



PROJECT DOCUMENTATION

IMPACT SUMMARY REPORT #2

***The Research Excellence Framework (REF)
The BU REF Project***

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Date: 12 November 2010

Summary Report

Summary			
Period Covered	11 November 2010	UET Sponsor	Prof John Vinney
External summary - HEFCE impact pilot – final report			
<p>Brief pilot background and key findings</p> <p>On 11 November 2010, HEFCE announced the findings of the REF impact pilot exercise that has been running since autumn 2009.</p> <p>29 UK HEIs took part in the pilot exercise which spanned five UOAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical medicine • Physics • Earth systems and environmental sciences • Social work and social policy • English language and literature <p><u>Key findings of the pilot</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) HEIs were able to provide evidence of a wide variety of impacts. 2) Expert review of impact case studies is an appropriate means for assessing impact. 3) The case study approach will be further developed for use in the REF based on the recommendations made by the expert panels. 4) The pilot confirmed that the feasibility and method for assessing impact is broadly similar across disciplines. 5) A robust assessment of impact should carry a significant weighting in the REF, however, the methods for assessing impact in REF 2014 will still be developmental and the weighting of impact for the first assessment will be carefully considered. One option is for impact to have a lower weighting than the currently proposed 25% with an intention to increase this for future REF exercises. 			
<p>Recommendations for defining research impact</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact will be defined as including social, economic, cultural, environmental, health and quality of life benefits. • Impact purely within academic will not be included. • The REF will assess impact that has taken place, not aspirational or planned impact. • Impacts can be submitted to the REF at any stage of development, so long as some change or benefit has arisen in the assessment period. • The REF Panels will provide further guidance as to what constitutes ‘interim’ impact within their disciplines. • Case studies should focus on final impacts or significant interim impacts. • Impacts that evolve over long time frames can be submitted to successive REF exercises. • Impact submissions should show ‘a distinctive contribution of the department’s research to public engagement activity’ and show the benefits of this public engagement. • It is expected that there will be an overarching broad typology of impact for the REF with REF Panels developing guidance on what constitutes impact (indicators, definitions and guidance) in their disciplines. 			

Recommendations for evidence of impact

- Case studies must provide Panels with enough evidence to make robust judgements.
- The case study template will be revised to encourage a coherent narrative.
- Case studies should contain all relevant information and evidence – panels should not be expected to make assumptions or undertake further work to gather evidence.
- Indicators of impact (including metrics) should be incorporated into the case study narrative.
- The highest scoring case studies were those that provided ‘a coherent narrative with evidence of specific benefits’.
- The ratio of one case study per 10FTE submitted staff was deemed appropriate.
- Rather than submitting a separate impact statement, institutions will be required to provide an explanation of the unit’s strategic approach to impact and how the institution supports researchers in achieving impact as part of the Environment element.
- Case studies should include details of key users who could potentially be contacted by the REF Panel, and/or references to other independent sources.

Recommendations for the assessment of impact

- The criteria of reach and significance were deemed as appropriate for assessing impact.
- In assessing case studies, the Panels discussed whether a 4* case study necessarily meant international reach and significance. Panels made holistic judgements on the merits of each case and found the case studies could achieve a 4* rating with either exceptional reach or exceptional significance; it was not essential to have both.
- The broad definitions of the starred levels in the impact profile were broadly applicable to the range of disciplines.
- The impact weighting is likely to be the same for all UOAs.
- Case studies should demonstrate how the original research contributed to the impact, regardless of whether this was direct or indirect.
- It should not be necessary that the institution was involved in exploiting or applying the research.
- The HEI where the research was undertaken should be credited with the impact; and impacts should not ‘travel’ with researchers if they move to a different institution. However, if staff have moved on since the research was undertaken, we consider that the HEI should only claim credit for the impact if it still remains active in the relevant area of research. Clear and simple guidance should be provided about these criteria for ‘ownership’ of impacts.
- Panels should give full credit to the submitting unit so long as the research made a distinctive contribution to the impact. Where the impact also depended on a wider body of research the case study should acknowledge this. Panels are likely to take into account the relative contribution of research from different institutions to an impact where these are clearly of a different order.
- The underpinning research must be of high quality; for the pilot this was research broadly equivalent to 2* or greater. The submitting unit must justify the quality of the research.
- A timeframe of up to 15 years between the impact and the underpinning research was deemed appropriate, although Panels will have the flexibility to extend this if necessary.
- All REF Panels will include research users.

Impact case studies – examples and good/bad practice

Example case studies and features considered to be good/bad practice are available from the REF website: www.ref.ac.uk

Positive incentives for assessing impact in the REF

These include:

- Encouraging collaboration between academia and industry, the public sector and the third sector.
- Encouraging institutions to support researchers in more fully realising the wider benefits of their research.
- Providing a level playing field in the REF for all types of research.

Potential unintended consequences of assessing impact in the REF

These include the following points, each of which will need to be carefully considered by the funding councils:

- Inadvertently encouraging researchers to focus on impact rather than blue skies research.
- Potential discouragement of collaborative research.
- Early career researchers are less likely to have achieved impact, and therefore department's with a high proportion of ECRs may be at a disadvantage.
- Small departments or new departments may face difficulties in demonstrate impact historically.

Types of impact assessed in the pilot exerciseClinical Medicine

Impacts primarily related to improvements to healthcare (including improved quality of life for patients, better health outcomes, lives saved, changes to clinical guidelines and practices, improved public awareness, and changes to healthcare policy); and economic benefits (through start-up companies and medical technology, contributing to the pharmaceutical industry and reducing the costs of healthcare).

Physics

impacts primarily related to the development of products and services, although a significant number reflected impact deriving from public engagement, and some focused on policy impact.

Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences

impacts included influence on policy development and implementation relating to the environment and climate change (often with international scope); development of processes, services and technologies relating to conservation, environmental management, monitoring and risk assessment; and product and service development (particularly in the oil, energy and utilities sectors).

Social Work and Social Policy

case studies primarily centred on influencing policy development, improving public services, and impacts on practitioners. Most of these impacts were within the UK nationally, locally or within one of the devolved nations, and some related to impact in other countries or on international agencies.

English Language and Literature

impacts included contributing to the creative economy, contributing to national cultural enrichment, extending the global/national knowledge base beyond academia, contributing to civil society, and influencing policy development.

Pertinent Documents/ Sources of Information this Period

- HEFCE REF website: <http://www.ref.ac.uk>
- REF Impact pilot exercise: Findings of the expert panels, 11 November 2010: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/other/re01_10/
- REF Research impact pilot exercise: Lessons-learned project feedback on pilot submissions, 11 November 2010: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/other/re02_10/
- 'REF impact will be lighter but also more widespread', THE, 11 November 2010: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=414178&c=1>
- 'REF pilot: humanities impact is evidence and can be measured', THE, 11 November 2010: <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=414173&c=1>