

REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

REF 2029 Town Hall

Strategy, People and Research Environment Guidance

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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

Principles and functions for REF 2029:

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:

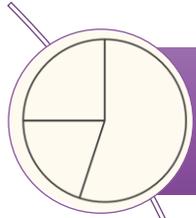
- **Robustness** of assessment outcomes
- Impact of the system on **research culture**
- Ensuring that the **bureaucratic burden** of the system is proportionate.

From Initial Decisions published in June 2023.

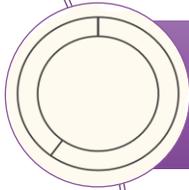
Evolution of Strategy, People and Research Environment element

- Replaces 'Environment' from REF 2021
- Underpinned by the Initial Decisions and the PCE pilot
- Published December 2025
- Guidance module includes overview of requirements for SPRE statements

Key changes in REF 2029



SPRE profile worth 20% of unit profile



Two assessed statements: Institutional statement worth 60% of SPRE profile, and unit-level worth 40%



Incorporates findings from PCE pilot including encouraging discussion of journey travelled



Statement on the Research Community: Roles and Careers



Statement of Representation

Assessment Approach

- SPRE is assessed holistically against two criteria: Vitality and Sustainability
- Qualitative and quantitative indicators encouraged to strengthen the narrative
- There is no third criterion, but reflection and journey travelled will be incorporated into vitality and sustainability
- ‘Distance travelled’ and adaptive strategies can demonstrate excellence
- PDAP and RDAP will advise the panels on aspects relating to people and research diversity

Structure of SPRE Statements

- Four shared sections across IL & UL
 - Context, Mission and Strategy
 - People
 - Income, infrastructure and facilities
 - Collaboration, engagement and impact
- IL emphasises institutional strategy and enabling systems
- UL emphasises implementation of strategies and on the ground practice
- Templates will be finalised with panels
- Graphs, charts and diagrams can be included within text narratives and will not affect the word counts. However, they should always have a description and be contextualised through the narrative.

Unit level quantitative data

From the Submission system:

- volume measure
- total number of outputs submitted
- number and percentage of substantive links with one, two, three, four, five or more research outputs
- distribution of outputs per sub-discipline within the UoA

From the quantitative data collection

- number of research doctoral degrees awarded in the REF period, by year
- average annual research income for the REF period, total across all sources

Quantitative Data approach

- The institution-level panel will receive aggregated unit data and
 - UoAs submitted with volume measure
 - UoAs with unit exceptions with volume measure
- Narratives must contextualise the quantitative data

Institution-level statement

- The ILS should focus on how strategy, systems and enabling infrastructure support the research environment.
- In the period 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2028
- Assessed by an institution-level panel
- Additionally provided to sub-panels to inform UL assessment

Institution-level statement -context

- the institution's stated mission and its strategy for research, trajectory since 2021
- organisational structure and key thematic research areas
- organisational approach to central roles (or non-UL roles) that enable or support research, engagement and impact
- Regional, civic or international partnerships
- approach to funding
- external drivers and challenges shaping the institution's priorities

Institution-level statement –small institutions

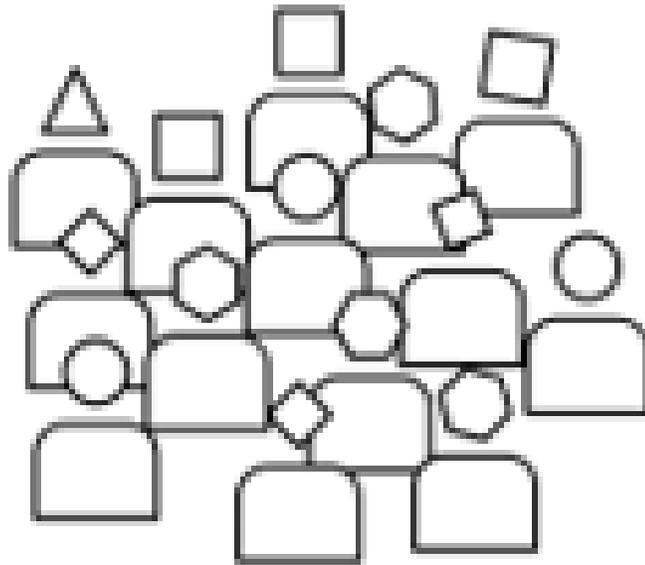
- ILS is the main place to discuss strategy, whereas the ULS is the place to discuss the implementation of strategy and practice at the unit level.
- Sub-panels have access to the ILS, but the IL panel will not routinely have access to the ULS
- Panels will develop further advice

Unit-level statement

- The ULS should focus on how the institution's research mission and strategy are implemented within the unit, including evidence of their effects.
- The ULS may discuss the effectiveness of separate or complementary UL strategy, processes
- Describing support for all researchers, those who support and enable research, engagement and impact and research students.
- In the period 1 August 2020 to 31 July 2028
- Assessed by the sub-panels
- Should not repeat ILS but can refer to data presented within it

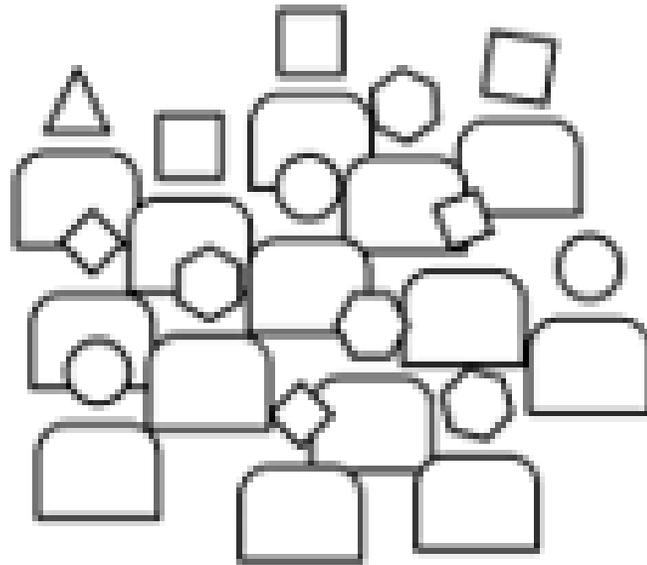
Relevant submitting unit for SPRE

- All researchers, and staff who enable research, engagement and impact and research students



Statement on the Research Community: Roles and Careers (SoC)

- All researchers, and staff who enable research, engagement and impact and research students
- Not separately assessed but informs the UL SPRE submission.



Statement of Representation

- A submitting unit comprises the collection of **subject structures, research groups and research activity** in an HEI, submitting to a UOA.
- The **representativeness** of submissions will be **addressed within the SPRE Unit Level Statements**
- **The important issues of research diversity, demographics and career stages will be assessed as part of the wider SPRE statements.**
- The statement of representation will not be directly scored but will be used as a point of reference in the assessment of the wider unit-level SPRE statements.
- An HEI's process for ensuring output submissions are representative of the research activity being undertaken must be outlined within the Institutional CoP to ensure that they are transparent, robust and equitable
- Further guidance available in section 7 of the CKU guidance

Indicators and Templates

- Templates and indicators will be published once they are confirmed by panels
- Templates have mandatory sections with some optional details
- Indicators are a mix of recommended and optional

Thank you and stay in touch

- Use QR code to sign up for **REF updates** straight to your inbox.
- Please visit **get involved** on our website to view current opportunities.
- Email us at **info@ref.ac.uk** if you have any suggestions about how we can improve our guidance for you.

