact eligible for submission by the UK HEI?

A13) Unfortunately not. In both of these cases the impact would be ineligible for submission to REF, unless some further primary research was undertaken at the UK HEI which made a significant contribution to the impact.

Q14) Could research informed teaching count as an impact case study?

A14) HEFCE have not yet released any guidance on this, but plan to include this in the Guidance for Submissions in July 2011. In the REF Impact Pilot exercise, feedback from the panels stated:

"The training of post-graduate students who were then employed in other sectors was presented in some cases studies as impacts (alongside other benefits). This was not considered appropriate evidence of impact for a case study, except where the training was in a set of scarce specialist skills, building directly on the research undertaken at the HEI, and bringing clear benefits to their sector of employment²."

² 'REF Impact Pilot Exercise – Findings of the Expert Panels', Annex F, HEFCE, November 2010, pp. 11.

“The panel also received some examples of the following, which it did not consider to be appropriate types of impact: Training of postgraduate research students (other than in rare cases where delivering individuals with scarce skills³.”

Q15) What are the eligibility criteria for the impact case studies?

A15) In HEFCE’s impact pilot, impact case studies had to satisfy four criteria to be considered eligible case studies⁴. These criteria were:

1. Time of impact: That the impact occurred during the assessment period.
2. Contribution by the institution: That specific research-based activity within the institution made a significant contribution to achieving the impact.
3. Quality of the research: That underpinning research, which produced outputs, met a sufficient standard of rigour and originality.
4. Evidence: That there is sufficient evidence to support the claim.

Case studies deemed by the panel to not meet one or more of the criteria were considered ineligible and were scored as ‘unclassified’.

Once the REF Guidance on Submissions is published in July 2011 then more will be known about the eligibility criteria for REF2014.

Q16) What are the key dates for impact in the REF?

A16) The key dates for impact in the REF are:

1 January 1993	At least some of the outputs from the underpinning research must have been published since this date
1 January 2008	Start of the REF assessment period for impact, i.e. claimed impacts must have been realised since this date.
March 2011	Publication of ' Decisions on assessing research impact ' (REF 01.2011)
July 2011	Publication of REF Guidance on Submissions
January 2012	Publication of panel criteria and working methods (including impact)
31 July 2013	End of the REF assessment period for impact, i.e. claimed impacts must have been realised prior to this date

Further information

These FAQs will be amended and updated as and when further information is released by HEFCE.

If you would like further information on the REF and/or impact, please contact:

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The REF website is a useful source of information: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/>

³ ‘REF Impact Pilot Exercise – Findings of the Expert Panels’, Annex F, HEFCE, November 2010, pp. 6.

⁴ ‘REF Impact Pilot Exercise Guidance on Submissions’, HEFCE, November 2009, pp. 8-9.