

Impact and the Research Excellence Framework: new challenges for universities

The 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF) places new emphasis on the non-academic outputs of research. Impact statements and related case studies prepared for the REF will be a primary means of focusing attention on this type of impact. This element adds an additional dimension to the evaluation process and presents universities with a new challenge: how best to construct submissions and present research results to capture these outputs.

In order to help universities prepare for the REF, RAND Europe and Ranmore Consulting Group have devised an analysis and advice package to help senior research leaders determine how best to identify research with the greatest impact and present this research to the REF panels. Also, they will help you deal with the process of addressing the inevitable people management challenges associated with the REF submission: how best to manage your talent pool and build your research capacity.

Building on RAND Europe's expertise in evaluating research impact, including previous work for the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) in developing the REF,¹ and Ranmore's work with senior level leaders in higher education institutes (HEIs),² the partnership is a unique relationship that will help you meet the new challenges posed by the 2014 REF.

Building up to the REF

Universities will be invited to make submissions in 2013 and the results will be published in 2014. Although full submission guidelines will not be published until mid-2011, based on the findings of the impact pilot study and other outputs of the review process, we know that the 2014 REF will assess universities on the basis of the *quality* of research outputs, the *wider impact* of research and the *vitality* of the research environment. Following the impact pilots, the funding councils have declared that using case studies, and evaluating the impact of those case studies through assessment panels, is a workable approach.

Although details are being finalised by the funding councils, the weighting for the impact assessment part of the REF is likely to be equivalent to approximately 15 to 20% of quality research funding. This equates to around £220m per year, and so constitutes a significant amount of funding for research. With so much riding on a positive outcome from this new assessment method, it is imperative for universities to be able to successfully identify and present their most impactful research. It is equally important that universities are able to consider strategies for managing the implications of the REF-associated selection and implementation processes on their talent pool and research activity.

The Impact Finder

In light of the challenges posed to the HEI sector by the 2014 REF, we are offering an analysis and advice package to support universities in their preparations and, crucially, to help them evaluate the impact of their research portfolios. At its core is the RAND Europe Impact Finder tool – a proven methodology for identifying impactful research. The impact finder methodology was developed initially for the Arthritis

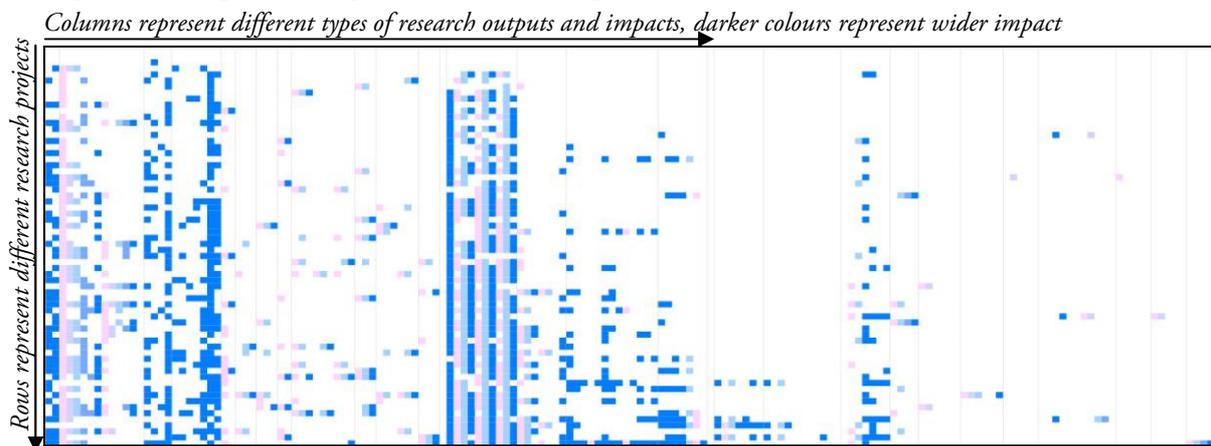
¹ RAND Europe was commissioned to produce several reports for HEFCE in relation to the REF, including the area of bibliometrics (see: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/resources/impact.pdf> and <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/resources/Options.pdf>), and in the broader domain of capturing research impact (see: http://www.rand.org/pubs/documented_briefings/DB578.html).

² For further examples of Ranmore's work in this area, see: <http://www.ranmore.co.uk/ranmore.aspx?page=54>. Ranmore is also active in the research and development area: see for example a report for the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (LFHE), entitled 'The Composition, Challenges and Changes in Top Teams in Higher Education Institutions' (2008 with S. Woodfield, see: <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html>).

Research Campaign³ but is now used widely. For example, it is being rolled out across the National Institutes of Health Research to evaluate high-quality research and health impacts, and has formed the basis of the Medical Research Council’s evaluation system.

The Impact Finder provides an overview of research impact and a basis for more detailed examination of the ‘why and how’ of research translation. The tool is implemented as a web questionnaire and collects information across a range of social, cultural, economic and academic impacts. The data are presented in ‘impact arrays’, which have been developed as a way to display the impacts of research and give an instant overview of the research portfolio. An example of an impact array is shown below: the *columns* represent different types of outputs and impacts, the *rows* different projects, and the *colouring* the intensity or geographic reach of an impact. The presentation of research impact in this way will provide the university with a valuable visual demonstration of impact across its entire research portfolio, as well as the means to select case studies for more in-depth qualitative analysis and demonstration of impact.

