

# REF 2029

Research Excellence Framework

## Next steps on REF 2029

**Helen Cross**

Director of Research and Innovation, Scottish Funding Council  
and Deputy Chair of the REF 2029 Steering Group

10 December 2025



# What is the Research Excellence Framework?

REF 2021

- informs allocation of around £2bn of block-grant funding each year
- provides accountability for public investment in research
- continually evolves, alongside our research base
- drives behaviour and therefore is a significant policy instrument across the UK



# Principles and functions for this exercise:

## 1. REF should fulfil the following purposes:

- **Inform the allocation** of block-grant research funding to HEIs based on research quality
- Provide **accountability for public investment** in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment
- Provide **insight into the health of research** in HEIs in the UK.

## 2. REF should underpin:

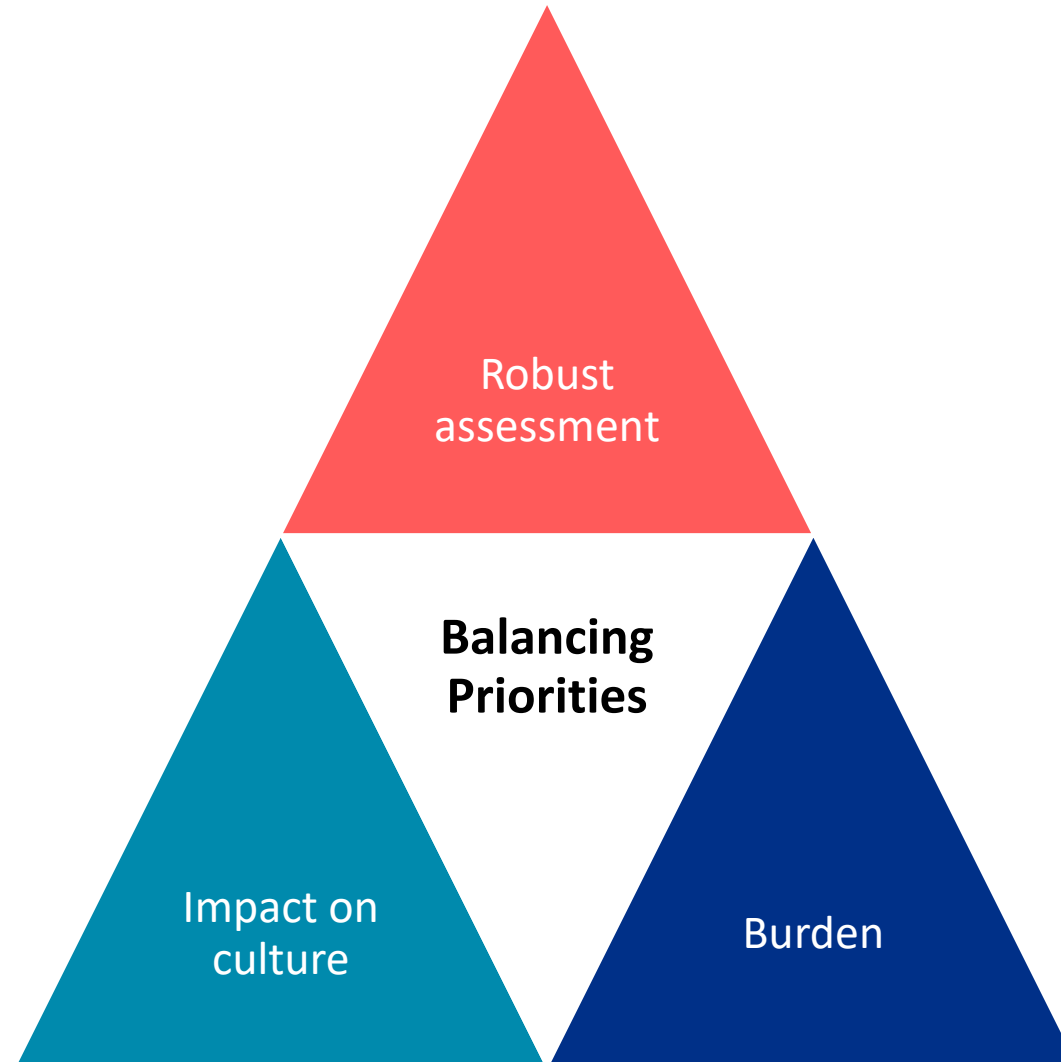
- A research system that produces **high-quality, rigorous** research that is **open** to all;
- An **inclusive and collaborative** research system that supports a diversity of people, ideas, institutions, methodologies, outputs, and activities; and
- An **engaged and impactful** research system that connects research with wider society to bring about positive socio-economic change.

