

The logo for The University of Manchester, featuring the word "MANCHESTER" in a purple serif font above the year "1824" in a smaller purple serif font, all contained within a purple rectangular box.

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester

REF 2021 and Lessons Learned

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Outline of session

1. Structure and purpose of REF 2021
2. University of Manchester's REF 2021 submission and results
 - Benefits of REF institutionally
3. How UoM prepared for REF 2021
 - Focus on output review and selection
4. Reflections and lessons learned
5. Expectations for REF 2029
 - Including current preparations

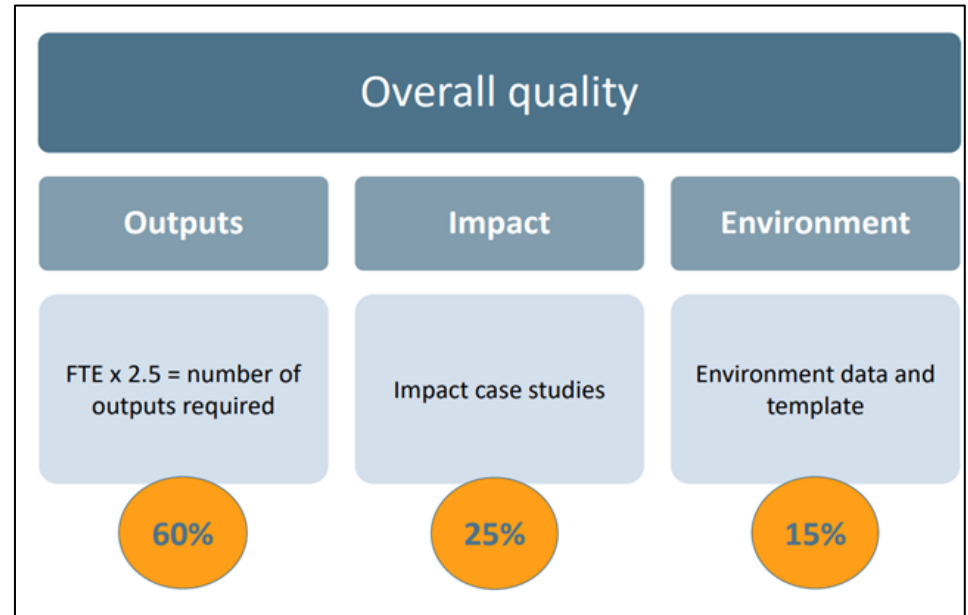
- System for assessing the quality of research in higher education institutions (HEIs).
- REF 2021 followed REF 2014, which replaced previous Research Assessment Exercises (RAE).
- Purposes of the REF include:
 - Informs the selective allocation of UK funding for research (around £2bn annually)
 - Provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment
 - Provides benchmarking information and reputational yardsticks

- Submissions into 34 discipline-based units of assessment (UOAs).

- Each UoA submission included:

