

# REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

**Welcome to the REF 2029  
Town Hall on the guidance for  
the  
PCE Pilot**

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Research Excellence Framework

## REF PCE Pilot Guidance Sector Townhall

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# Agenda

- Introduction
- The Guidance
- Questions
- Next Steps

# Initial decisions on REF 2029 (June 2023)

- REF 2029 has an expanded definition of research excellence. The three elements have been refocussed and rebalanced to reflect this:
  - **People, culture and environment (PCE)** replaces the environment element and will be expanded to include research culture – 25%
  - **Contribution to knowledge and understanding** replaces the outputs element. It will largely be based on assessment of research outputs, but will also include evidence of broader contributions to the advancement of the discipline – 50%
  - **Engagement and impact** replaces the impact element. It is similar to the impact element of REF 2014 and will consist of impact case studies and an accompanying statement 25%
- REF 2029 will move further away from the assessment of individuals. Research volume will be determined by data drawn directly from the existing HESA staff record.

# PCE Updates

- The PCE Indicators project was commissioned with Technopolis and CRAC-Vitae which will develop the indicators to be used for the assessment of PCE.
- Given the extended timeframe of the REF to 2029, an opportunity emerged for more in-depth testing of the indicators developed through the commissioned PCE indicators project.
- A pilot exercise was announced which involves drafting of example PCE submissions by a sample of HEIs for assessment by pilot panels in a selected number of Units of Assessment (UoAs).
- The pilot will utilise the outputs of the commissioned project, the selected indicators and the draft submission/assessment template.

# PCE Indicators Project

- Desk research to understand existing landscape on research culture and possible indicators (February 2024)
- Consultation with the sector to co-design indicators and templates for submission and assessment
  - Scoping workshops (May to June 2024)
  - Thematic workshops (July to September 2024)
- Indicators and templates for Pilot assessment produced (October 2024)

# PCE pilot exercise

- The pilot will incorporate the production and assessment of PCE statements from a sample of HEIs, within a selection of Units of Assessment (UoAs) which will be assessed by pilot assessment panels
- It is necessary to focus our pilot to strike a balance between:
  - manageable amount of work to be delivered
  - sufficient evidence for a meaningful assessment
- A key concern with the pilot is that the sample of material produced and outcomes of the assessment can be considered representative of the broader research landscape
- The main output is a realistic assessment of the feasibility of carrying out assessment of PCE in a 'full-scale' REF exercise

## Selected UoAs

8 UoAs have been identified for the pilot exercise

- Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy (UoA 3)
- Biological Sciences (UoA 5)
- Earth Systems and Environmental Science (UoA 7)
- Computer Science and Informatics (UoA 11)
- Business and Management Studies (UoA 17)
- Social Work and Social Policy (UoA 20)
- History (UoA 28)
- Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies (UoA 33)



## Participating HEIs

- 40 HEIs are participating
- A mixture of research-intensive institutions and those with more of a teaching focus.
- A mixture of small and specialist institutions and large multi-faculty institutions.
- A breadth of UoA coverage
- HEIs preparing submissions December 2024 to March 2025

## Assessment Panels

- 8 Subject panels in the selected UoAs – Composed of approx. 20 panel members, including two Co-chairs
- 1 Institution level panel – Composed of the Co-chairs of the subject panels, plus some additional members

Broad range of expertise:

- Experience of research assessment, e.g. served on a REF panel or other national assessment exercise
- Experience of research submissions, e.g. coordinated an institutional or unit-level submission for the REF 2021 exercise
- General expertise in PCE, e.g. has an institutional role focusing on a field related to research culture, or involved in other groups or organisations with an active interest in PCE

# Purpose of the Pilot Guidance

- The guidance and framework are being tested in the Pilot Exercise
- The guidance and framework will both develop during and following the pilot, therefore the guidance for REF 2029 will be different from this guidance
- The Pilot will not examine CKU or I&E, but outcomes of the Pilot may be applied in development of these areas
- The Pilot will focus on the newer elements of PCE, we will not examine income, infrastructure and facilities, though these will remain an important part of the assessment
- The nature of the pilot means there will need to be flexibility to allow for testing of different approaches

# The Framework

Five factors which enable positive research culture

## Strategy

Having robust, effective and meaningful plans to manage and enhance the vitality and sustainability of the research culture and environment.

## Responsibility

Upholding the highest standards of research integrity and ethics, enabling transparency and accountability in all aspects of research.

## Connectivity

Enabling inter-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches both within and between institutions, fostering co-creation and engagement with research users and society, and recognizing and supporting open research practices.

## Inclusivity

Ensuring the research environment is accessible, inclusive, and collegial. Enabling equity for under-represented and minoritised groups.

## Development

Recognising and valuing the breadth of activities, practices and roles involved in research, building and sustaining relevant and accessible career pathways for all staff and research students, providing effective support and people-centred line management and supervision, supporting porosity and embedding professional and career development at all levels and across all roles.

