

REF 2021 Impact Case Study Guidance

Impact case studies that include confidential information

A REF2021 Impact Case Study (ICS) needs to follow a strict set of rules and regulations to be fit for submission. In some cases this might include confidential, commercially sensitive or security sensitive material, which can be submitted using a variety of redaction options. This guide aims to set out details of the options of how this might be achieved.

1. REF2021 Guidance

The main panels recognise that some evidence in case studies may be of a confidential or sensitive nature. The following arrangements are in place to enable institutions to submit case studies that include confidential information, with the agreement of the relevant organisation(s):

- a) All panel members, assessors, observers and the panel secretariat are bound by confidentiality arrangements. The current confidentiality and data security arrangements are included in the 'Panel criteria'. Panel members' obligations during the assessment phase will be expanded on, to include specific arrangements for their treatment of confidential or sensitive information in submissions. These expanded arrangements will be published in advance of the submission deadline (27th November 2020).
- b) Where there are main or sub-panel members or assessors who HEIs believe would have a conflict of interest in assessing specific case studies, HEIs can identify these when making submissions, and the case studies will not be made available to such individuals.
- c) When making submissions, HEIs can identify specific case studies that either should not be published at all due to their confidential nature, or that should be redacted prior to publication. HEIs will need to provide redacted versions suitable for publication by 29 January 2021. Submitted case studies

identified as 'not for publication' or the elements for 'redaction' will be destroyed by the REF team once no longer required for assessment purposes.

- d) To protect panel members from potentially inappropriate exposure to intellectual property, sub-panel chairs may identify specific panel members who should not have access to, or should have access only to the redacted versions of, specific case studies that include commercially sensitive information.

In addition to the general arrangements set out above, there may be specific instances where research has had impacts of a sensitive nature where the material to be included in a case study could only be made available for assessment to individuals with national security vetting clearance. This may relate to the underpinning research, the nature of the impact, or both. The following arrangements apply, to enable the submission of such specific cases:

- a) The submitting HEI must request advance permission from the REF director to submit such case studies, by providing outline information about the broad nature of the research and/or impact, the level of sensitivity of the intended material, and the level of clearance required of individuals to whom the full case study could be made available. There will be three staggered deadlines for requests in May, September and December 2019.
- b) Permission will be granted to submit such case studies where the REF director considers, having consulted the relevant panel chairs, that:
 - i. the confidentiality arrangements outlined in paragraph 0 above are insufficient to enable the institution to submit the case study in the normal way for assessment by the panel **and**
 - ii. it is practicable to identify existing panellists or appoint additional assessors who have the appropriate clearance and expertise, and do not have direct conflicts of interest, to assess the material.
- c) Where permission is granted, arrangements will be made for the HEI to make the case study available securely to the appropriate panel members/assessors. Only the outline information will be made available to the panel and no details about these case studies will be published.
- d) HEIs should allow sufficient time for such case studies to go through the relevant organisation's internal release processes.

2. Redaction Options

Level	Description	Internal processes	Evidence	REF2021 review by	Published?	Notes
Security Sensitive	Case study based on or containing security sensitive information	To be reviewed only by those with appropriate security clearance	Only appropriate evidence to be supplied and stored by those with security clearance only	Only by those with appropriate security clearance	Not for publication	Needs to be highlighted to the REF team through formal reporting process before July 2019

Level	Description	Internal processes	Evidence	REF2021 review by	Published?	Notes
Redaction (1)	Case study contains commercially sensitive information that cannot be published or reviewed by the whole REF2021 sub-panel	To be reviewed by UOA Impact leads only and marked as sensitive	Evidence to be directly transferred to Panel SharePoint by author and any sensitive documents highlighted to UOA impact leads	May identify specific panel members who should not have access to, or should have access only to the redacted versions	Not for publication	Author must give clear indication of who should not see the case study as soon as possible to ensure appropriate processes are put into place
Redaction (2)	Case study contains commercially sensitive information that cannot be published, but can be reviewed by REF2021 sub-panel members	To be reviewed by UOA Impact leads only and marked as sensitive	Evidence to be directly transferred to Panel SharePoint by author and any sensitive documents highlighted to UOA impact leads	All sub-panel members can review case study	Not for publication	Author must give clear indication of who should not see the case study as soon as possible to ensure appropriate processes are put into place
Partially Redacted (3)	Case study contains small amounts of sensitive data which cannot be viewed by REF2021 sub-panel members, but the whole case study can be published with redaction	Normal review processes take place with all staff members aware of sensitive sections	Evidence may be transferred onto Panel SharePoint by RA. Any sensitive documents should be clearly identified	May identify specific panel members who should not have access to, or should have access only to the redacted versions	Redacted version published	Redacted versions suitable for publication to be submitted by 29 January 2021
Partially Redacted (4)	Case study contains small amounts of sensitive data which can be	Normal review processes take place with all staff	Evidence may be transferred onto Panel SharePoint	All sub-panel members can review	Redacted version published	Redacted versions suitable for publication to be submitted by 29 January 2021

	viewed by REF2021 sub-panel members, but the whole case study can be published with redaction	members aware of sensitive sections	by RA. Any sensitive documents should be clearly identified	unredacted case study		
Standard Case study	Case study contains no commercially sensitive or potentially inappropriate intellectual property	Normal review processes take place	All case study information stored securely on Panel SharePoint	All sub-panel members can review unredacted case study	Full version published	All case studies must be reviewed by governance team for pseudonymisation and GDPR compliance