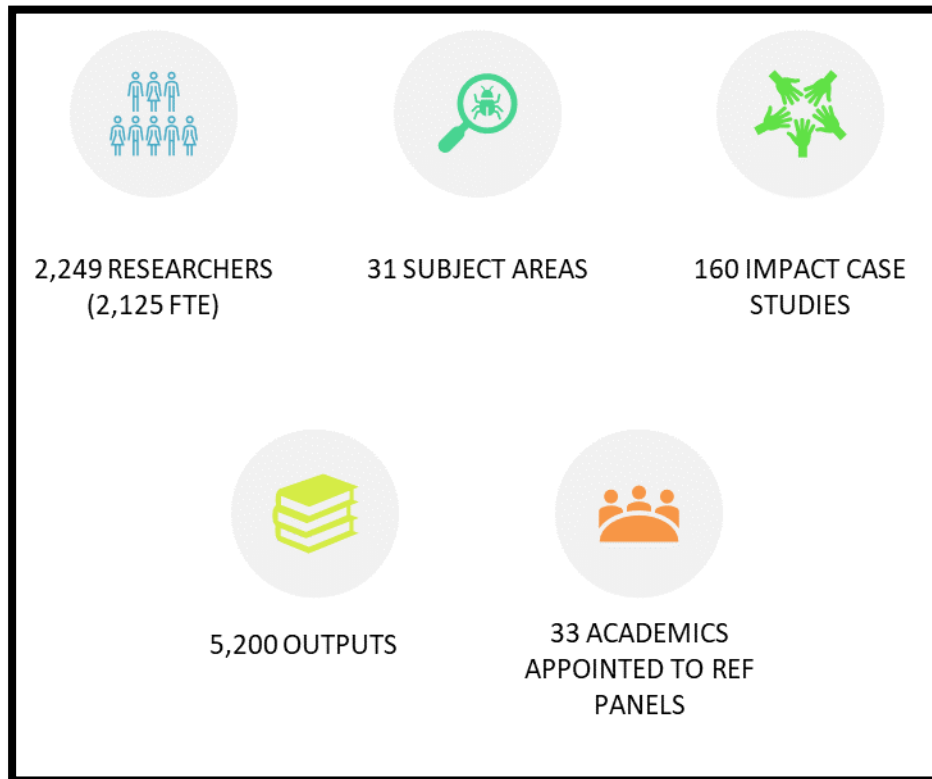
- **Outputs:** published or publicly available products of research, which can take many forms.
- **Impact case studies:** demonstrating the impacts research has had beyond academia.
- **Research Environment:** data and narrative statements on the environment for supporting research and enabling impact.

- New Institutional research environment statement (unscored pilot for REF 2021).



Our REF 2021 submission

Manchester had one of the largest and broadest REF submissions in the UK



Institution	No. UoAs	FTE entered
University of Oxford	31	3,405
UCL	32	3,177
University of Cambridge	30	2,847
University of Edinburgh	28	2,563
University of Manchester	31	2,125
King's College London	25	1,883
University of Nottingham	29	1,718
University of Leeds	28	1,686
Imperial College London	11	1,550
University of Sheffield	25	1,518
University of Bristol	28	1,494
University of Birmingham	28	1,461
Cardiff University	23	1,406
University of Glasgow	28	1,378
Newcastle University	27	1,371
University of Southampton	25	1,313
University of Warwick	22	1,252
University of Exeter	26	1,251
University of Liverpool	23	1,225

UK Research Excellence Framework

- Retained 5th place for **Research Power**, demonstrating the quality and scale of our research and impact
- Moved up to 8th for **Research Quality**

The REF2021 panels considered three elements and judged that 93% of our research is 'world-leading' (4*) or 'internationally excellent' (3*)

- **Outputs:** 90% 3*/4*, includes 44% evaluated as 'world-leading' (4*)
 - **Impact:** 96% 3*/4*, includes 65% evaluated as 'outstanding' (4*)
 - **Environment:** One of the best places in the country to build a research career (99% 3*/4* - includes 81.7% at 4*).
-
- 9 subject areas ranked in the top 3 nationally
 - 23 subject areas ranked in the top 10 nationally

Benefits of REF excellence

Income

- £86 million annually for quality-related (QR) funding.

Reputation

- Independent and authoritative confirmation as a **global powerhouse of research**.
- Benchmark of quality attracts further research funding.
- Recruitment magnet for staff, PGRs, and students.

Recognition

- Morale boost for staff on the collective quality of their research.
- Contribution to solving the world's most urgent problems (Impact).
- Demonstrates that the University is an excellent place to carry out research at all career stages (Research Environment).

How UoM prepared for REF 2021 (outputs)

Submission built by **Research Review Exercise (RRE)**:

- Annual, mandatory University exercise for all REF-eligible staff to optimise the output submission, 2014 onwards
- Peer review of outputs by internal reviewer teams, using the REF four-point assessment criteria for originality, significance, and rigour
 - **Training for panels and for all researchers (awareness)**
- Also collected information about other research activities and impact to help prepare for impact and environment

How UoM prepared for REF 2021 (outputs)

Later stage assessment and selection:

- Calibration of scoring and some re-review of outputs for final output selection
- Annual RRE replaced by local rolling reviews and output 'review summits'
- Introduced a 13-point scale (e.g. 3+, 4- etc) to provide finer differentiation at grade boundaries
- Aggregated output quality results for Units of Assessments (UoAs) used to model decisions about allocation of staff across UoAs (especially Panel A).

