



## Evidence for Enhancement: Improving the Student Experience

### The Scottish HE Data Landscape

#### An overview of: Research Excellence Framework (REF)

##### **Type and scope of the data**

The REF is a process of expert panels reviewing research at Higher Education Institutions. Three elements are assessed: the quality of outputs (for example, publications, performances and exhibitions); their impact beyond academia; and the environment that supports research. Each institution is scored on these three elements (outputs, impact, environment) for each of the subjects, called the Unit of Assessment (UOA) that they submit. In REF 2014, there were 36 UOAs grouped in four panels (A-D). In REF 2021, there will be 34 UOAs.

##### **Time period of data renewal**

The REF was first carried out in 2014, replacing the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) which reported in 2008. The next REF exercise will report data in 2021.

##### **Questions that the data can help to explore or answer**

The REF results offer a fair comparison of research performance across the sector. It is used to provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information.

##### **Important caveats, exclusions etc.**

For RAE and REF 2014, institutions could select which staff to submit for assessment, but for REF 2021, all academic staff whose research is above a percentage threshold of their time must be submitted. Other methodology changes - for example, impact - were not assessed in RAE, meaning it is not always possible to look at longitudinal changes. Different subjects must necessarily consider relevant context, so comparisons between UOAs in different panels is not recommended.

Some institutions collaborate to make a joint submission or make multiple submissions for one UOA.

##### **Publications/analyses which use the data**

Research funding by the UK funding councils is primarily determined by the REF results. Better institutional performance in the REF is rewarded by allocation of a higher proportion of the annual funding pot.

The REF results are also used widely as a measure of institutional research excellence. UK league tables use the results at subject level, usually with relatively low weighting.

##### **Where to find the data and any further published analysis**

[www.ref.ac.uk/2014](http://www.ref.ac.uk/2014)

[www.rae.ac.uk](http://www.rae.ac.uk)