## 3. REF decision making should be driven by:

- **Robustness** of assessment outcomes
- Impact of the system on **research culture**
- Ensuring that the **bureaucratic burden** of the system is proportionate.

From Initial Decisions published in June 2023.

# Developing the policy framework



# REF 2029 timeline

**Initial  
Decisions  
June 2023**

**Results:  
Dec 2029**



REF Team recruited  
PCE Pilot announced  
OA policy confirmed

Guidance published and 890 panel members appointed

Criteria setting  
Spring - Autumn 2026



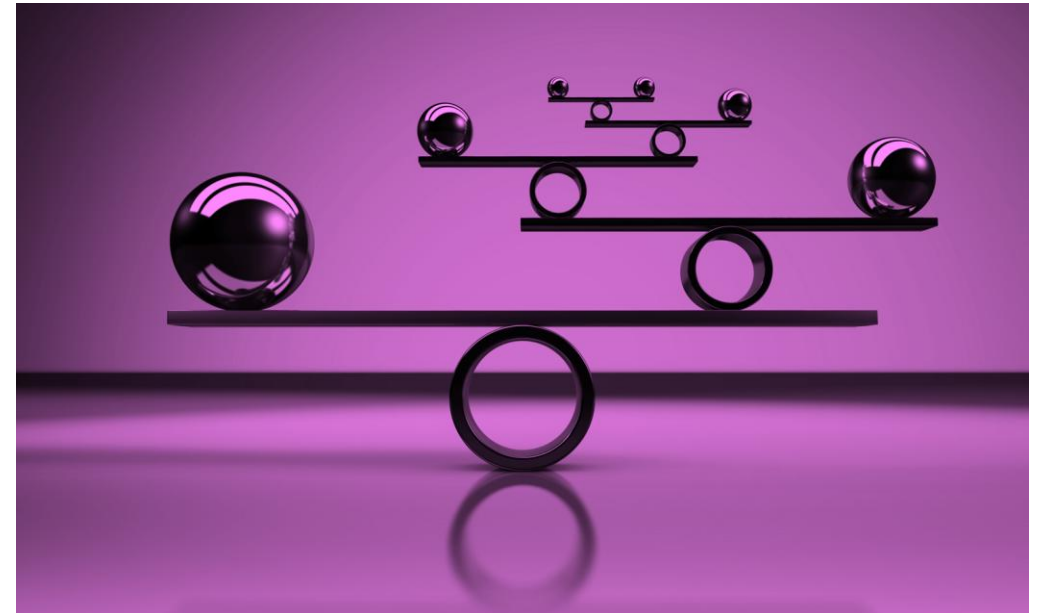
Submissions  
Autumn 2027 to Autumn 2028



