

Annex A: Assessment criteria and level definitions

1. This annex sets out the generic criteria for assessing submissions and the definitions of the starred levels in the overall quality profiles and each of the sub-profiles (for outputs, impact and environment).
2. Sub-panels will use their professional judgement to form the overall quality profile to be awarded to each submission, taking into account all the evidence presented. The primary outcome of the assessment will be an overall quality profile awarded to each submission, showing the proportion of the submission that meets each starred level in the profile.
3. The definitions of the starred levels in the overall quality profile are below.

Table A1: Overall quality profile: Definitions of starred levels

Four star	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Three star	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence.
Two star	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
One star	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Unclassified	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment.

4. For each of the three elements of the assessment – outputs, impact and environment – sub-panels will develop a sub-profile, showing the proportion of the submission that meets each of the four starred quality levels. The assessment criteria and the definitions of the starred levels for the sub-profiles are set out below.

Table A2: Outputs sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

The criteria for assessing the quality of outputs are 'originality, significance and rigour'	
Four star	Quality that is world-leading in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Three star	Quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour but which falls short of the highest standards of excellence.
Two star	Quality that is recognised internationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
One star	Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of originality, significance and rigour.
Unclassified	Quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognised work. Or work which does not meet the published definition of research for the purposes of this assessment.

Table A3: Impact sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

The criteria for assessing impacts are 'reach' and 'significance':	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In assessing the impact described within a case study, the panel will form an overall view about its 'reach and significance' taken as a whole, rather than assess 'reach and significance' separately. 	
Four star	Outstanding impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Three star	Very considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Two star	Considerable impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
One star	Recognised but modest impacts in terms of their reach and significance.
Unclassified	The impact is of little or no reach and significance; or the impact was not eligible; or the impact was not underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitted unit.

Table A4: Environment sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

The research environment will be assessed in terms of its 'vitality and sustainability'. Panels will consider both the 'vitality and sustainability' of the submitted unit, including its approach to enabling impact from its research, and its contribution to the 'vitality and sustainability' of the wider research base.	
Four star	An environment that is conducive to producing research of world-leading quality and enabling outstanding impact, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
Three star	An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally excellent quality and enabling very considerable impact, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
Two star	An environment that is conducive to producing research of internationally recognised quality and enabling considerable impact, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
One star	An environment that is conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality and enabling recognised but modest impact, in terms of its vitality and sustainability.
Unclassified	An environment that is not conducive to producing research of nationally recognised quality or enabling impact of reach and significance.

5. The 'Panel criteria' explains in more detail how the sub-panels will apply the assessment criteria and interpret the level definitions in developing the sub-profiles.

6. The method for combining the sub-profiles into the overall quality profile is explained in Annex B.

Notes on the criteria and definitions of the starred levels

7. 'World-leading' quality denotes an absolute standard of quality in each unit of assessment.

8. 'World-leading', 'internationally' and 'nationally' in this context refer to quality standards. They do not refer to the nature or geographical scope of particular subjects, nor to the locus of research nor its place of dissemination. For example, research which is focused within one part of the UK might be of 'world-leading' standard. Equally, work with an international focus might not be of 'world-leading, internationally excellent or internationally recognised' standard.

9. The criterion of 'reach' for impacts does not refer specifically to a geographic scale. Sub-panels will consider a number of dimensions to the 'reach' of impacts as appropriate to the nature of the research and its impacts. For example, an impact located within one region of the UK might be judged as 'outstanding' (graded as four star). Equally, an impact with international reach might not be judged as 'outstanding', 'very considerable' or 'considerable'.

10. The profile for a submission that contains no research which meets the one-star threshold will be 100 per cent unclassified. A submission that contains no research (that is, no work that meets the definition of research for the REF) will not be awarded a quality profile.