REF 2021 reflections

Essentials for success

- Project delivery plan with staged timelines
- Governance – REF Board chaired by VP-Research
- Teamwork across the REF professional service teams and UoA academic teams
- Clear role descriptions and time to do the work – academic workload adjustments, professional service recruitment
- Output review exercises essential for an accurate view of research performance but burdensome and may not need to be annual:
 - extensive re-reviewing in the later stages of preparation (calibration, quality indicators eg citations, prizes)

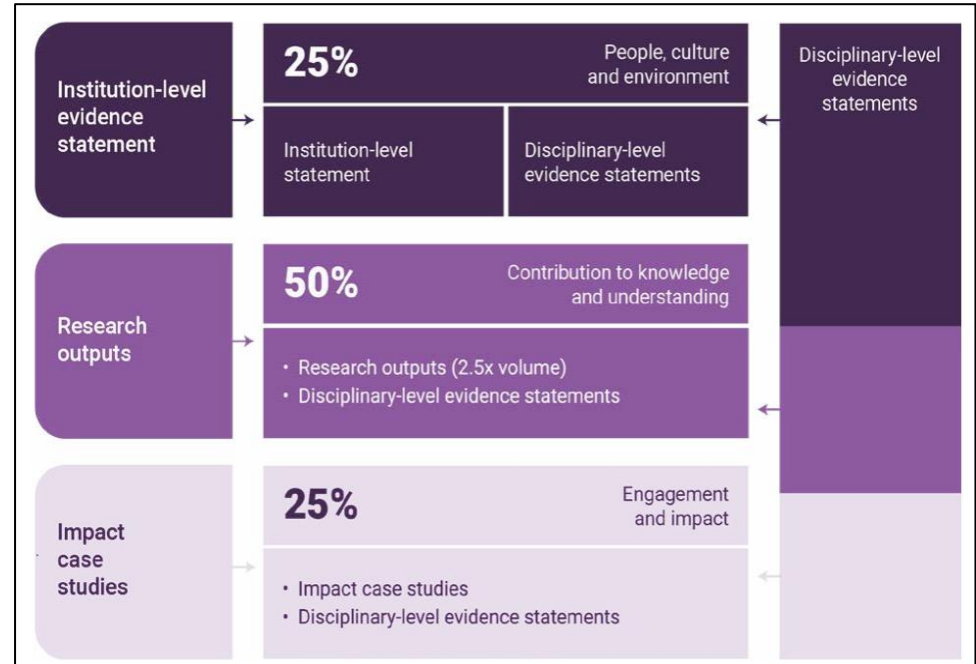
REF 2021 reflections

Areas to develop - early stage preparation for impact and environment

- Scope potential impact cases, and strategically support
- Data capture systems for Institutional and UoA Environment Statements. Uneven support and access to accurate data across the institution caused additional burden.
- Early drafting, reviewing and sharing of UoA and Institutional environment statements
- Generic model text for UoAs to draw on
- Allow extra resource for any new element in each exercise (e.g. impact in REF 2014, institutional environment statement in REF 2021)

Expectations for REF 2029

- **Outputs:** no minimum or maximum number of outputs for individual members of staff.
- **Output weighting reduced** and increased weight and focus on **People, Culture, and Environment (PCE)** (TBC)
- **PCE** to use more structured, quantitative ‘indicators’ as well as narrative statements. Pilot development April-November 2024
- Introduction of **disciplinary level statements:** ‘contributions to knowledge and understanding’, recognising broader range of research outputs.



- **Staff ‘volume measure’ to replace census date** for eligible staff, taken from staff data over several years (TBC).
- **Final guidance and criteria** winter 2025/26.
- **Submission deadline** autumn 2028.

Preparations for REF 2029

Project delivery plan for REF2021 as template for REF 2029

Outputs and Research Review Exercise (RRE)

- 2020/21-2022/23: 3 year pause in annual RRE
- 2022/23: RRE training preparation
- 2024: Faculty-led RRE of sample of outputs published 2021 to date (reduce review and re-review burden for academics).
- 2024/ 2025 onwards: annual University-led RRE (three, or four?).

People, Culture & Environment – this afternoon
Impact – agenda session on Friday