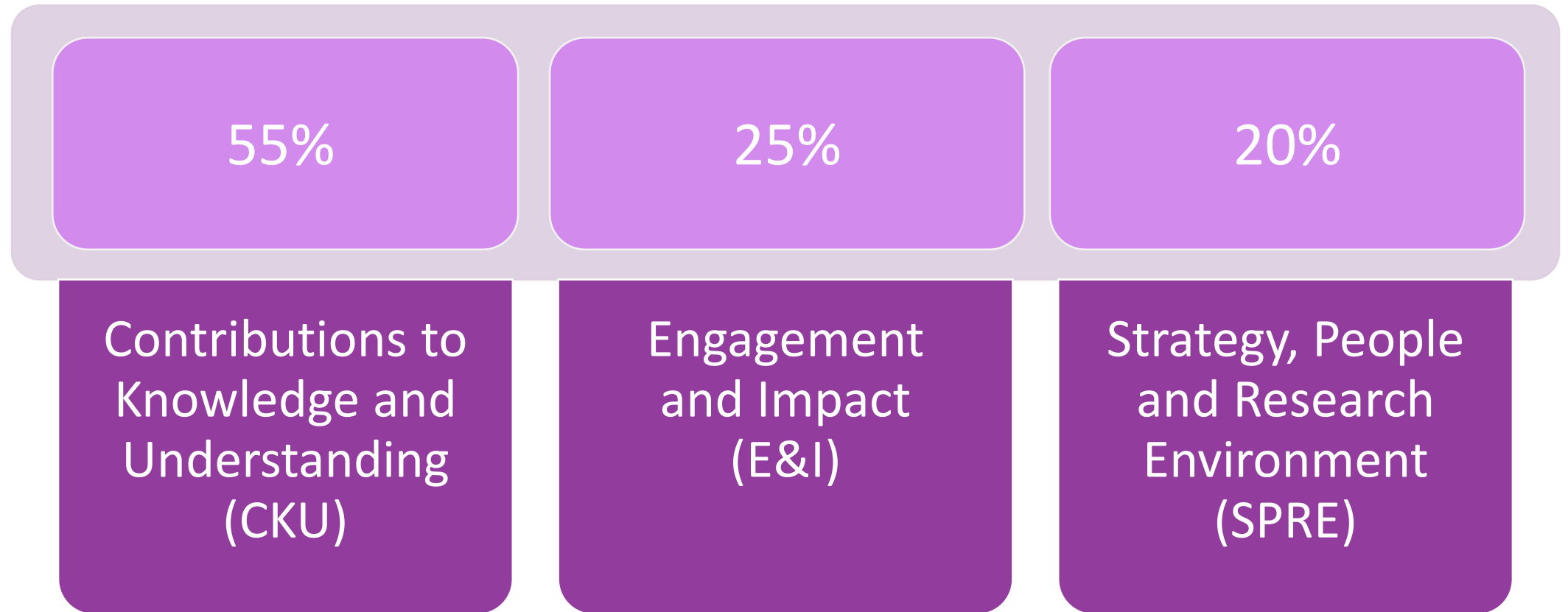
Assessment

# Published today

- Weightings confirmed
- Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) guidance
- Updates to Contributions to Knowledge and Understanding (CKU) guidance
- Engagement and Impact (E&I) guidance
- An updated timetable
- The People, Culture and Environment Pilot report



# Confirmed weightings for REF 2029



# Strategy, People and Research Environment



- Celebrates how research strategies enable the building of excellent cultures and research environments.
- Recognises the people who undertake, enable or support research, engagement and impact
- Encourages sustainable and ethical research practices
- Highlights strong, inclusive environments that enable people to conduct world-class research.

