

Research Excellence Framework 2029 (REF2029) - Update and Internal Preparations

Objectives

- Provide an introduction to REF2029
 - What is the purpose, what is new, what we need to deliver and what are the rules?
- Overview of the University preparations
 - What we have done to date, what are our plans, what steps we are taking in 2025/2026?
- Signposting to more information
- Q&A and Discussion: working together to deliver an excellent REF submission

What is the REF?

Purpose

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is UK system for **assessing research excellence and Impact**.

It is a national **peer-review** evaluation of the quality and impact of UK research and environment in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on behalf of four funding councils*.

Described as 'an assessment exercise' that occurs approximately every 7 years (REF2014, REF2021, REF2029).

*Research England, Scottish Funding Council, Medr, Wales' Commission for Tertiary Education and Research and Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland

What is the REF? Purpose

REF funding bodies have agreed **3 core purposes**:

- inform the **allocation of block-grant research** funding to HEIs based on research quality
 - it is **worth over £22 million/year** in Quality Related (QR) funding to the University of Bath
 - **Allocated to Departments to invest in research, researchers and research infrastructure.**
- provide **accountability** for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment
- provide **insights** into the health of research in HEIs in the UK

Rationale of (re)design of REF 2029

“The changes create an assessment exercise that will underpin:

- a research system that produces **high-quality, rigorous** research that is **open** to all;
- an **inclusive and collaborative** research system that supports a **diversity** of people, ideas, institutions, methodologies, outputs, and activities; and
- an **engaged and impactful** research system that connects research with wider society to bring about positive socio-economic change.”

REF 2029 – what is new

Main Changes

- **Shift** from assessment at an individual level to an **institutional** and disciplinary level



- Staff volume determined by **average of 2 years of data from HESA staff return** – no staff list submission or need to identify staff circumstances
- **Decoupling of staff and outputs** – so no minimum number of research outputs per person
- Impact can be underpinned by any research (no 2* quality threshold)
- **New assessed narrative statements** to provide a broader view of all the elements submitted
- Emphasis on support for **research culture**, environment and people

REF 2029 – What we need to deliver

*to be confirmed in December 2025

Element	Weighting	Submission component	Contribution to element	Overall contribution
Contribution to knowledge and understanding	50%*	Outputs	at most 90%	45%
		Disciplinary-level statement	at least 10%	5%
Engagement and Impact	25%*	Impact case studies	80% for units >40FTE	20%
		Disciplinary-level statement	20% for units >40FTE	5%
People, culture and environment	25%*	Disciplinary-level statement	at most 80%	20%
		Institutional-level statement	at least 20%	5%

Code of Practice by
February 2026

Equality Impact
Assessment by
February 2026

HESA Return in
October 2025
(pilot), 2026 and
2027

REF 2029 – How is it organised – Units of assessment

*to be confirmed in December 2025

The submissions are assessed by experts who are organised in four main panels and have **34 sub-panels or Units of Assessment (UoAs)** and also referred to in the REF2029 guidance as disciplines. The main panels are:

1. Panel A – Medicine, health and life sciences
2. Panel B – Physical sciences, engineering and mathematics
3. Panel C – Social sciences
4. Panel D – Arts and humanities

In 2021, University of Bath went into 14 UoA spread across Panel A, B and C as follows:

- Panel A - Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy (UoA3), Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience (UoA4), Biological Sciences (UoA5)
- Panel B - Chemistry (UoA8), Physics (UoA9), Mathematical Sciences (UoA10), Computer Science and Informatics (UoA11), Engineering (UoA12)
- Panel C - Economics and Econometrics (UoA16), Business and Management Studies (UoA17), Politics and International Studies (UoA19), Social Work and Social Policy (UoA20), Education (UoA23) and Sports and Exercise Science, Leisure and Tourism (UoA24)
- We did not go into Panel D

A full list can be found on the REF website (see resources at end)

REF29 Timetable

Full timetable available here:
<https://2029.ref.ac.uk/about/timetable/>

*to be confirmed in December 2025

2023	Initial Decisions
Spring 2024	Consultation exercises and Further decisions
Winter 2024/25	Open Access Policy published ; Volume Measure and Code of Practice guidance published
Summer 2025	CKU Guidance published
Winter 2025	Engagement and Impact Guidance published – expected December 2025* PCE Guidance published – expected December 2025*
2026	Publish full final guidance
Spring 2027	Submission intentions survey deadline
Autumn 2027	Staff HESA returns determining staff volume for REF 2029
Autumn 2028	
Nov 2028	Submission deadline
Dec 2029	Results published

REF2029

Delving into the detail – what are the rules (as we understand them today)*

*subject to change!