Example of an impact array generated by the Impact Finder



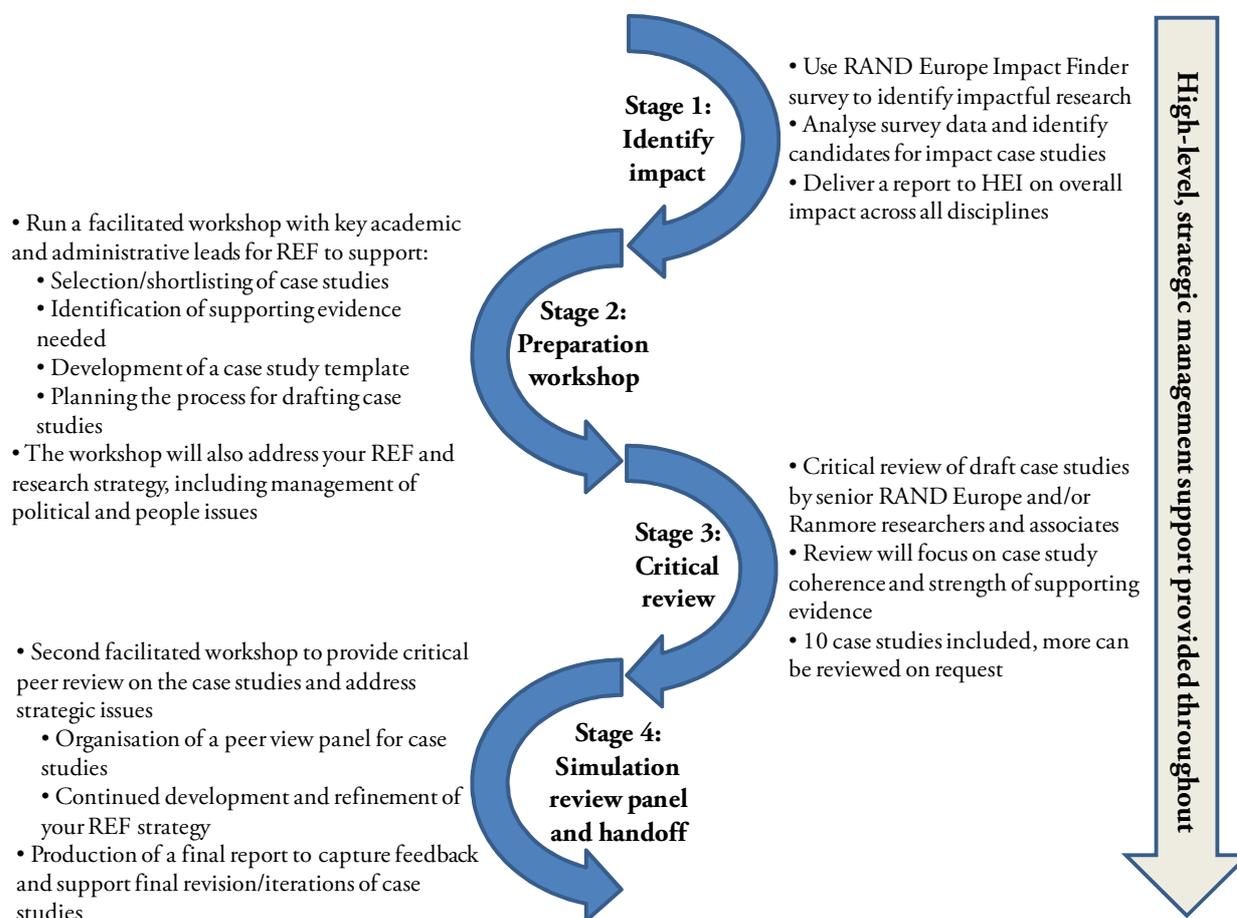
The analysis and advice package

RAND and Ranmore will analyse the impact survey findings, make recommendations about the most promising case studies for presentation in the impact assessment, and run a workshop for key research leaders to support the initial stages of case study development. Then we will provide a critical peer review function once the case studies have been prepared by the university’s departments. In each case, we will work with you to develop a comprehensive approach suitable for your university’s needs and strategic challenges. The key stages of this analysis and advice package is summarised in the figure below.

As partners, RAND and Ranmore will bring an extensive knowledge base of the university sector, the research funding landscape and cutting-edge research evaluation techniques to your university and REF preparations. The evaluations of the REF Impact Pilot stressed that universities must begin to prepare immediately for the 2014 REF. We hope that our analysis and advice package might be a helpful part of your preparation.

³ ‘Mapping the Impact: Exploring the Payback of Arthritis Research’, available at: <http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG862.html>.

Stages of REF analysis and advice package for higher education institutes



RAND Europe is an independent not-for-profit public policy research institute that helps to improve policy and decision making through research and analysis. The RAND Europe team has extensive experience of evaluating the impact of research and has worked across a range of sectors and disciplines, including the biomedical sciences, social sciences and humanities, international research evaluation practices, education and health systems. For more information, see www.rand.org/randeuropa or contact Jonathan Grant, President of RAND Europe at: jgrant@rand.org.

Ranmore Consulting Group specialises in facilitating strategic planning, leadership development and change activities in the higher education and other sectors. It brings firsthand experience of working with more than half of the HEIs in the UK. The Ranmore network includes those with expertise in strategic planning, developing research leadership, change management and coaching. For more information, see www.ranmore.co.uk or contact Tom Kenzie, Director of Ranmore at: tkennie@ranmore.co.uk.