

# REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

**Welcome to the REF 2029  
Town Hall on our recently  
published Open Access Policy**

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# REF 2029 Open Access Policy

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# What is the Research Excellence Framework?

REF is owned and led by the four UK higher education funding bodies



- It:
  - informs allocation of around £2bn of block-grant funding each year
  - provides accountability for public investment in research
  - continually evolves, alongside our research base
  - (given the connection to allocation of funds) inevitably drives behaviour and therefore is a significant policy instrument across the UK

# Key developments for REF 2029

- **People, Culture and Environment**, global perspective that culture is:
  - Crucial in supporting high-quality research with impact
  - A key component of excellence
  - Linked with long-termism, stability, sustainability and productivity
- **Breaking link between individual staff members and unit submissions:**
  - HESA data on staff primarily employed to undertake research (no REF census)
  - “Substantive connection” and “substantive link”
  - Exploring the removal of minimum and maximum outputs per staff member
- **Impact Case studies:**
  - Reducing the minimum requirement for small submissions to one case study
  - Revising threshold levels and weighing of the impact statement

# The REF 2029 Policy Roadmap

Modular  
development  
and publication

Web-based,  
interlinked  
guidance

Stakeholder  
deep-dives

# REF2029 timetable

**AW 2024-5**

**Policy releases:**

- Open access
- Volume measure; Codes of practice guidance (VM)

**2025**

**Summer –** Contribution to knowledge and understanding; engagement and impact

**Summer –** Expert panels begin guidance development

**Winter –** PCE criteria and definitions published

**2026**

- Final full guidance is set

**2027**

- Submission intentions deadline

**2028**

- Submission deadline
- Assessment phase begins

**2029**

- Results published

# Principles and functions for this exercise:

## 1. REF should fulfil the following purposes:

- **Inform the allocation** of block-grant research funding to HEIs based on research quality
- Provide **accountability for public investment** in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment
- Provide **insight into the health of research** in HEIs in the UK.

## 2. REF should 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.

## 3. REF decision making should be driven by:

- **Robustness** of assessment outcomes
- Impact of the system on **research culture**
- Ensuring that the **bureaucratic burden** of the system is proportionate.

From Initial Decisions published in June 2023.



# Open access – consultation

March to June 2024 covered:

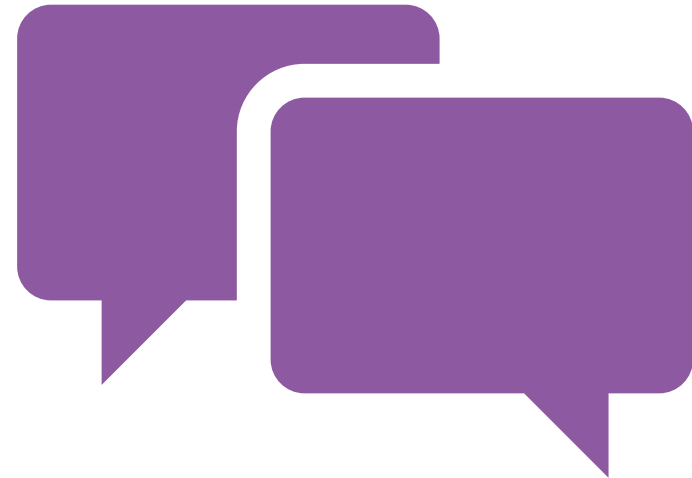
- Deposit requirements, embargo periods and licensing for journal publications and exceptions.
- Proposed introduction of an open access mandate for longform outputs.

We invited submissions from individuals and organisations.

We met with sector groups representing different interests to consider differential impacts of the policy.

Policy published December 2024

**Our aim throughout has been for consultation to be meaningful**, to assess the views and evidence submitted, and to bring these into our considerations and decision making.





# Open access – longform outputs



**There will be no longform open access mandate for REF 2029.**

An open access requirement for submission of longform outputs **will be in place for the next assessment exercise**, with implementation **from 1 January 2029**.

# Open access – Journal articles and conference contributions 1 of 2

## **Implementation date**

- 01 January 2026 (REF 2021 policies apply up to this date).

## **Deposit**

- post publication with three months (where not published fully open access) earlier deposit is both accepted and supported.

## **Licensing**

- As open as possible. Preference is for CC-BY or other licenses conferring the same level of openness. Licenses meeting the standards of CC-BY-NC and/or CC-BY-ND (including CC-BY-NC-ND) are acceptable.

## **Embargo periods**

- continue with the proposed reductions. This is in the context of, and to encourage moves across the sector towards rights retention and exploration of open access options for publication with short/no embargo periods, to support quicker access to research.



# Open access – Journal articles and conference contributions 2 of 2

## Exceptions

- Exceptions are set out in the policy, grouped by exception type. Some further exceptions have been applied and changes made to some proposed exceptions responding to information from the consultation.

## Audit

- Consultation flagged a need for some early guidance. The audit approach for open access in REF 2029 will be broadly in line with that used for REF 2021.
- An outline of the principles for audit are set out in the revised policy.