REF 2029 – Volume Measure - What

Volume Measure

- A measure of Research Capacity - ensures that the scale of an institution's submission aligns
- Used to determine the number of outputs and impact case studies required for each Unit of Assessment (UoA) submission.
- Volume measure is based on contracts not individuals.
- Outputs and Impact Case Studies submitted to the exercise are not tied to the volume measure

REF 2029 – Volume Measure - How

▪ **HESA** = Higher Education
Statistics Agency

▪ More information here:
<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

Volume Measure

- **Volume Measure** = Average number of **FTE Staff** per UoA
 - UoA = Unit of Assessment – is your disciplinary area
- Calculated based on our annual **HESA staff return** – use existing data
 - Already used to inform other QR funding allocations such as enhancing research culture fund
- Average of 2 years of data from **HESA staff return** (25/26, 26/27)

REF 2029 – Volume Measure - Who

Eligible Staff

- **Volume** Measure = Average number of **FTE Staff** per UoA
- Based on Staff Contract
 - Education and Research
 - Research only
- Staff who count towards volume measure either have
 - Significant Responsibility for Research (E&R)
 - Independent Researcher (R only)
- Approach will be set out in our updated Code of Practice

REF 2029 – Volume Measure - Why

- Determines
 - Number of research outputs
 - 2.5 x FTE – no minimum number
 - Number of impact case studies
 - Numbers tbc, initial announcement
 - 1 ICS 0 to 9.99 FTE
 - 2 ICS 10 to 19.99 FTE
 - 3 ICS 20 to 39.99 FTE
 - 4 ICS 40 to 59.99 FTE etc

What is the REF?

Assessed elements –
CKU – 50% tbc!

Star rating

4* World leading

3* Internationally Excellent

2* Internationally Recognised

1* Nationally Recognised

U Unclassified

There are three main components that are assessed and given a star rating:

Contribution to knowledge and understanding (50%)

- Assessment of the contribution the HEI has made to knowledge and understanding within a specific disciplinary area.
- **Research is defined "as a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared".**
- Assessed through peer review of:
 - Research Outputs e.g. journal articles, abstracts, books, software, patents, artifacts
 - Narrative Statement – contribution to disciplines
- Assessed for Quality “star” rating
- Assessment Criteria: originality, significance and rigour

What is the REF?

Assessed elements –
PCE – 25% tbc!

Star rating

4* World leading

3* Internationally Excellent

2* Internationally Recognised

1* Nationally Recognised

U Unclassified

There are three main components that are assessed and given a star rating:

People, Culture and Environment (25%)

- Assessment of the HEIs environment and culture at a disciplinary (UoA) and institutional level.
- Proposed assessment framework: Context, Strategy, Responsibility, Connectivity, Inclusivity and Development
- Proposed assessment criteria: Vitality, Sustainability and Rigour
- Assessed through peer review of:
 - Institutional Statement
 - UoA Statement
- Given a Quality “Star” Rating

What is the REF?

Assessed elements – E&I
25% - tbc

Star rating

4* World leading

3* Internationally Excellent

2* Internationally Recognised

1* Nationally Recognised

U Unclassified

There are three main components that are assessed and given a star rating:

Engagement and Impact (25%)

- Defined as "any identifiable benefit or positive influence on the economy, society, public policy or services, cultures, the environment and quality of life, beyond academia".
- Assessed against significance (how much has changed), reach (how far it has reached) and rigour* (the process for delivering impact).
- Assessed through peer review of:
 - Impact Case Studies (ICS)
 - Narrative Statement – wider contribution of disciplines research to society
- Given a Quality “Star” Rating

What is the REF? CKU Eligibility

- **Contribution to knowledge and understanding**
 - Need to be able to **demonstrate a substantive link** between the Institution and any submitted output
 - **Likely** to need to be employed at University of Bath at a minimum 0.2FTE for at least 6 months – question remains about portability
 - Outputs published between **01 January 2021 and 31 December 2028** are likely to be eligible for inclusion in REF 2029
 - **Any staff member with research as part of their role** - Teaching only staff, or outputs solely authored by PhD students, are not eligible
- To note
 - Further guidance on narrative statement will be published in winter 2025.