# Indicators and Evidence

- Indicators of positive research culture have been identified
- Example sources of quantitative and qualitative evidence which illustrate performance against the indicators are suggested
- We are asking participating HEIs to provide as much evidence as they are able to, supporting their performance across all indicators
- The pilot will seek feedback from the participating HEIs and the pilot panels:
  - Which indicators were straightforward to work with? Which indicators were problematic?
  - Which indicators could be considered mandatory? Do any indicators lend themselves to certain institutional types?
  - What aspects of the template were positive? What aspects of the template were challenging?
  - Which indicators are not robust or may be challenging to audit? Were there any concerns about data quality?
  - Are there other indicators not tested in the pilot that should also be considered?
  - What could be improved?

# Submissions

- HEIs will make submissions to one or more UoAs and an institutional-level submission
- A template is provided for HEIs prepare their PCE submissions. A separate template should be complete for each UoA submission and for the institution-level submission
- HEIs will prepare their submissions during December 2024 to March 2025
- HEIs will provide quantitative and qualitative evidence to support their performance against the indicators in all five enabling factors. HEIs should not be constrained by the examples of evidence given if other sources of evidence better represent their performance
- Indicative word limits for each section are 1,000 words.
- Additional evidence is permitted, but submissions should be readable as stand-alone documents
- We don't expect all participating HEIs to approach this in exactly the same way. HEIs may take different approaches if making submissions to more than on UoA

# Assessment Criteria

- **Vitality:** which will be understood as the extent to which the institution fosters a thriving and inclusive research culture for all staff and research students. This includes the presence of a clearly articulated strategy for empowering individuals to succeed and engage in the highest quality research outcomes.
- **Sustainability:** which will be understood as the extent to which the research environment ensures the health, diversity, wellbeing and wider contribution of the unit and the discipline(s), including investment in people and in infrastructure, effective and responsible use of resources, and the ability to adapt to evolving needs and challenges.
- **Rigour:** which will be understood as the extent to which the institution has robust, effective, and meaningful mechanisms and processes for supporting the highest quality research outcomes, and empowering all staff and research students. This includes the sharing of good practices and learning, embracing innovation, robust evaluation and honest reflection demonstrating a willingness to learn from experiences.

# Quality Descriptors

- **4 star:** Evidence of a culture and environment conducive to producing research of **world-leading quality** and enabling outstanding engagement and impact. There is evidence that the policies and measures in place at the institution are having a positive impact on PCE within the institution, and furthermore collaboration and sharing of good practice and learning mean that there is also influence outside the institution.
- **3 star:** Evidence of a culture and environment conducive to producing research of **internationally excellent quality** and enabling outstanding engagement and impact. There is evidence that the policies and measures in place at the institution are having a positive impact on PCE within the institution.
- **2 star:** Evidence of a culture and environment conducive to producing research of **internationally recognised quality** and enabling outstanding engagement and impact. There is evidence that the policies and measures in place to positively influence PCE at the institution are being adhered to.
- **1 star:** Evidence of a culture and environment conducive to producing research of **nationally recognised quality** and enabling outstanding engagement and impact. There is evidence that policies and measures are in place which are intended to have a positive impact on PCE at the institution.
- **Unclassified:** Evidence provided is not robust, or evidence suggests a culture and environment conducive to producing research falling below nationally recognised standards.

# Assessment

- Submissions will be assessed by eight subject-level panels and one institution level panel
- Panels will reach agreed scores for each enabling factor
- Summary data is likely to be published in the final report of the pilot, but we do not plan to publish scores for enabling factors, submissions, or participating institutions



# Feedback

- We will seek feedback from participating HEIs on the process of preparing their submissions
- We will provide a Miro board or other online collaborative space to facilitate discussions and capture initial feedback
- We also anticipate running some reflective workshops and additional evidence gathering at the close of the Pilot exercise
- Feedback is likely to be framed around the following questions:
  - How much effort/staff time went into the preparation of each submission?
  - What worked well? What could be improved?
  - Which indicators were straightforward to work with? Which indicators were problematic?
  - What aspects of the template were positive? What aspects of the template were challenging?
  - Which indicators are not robust or may be challenging to audit? Were there any concerns about data quality?
  - Could collection of any of the indicators be automated?
  - Are there other indicators not tested in the pilot that should also be considered?

# Questions

- The Overall Framework
- Preparing submissions
- Assessment criteria
- Quality descriptors
- Assessment process
- Feedback

# Next steps

- We will capture your questions from today and combine these with questions raised by the HEIs participating in the Pilot
- We will aim to produce a FAQ document which we will publish in due course
- There will be other opportunities to engage with us:
  - Open drop in forums (starting 12 February)
  - Some thematic workshops to be confirmed

# Our approach will need to consider...

- **Flexibility**: Different approaches and indicators may be necessary for different types of higher-education institutions, different research strategies, or different research disciplines
- **Journey travelled**: Not every institution will start from the same place or has the same resources. We will need to consider what has been achieved with what resource, and progress that has been made.
- **Context**: Indicators are of limited value if we do not understand the context or the narrative behind them. We need space in the assessment to contextualise the indicators.

# Objectives

- We want to develop 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
  - an engaged and impactful research system that connects research with wider society to bring about positive socio-economic change
- We want to shine a light on research culture, to not just assess research culture, but identify and reward healthy research culture, and therefore to drive it in a positive direction. Our hope is that this will have a positive impact on research culture and the people doing research.