# Developing Strategy, People and Research Environment for REF 2029

Strategy, People and Research Environment

People, Culture and Environment Pilot

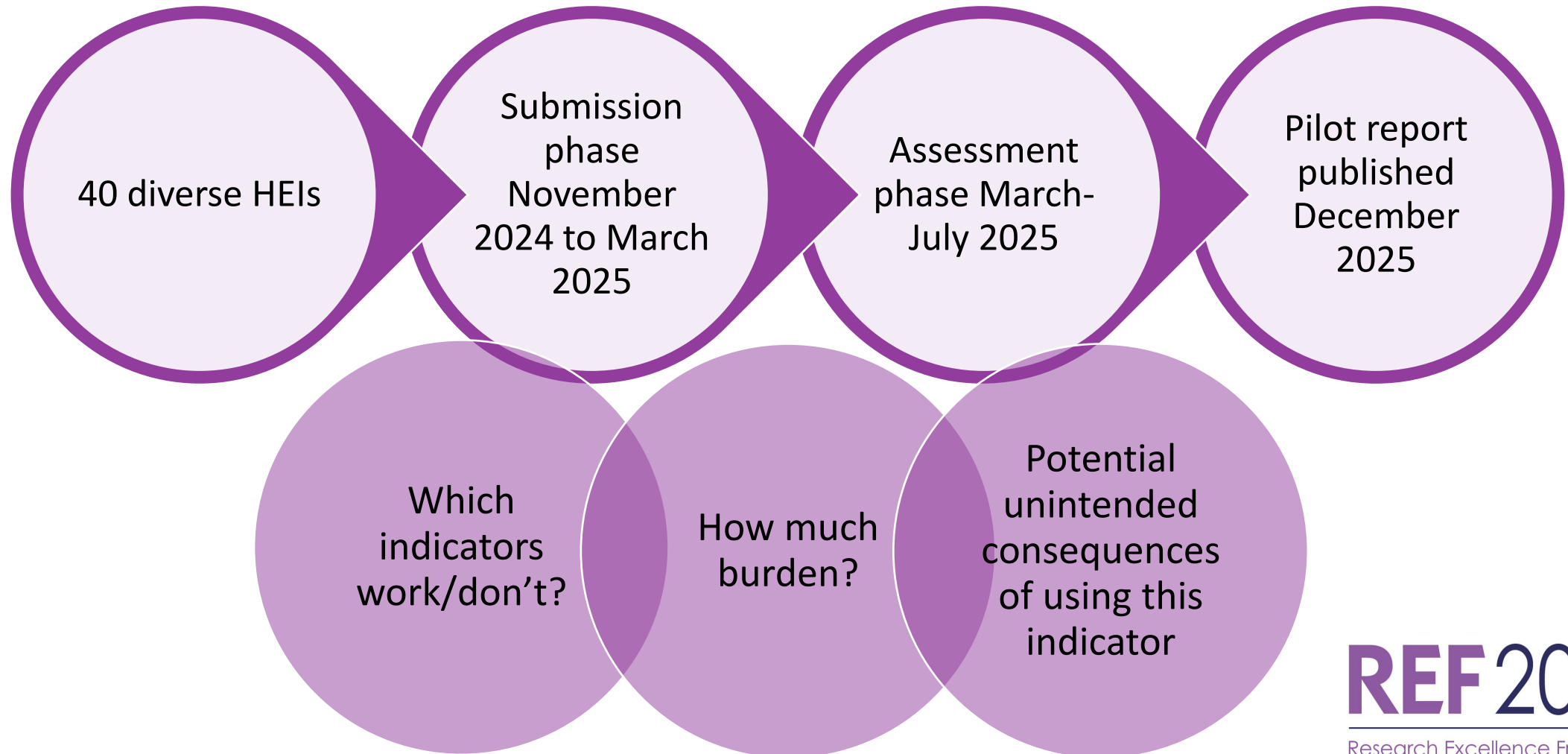
Indicators Project

Initial decisions

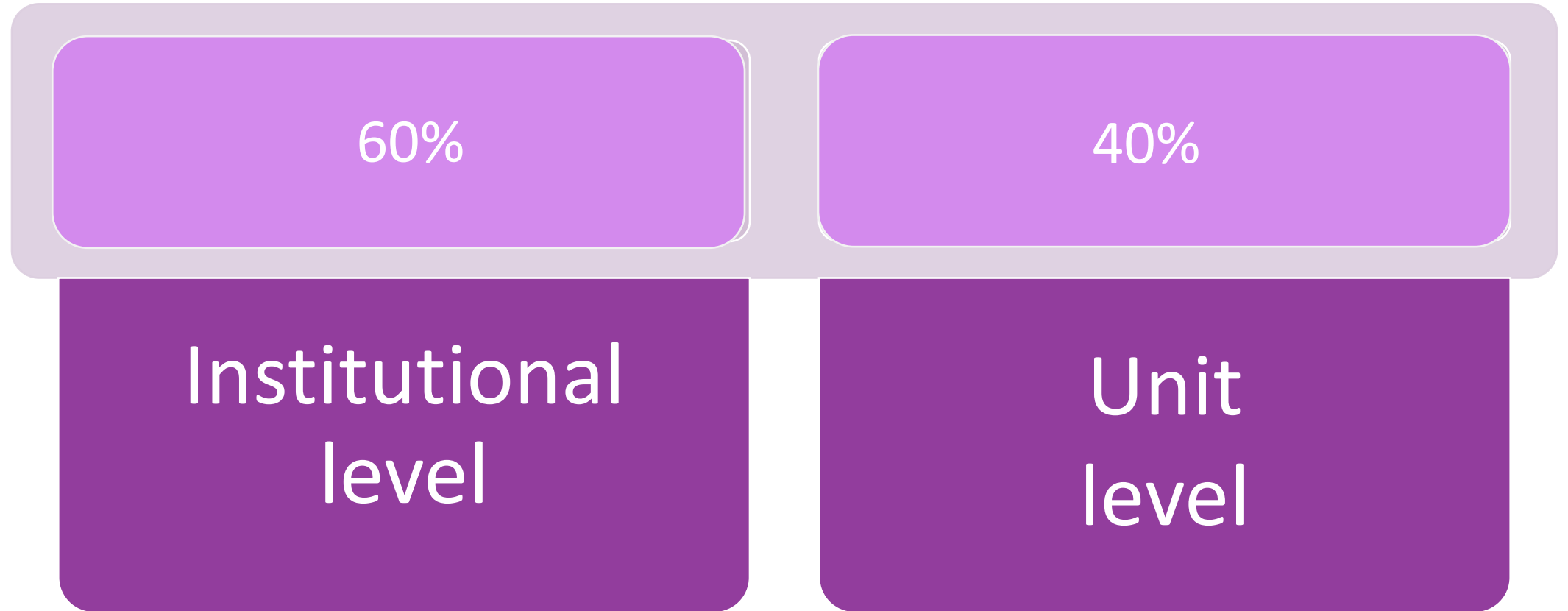
Future Research Assessment Programme

**REF 2029**  
Research Excellence Framework

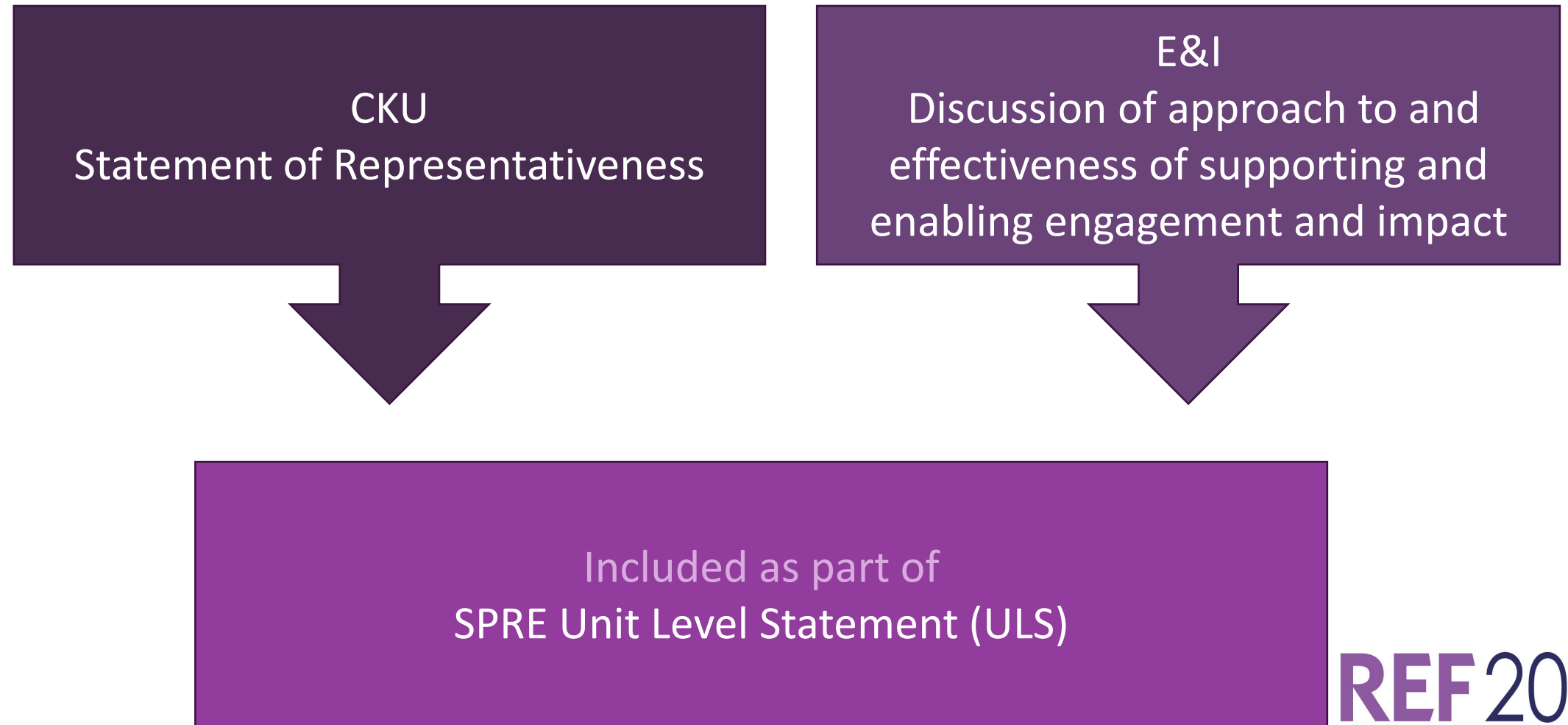
# People, Culture and Environment (PCE) - Pilot exercise



# SPRE weightings



# Disciplinary statements and representativeness








# Substantive link policy (Portability)



Limited portability introduced for longform/extended process research outputs for 5 years

# Engagement and Impact

-  Template and approach retained from REF 2021.
-  1 Minimum case studies reduced to one