What is the REF? OA Eligibility

- **Open Access Requirements**
 - **Outputs in-scope** for the open access policy are journal articles and conference contributions that have an International Standard Serial Number (ISSN) and were **published between 01 January 2021 and 31 December 2028**.
 - for outputs published between **1 January 2021 and 31 December 2025** – **REF2021 rules apply**
 - for outputs published between **1 January 2026 and 31 December 2028** – **REF2029 rules come into effect**
 - No open access requirements for longform outputs – this will come into effect in the next exercise
 - To note
 - Open access policy now published

What is the REF? E&I Eligibility

- **Engagement and Impact**
 - Underpinning research needs to have been conducted at the University of Bath
 - Staff need to be employed at University of Bath at a minimum 0.2FTE
 - Impact is **likely** to need to have been achieved between 1st August 2021 and 31st July 2028
 - Associated underpinning research is **likely** to need to have been published between 01 January 2008 and 31 December 2028
- To note
 - Awaiting further guidance on number of impact case studies required and definition of rigour (engagement)

What is the REF? PCE Pilot – Draft Guidance and Template

- **PCE Pilot**
 - Announced in January 2024,
 - Pilot aims to "**explore the practicality of submission and assessment of various elements of PCE**".
 - **Focus is on testing and learning** with feedback and shaping future guidance and template
 - Bath taking part in 3 UoAs (plus an institutional statement):
 - Biological Sciences (UoA5)
 - Computer Science and Informatics (UoA11)
 - Business and Management (UoA17)
 - PCE Guidance and Template Published 14th January 2025 - <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/publication/pce-pilot-exercise-guidance/>

What is the REF? PCE - ON HOLD

- **PCE**
 - Focus on Research Culture Action Plan
 - Will update once Guidance Released

REF2029 – University of Bath Preparations

University of Bath Preparations to date

- Established REF Strategy Steering Group (formally Review Group)
- Developed ambitious targets for each UoA through benchmarking to improve performance
- Responded to consultations
- Took part in People, Culture and Environment workshops and pilots
- REF audit exercises 2022/23, 2023/24, 2024/25
 - Assess where we are now
 - Identify priority areas for support
 - Focused on Outputs and Impact Case Studies
 - Faculty/School led approach
- Secured additional funding to support impact development and delivery
- Secured additional funding to support a calibration exercise of output reviews

25/26 Audit Deliverables

If in doubt speak to your UoA
Lead or email ref@bath.ac.uk

Contribution to knowledge and understanding	Faculty/School and UoA lead Peer Review of Eligible Research Outputs against REF2021* criteria and grading Action: Please ensure your outputs are on PURE!
Engagement and Impact	Drafting of REF Impact Case Studies Action: Keep an eye out of updates and events – ICS writing retreats planned for November and February
People, Culture and Environment	Self assessment of position against Research Culture Priority areas Action: Keep an eye out for updates and events.
Code of Practice and EIA	Code of Practice Development and Consultation Action: Read the code of practice and provide feedback

25/26 Audit Timetable

October 2025	Start Audit Process – Launched in October 2025
<i>November 2025</i>	<i>Consult on Code of Practice</i>
March 2026	Submit deliverables (output review scores, draft impact cases, PCE questionnaire) at UoA and Faculty/School Level
April 2026	Faculty/School Submit deliverables to RIS and VCs office
May 2026	REF SSG - Internal Panel Reviews
July 2026	Feedback to Faculties/School and UoAs
July 2026	Report to UEB
Autumn 2026	Long term plan announced to 2028

Full timetable available here: <https://2029.ref.ac.uk/about/timetable/>

UoA Leads

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

- Psychology, UoA - Gregory Maio
- Economics and Econometrics, UoA 16 - Robertas Zubrickas
- Politics and International Studies, UoA 19 - Sophia Hatzisavvidou
- Social work and social policy, UoA 20 - Kate Woodthorpe
- Education, UoA 23 - Lizzi Milligan, Jim Hordern
- Sport and Exercise Science, UoA24 - Martyn Standage

School of Management

- Business and Management, UoA 17 - Fotios Petropoulos

Faculty of Science

- Allied Health Professionals, UoA 3 - tbc
- Computer Science and Informatics, UoA 11 - Thomas Powell
- Biological Sciences, UoA 5 - tbc
- Chemistry, UoA 8 - Petra Cameron
- Physics, UoA 9 - Daniel Wolverson
- Mathematical Sciences, UoA 10 - Kirill Cherednichenko

Faculty of Engineering

- Engineering, UoA12 – Chris Bowen
- Architecture, UoA13 – Anthony Darby

Useful Additional Resources and Reading

- Initial Decision Document – Outlines the initial Design of REF2029 - <https://repository.jisc.ac.uk/9148/1/research-excellence-framework-2028-initial-decisions-report.pdf>
- REF2029 website – a great way to keep up with the news and updates following consultation on the initial decisions - <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>
- REF2014 and REF2021 information is also available – for example <https://2021.ref.ac.uk/> which includes guidance, results and Impact Case Study Databases of those submitted (and made public)
- You can also signup to the REF news alert to your email
- Or contact the University REF Team on ref@bath.ac.uk