

A Brief Guide to Scoring Case Studies

By the QMUL Impact Team

What is Impact?

Even though research impact is much broader than the REF, we are using the REF 2021 definition of impact for the purpose of scoring case studies:

“For the purposes of the REF, impact is defined as an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, **beyond academia**.”

Impact includes, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:

- the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding
- of an audience, beneficiary, community, constituency, organisation or individuals
- in any geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.

Impact includes the reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost or other negative effects.”
([Draft Guidance on Submissions](#))

Impact Case Studies

For REF 2021, impact is primarily demonstrated through a five-page narrative entitled the impact case study. The impact case study identifies the impact(s) claimed, provides evidence that the impact could not have occurred without the research and the scale of the impact (in terms of *reach* and *significance*, see below). The impact case study also offers space to present the underpinning research that contributed towards the claimed impact(s).

Successful impact case studies will demonstrate the following:

- A clear articulation of the impact(s) and beneficiaries;
- Clear links between the research and the impact(s);
- An easy to follow narrative that could be understood by a third year undergraduate student;
- Evidence of the impact(s);
- Evidence of the reach and significance of the impact(s).

Reach and Significance

Reach and significance are the measures by which REF panellists will assign scores to impact case studies. According to the REF 2021 guidance:

REACH

“Reach will be understood as the extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact.

SIGNIFICANCE

Significance will be understood as the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness or well-being of the beneficiaries.” ([Consultation on the Panel Criteria and Working Methods](#))

It is important to remember that reach is not about the number of beneficiaries or international influence. It is about having an influence or change in a targeted population, which could be quite local.

Think about reach and significance in your scoring of impact case studies; however, as case studies are not finished and are only still in draft form, we are also looking at the *potential* for reach and significance in these scores. How are reach and significance articulated? Is there a clear line from research to impact to reach and significance? Can you judge, at this point in time, what the best case scenario is for the reach and significance of each case study?

What is the Difference between Impact and a Pathway to Impact?



A pathway to impact is the mechanism by which researchers move from the research to the impact. A pathway might be dissemination, media attention, a patent, a report, etc.



Ideally, a pathway to impact will lead to *actual* impact, which is the *shift* or *change* that occurs as a result of the research.

Examples of Pathways to Impact

- Patents
- Media stories
- Presentations
- Reports
- Commissioned work
- Guidance/guidelines
- Training
- Advice
- Public engagements
- Collaboration/partnerships
- KTPs
- Spin-outs*
- This list is not exhaustive!

Evidence

Evidence of impact is either quantitative or qualitative. Evidence will reflect the type of impact claimed. For example, economic impact can be evidenced through financial reports or number of jobs created (and many other ways), but policy impact might be evidenced through citations or testimonials (amongst others). Evidence needs to be unbiased and external to QMUL.

At this point in the REF cycle, we need to be very clear on what the evidence of impact looks like in each case study. How robust is it? Does it link the research to the impact clearly? Does the evidence demonstrate reach and significance? Where evidence is not available, is there a clear plan for capturing it?

There is a list of possible types of evidence in Annex A of the "[Consultation on the Panel Criteria and Working Methods](#)" hosted on the REF 2021 website. This Annex demonstrates the relationship between types of impact and evidence of the reach and significance of the impact.

Scoring

Because impact case studies are incomplete at this stage, we are scoring using two indicators of readiness: the **potential quality** of the impact and the **maturity** of the impact. Scores can be written in whole or half numbers.

Please think about the case study's **reach** and **significance** in your scoring. As well, consider the robustness of the evidence presented within the narrative and adjust your score to reflect this.

How many boxes can you check?

Checkbox for Scoring Case Studies

Quality Scoring

	Does the case study manage the following?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear articulation of the impact(s) and beneficiaries
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear relationship between the research and impact
<input type="checkbox"/>	Clear understanding the reach and significance of the impact
<input type="checkbox"/>	Robust evidence that underpins each claim of impact
<input type="checkbox"/>	A well-written narrative that highlights all of the above.

If you cannot check any boxes above, you are likely looking at an unclassified case study.

If you check one or two boxes, you are likely looking at a score of 1*-2*.

If you check two to four boxes, you are likely looking at a score of 2*-3*.

If you check all five boxes, you are likely looking at a score of 4*!

Maturity Scoring

	Does the case study have the following?
4	Impact is fully developed – it has already achieved its score for potential quality.
3	Impact is expected to be fully developed by 31 July 2020.
2	Impact might be fully developed by 31 July 2020.
1	Impact is unlikely to be fully developed by 31 July 2020.
U/C	Impact definitely won't be fully developed by 31 July 2020.

Questions? Comments?

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