-  2\* quality threshold removed.
-  Guidance encourages discussion of engagement strategies and responsible practices
-  Unit-level statements from 'Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding' (CKU) and 'Engagement and Impact (E&I)' removed

# Selective submissions

No multi-track  
approach

Exploring optional  
REF flexibility for  
smaller units

Full details to  
follow

# REF2029 next steps

**2025**

**Winter**

Weightings confirmed.  
PCE Pilot Report published.  
Strategy, People and Research Environment guidance published.  
Engagement and Impact guidance published.  
Updates to Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding guidance.

**2026**

**Spring**

Expert panels meet to develop guidance.

**Autumn**

Final full guidance is set.

**Winter**

Special requests open.  
Publication of SG papers.

**2027**

**Spring**

Survey of submission intentions opens.

**Summer**

Submission intentions and special requests close.

**Autumn**

Submission window opens.  
Additional panel recruitment.

**2028**

**Autumn**

Submission deadline.  
Assessment phase begins.

**2029**

Results published (planned for December 2029).

Criteria setting



Submissions



Assessment

# Thank you and stay in touch

- Use QR code to sign up for **REF updates** straight to your inbox.
- Please visit **get involved** on our website to view current opportunities.
- Email us at **info@ref.ac.uk** if you have any suggestions about how we can improve our guidance for you.



@ref2029.bsky.social



Research Excellence Framework



**REF 2029**

Research Excellence Framework