

## Preparing for Our Research Excellence Framework (REF) Submission

Research is central to all we do as a university, and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) is an important way in which this work is recognised and rewarded. The REF result greatly influences our competitive position and, thereby, affects our ability to continue to attract excellent staff and students. The REF result also determines how '[QR](#)' money is distributed across the HE sector, and this money helps fund research and impact even when it is not supported by a research grant or contract. High quality research underpins our teaching, our reputation, and our contribution to society. Given the value of this exercise, it is important that we are well prepared to ensure our submission properly represents the research excellence at our university.

The next Research Excellence Framework (REF 2021) submission will be in November 2020, with the results due in December 2021. Lancaster performed well in the last exercise, being the only [N8 university](#) that received an increase in QR funding following the results of REF 2014. This time the rules are going to be somewhat different, and we face increasing competition from other HEIs. Our institutional preparations are already underway, with a census of outputs taking place, and eligible case studies being identified.

There are four main REF panels sub-divided into 34 disciplinary based Units of Assessment (UOA). The REF panels, made up from national and international experts, will assess the quality of research outputs (e.g. journal articles, monographs and exhibitions), research impact and research environment submitted by each UK university. Summary results in the form of a quality profile are published at the level of the UOA for each university that enters a submission to the REF.

It is a strategic priority for Lancaster to grow the number of staff submitted into the REF, and the university is committed to supporting academic staff to become 'REF ready' with internationally-significant outputs to be submitted. This is central to the 'research enhancement' approach we have been developing across campus, and to the inclusive approach we have always championed at Lancaster.

### Lancaster University Research Enhancement

Preparations for REF2021 are already underway. Last year we put in place a Research Enhancement Process to ensure that faculties are supported in delivering the best REF submission possible. This process frames our activities at the university, faculty, department and individual level. The aim of the Research Enhancement Process is to deliver research excellence through a mentoring and developmental culture, and is broader than the REF, but includes REF preparation as this is an important component of how research is funded in the UK.

#### The University's Role

*Eligibility of Individual Staff:* The funding councils recently published the staff eligibility criteria for the REF and the university is currently working through these in detail to ensure that we identify and submit our academics according to these criteria. There are also eligibility criteria associated with outputs, such as publication dates and open access. For every eligible academic that is entered into the REF, between one and five research outputs will be associated with them in the institutional submission. We will start to look in detail at the pool of research outputs so that we can consider those that are most likely to be highly rated in the REF.

## The Faculty's Role

REF panels will assess outputs according to published panel criteria which will be influenced by discipline. It is important therefore that there is local delegation of our preparation processes, overseen by faculties. Each faculty now has a REF Steering Committee to support this process.

## The Department's Role

*Departments' Ratings of Outputs:* Departments will, under the supervision of their faculties, conduct processes to examine research outputs to inform our estimation of the most likely ratings in the REF exercise of each output. It is acknowledged that this is not a perfect process and any review can only provide the most likely rating for an individual output but we will endeavour to make the process as accurate as we can. This will require iteration over the next three years up to the submission as we consider these outputs in more detail. Departments may use a mix of internal peer review, senior staff with experience of the REF in the department or in other relevant departments, and external expert review. It is recognised that this will generate a range of opinions on each output that the university will use to form their assessment as to which outputs should be entered into the REF in order to maximise our position. Thus, the output rating process will produce a 'best approximation' of outputs to inform output selection for the final REF2021 submission.

Heads of Department will ensure that mentoring and developmental support is provided to academic staff, based on the emergent outcomes of the ratings review process. Guided by the outcomes of this process, constructive feedback will be provided to individual staff in a supportive manner. In some cases, Heads of Department may identify individuals who could benefit from additional support to help their professional development. It is important that such advice is provided within departments in a developmental and supportive manner.

Internally generated estimates of the ratings of outputs used in preparation for the REF will not be used in promotion or probation cases for individuals, as these are approximations used to guide this specific REF process.

It is important that we begin looking at outputs now for several reasons:

- We need to identify whether the outputs being considered are eligible for submission according to the various open access and other publication criteria set out by HEFCE. There is a large volume of work required across the university because of the high number of outputs to be reviewed in order to select those for submission. All outputs considered for REF will require checks and validations against REF eligibility and the REF [open access policy](#).
- Where staff can benefit from mentoring and further developmental support this can be targeted appropriately and in a timely manner.
- We need to identify those outputs which are most likely to be rated as four star, and this will require a great deal of discussion and reflection to select the appropriate outputs.

Departments are being asked to update the information on their provisional output rating estimates by the end of May 2018 and departments are required to record proposed outputs in [Pure](#) so that the [Library](#) can start the process of checking the eligibility of those outputs. This is especially important for those outputs that are within the scope of the REF open access policy which require deposit within 3 months of acceptance.

Heads of Department and Faculty REF leads have reflected upon feedback received during the 2017 census. In some cases, this may mean for example moving away from internal peer review of outputs to external review and/or review of outputs by a smaller group of senior staff in departments. Some

departments that have been using journal lists (for example LUMS) may now start considering peer review. Faculties will work with departments and provide guidance on this.

### Supporting the Development of Impact Cases

The weighting of impact cases in REF2021 has increased so they are now even more important. To support the development of impact case studies the University's Research Committee has a dedicated [impact fund](#), which runs bi-annual calls.

Faculties are conducting regular censuses to monitor their impact and the number and maturity of potential case studies to be considered for REF2021. Impact Managers will work closely with Research Enhancement Directors, Associate Deans for Research and Department impact leads to support the development of impact case studies.

### Further Information

We have organised REF information meetings between February and April 2018 for any academic staff who would like more information about REF preparation to attend. These meetings will include the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research & Enterprise) and members of Faculty REF leadership teams, who will be happy to answer any questions or queries. Further meetings will be arranged in the future if there is interest from staff.

Also academic staff will be expected to have an ORCID number to be eligible for REF submission. This is straight-forward and easy to do. Further information and instructions on creating an ORCID can be found [here](#).