REF 2014: THE RESULTS

Last year, the UK set out to assess the research conducted at its higher education institutes. Here, *International Innovation* evaluates the recently published results of that investigation, highlighting key facts about the academic institutions and individuals involved in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

**IN 2009, THE** Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) undertook a consultation to design a tool to evaluate the quality and impact of academic research in the UK and acknowledge the diverse and significant opportunities that it brings to society and the economy. Named the Research Excellence Framework (REF), this tool provides accountability for public investment in research and demonstrates the benefits of that investment.

For the last few years, over 52,000 researchers and academics from across the scientific and research landscape have been working tirelessly to see their work evaluated under this new Framework, which was brought in to replace the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise. Now, the fruits of their labour are ringing true with the release of the 2014 REF results.

**FANTASTIC FOUR**

At the end of last year, HEFCE, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland (DEL) jointly examined REF submissions and subsequently provided a robust and thorough analysis of all higher education subjects from the UK’s 154 universities.

Professor Madeleine Atkins, Chief Executive of HEFCE, explains the impact of REF, on behalf of REF’s four funding bodies: “The 2014 REF represents an outstanding achievement. Rigorous assessment of high-quality research is at the heart of the REF and the results confirm that UK universities are in the top rank of an internationally competitive research community. UK research has improved from an already strong position in the last exercise, with many universities delivering more groundbreaking work of the highest quality. Universities have also demonstrated how their excellent research has impacted positively on economic growth, health and social well-being, and improved quality of life. These achievements demonstrate the huge return on public investment in research.”

**THE RESULTS ARE IN**

REF evaluations were managed by a Framework team, a steering committee and a number of representatives from the four participating funding bodies. An expert panel reviewed and judged the submitted research, awarding a grade of either 4* (world-leading), 3* (internationally excellent), 2* (recognised internationally) and 1* (recognised nationally or unclassified).

After collating and reviewing the REF submissions, the results of REF were finally announced on 18 December 2014, providing evidence of the UK’s prominent position in the global research landscape. REF found that, overall, grade point average (GPA) has risen from 2.56 to 3.01 on a national level, a result which indicates a remarkable improvement in UK academic research since the RAE was conducted in 2008. It also showed an increase in the proportion of submissions scoring 4* from 17 to 30 per cent, suggesting that research excellence is certainly on the rise across the UK.

**REF REVIEW**

From the most research-intensive universities to a broader group of educational facilities, the Framework recognised and celebrated excellence in all forms of research – even in widely acclaimed interdisciplinary work. Collaboration between universities was a defining factor of the REF results, to which a number of educational bodies were praised for their collective outputs. For example, a concerted effort between the University of Edinburgh and Heriot-Watt University in mathematics led to a combined joint submission to the mathematical sciences research area.

The credibility of REF is also highlighted in its ability to review a diverse workforce, taking into consideration early stage researchers; those with years of expertise in their fields, including staff on maternity leave or working part-time; individuals with disabilities, injuries or mental health conditions; and those with caring responsibilities.

**REF’S REVERBERATING IMPACT**

The REF results will have a major impact on the UK research landscape by providing both leverage for public investment in research, as well as public information about the performance of universities. The four funding bodies will use the results generated by REF to effectively distribute research funding to academic institutions around the UK – £2 million has been dedicated for the 2015-16 period.

**COMPARING DATA: 2008 RAE AND 2014 REF**

![Comparison of 2008 RAE and 2014 REF results](chart.png)

**2008 RAE**

**2014 REF**

- World-leading
- Internationally excellent
- Internationally recognised
- Nationally recognised
- Below nationally recognised standard or outside scope
REF 2014: GPA* RANKING IN THE UK

*GPA – grade point average

LONDON

LSE 3.21
Imperial College 3.16
Kings College 3.05
University College 2.99
Birkbeck 2.88
Goldsmiths 2.80
Westminster 2.73
Brunel 2.62
London Met 2.57
West London 2.09

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