



Altmetrics and the REF: how altmetrics can be used in your REF 2021 preparation

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Following the final consultation on the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in mid October 2018, UK higher education institutions (HEIs) are now ramping up preparations for REF 2021 – with the deadline for submissions rapidly approaching in November 2020. In this article we will look back at REF 2014 and provide a view on how altmetrics could have assisted in REF 2014 submission preparations and how they can support the preparations for REF 2021. We will also look in more detail at how the Altmetric Explorer can be used to find relevant input for your submission.

Impact: reach and significance beyond academia

Impact was introduced for the first time in REF 2014 and its definitions (reach and significance beyond academic impact) were previously uncharted territory in the UK research evaluation landscape. Many HEIs found it difficult to bridge the gap between underpinning research and the narrative case for their impact. Gathering evidence of impact is of crucial importance, so any assistance in compiling evidence for case studies that minimise time and effort will be vital.

Would altmetrics have helped in preparing for the REF 2014 submission?

The endpoint of the research lifecycle has more to offer than just citations. Citations as a means of publication-to-publication

relationship are well captured, understood and a matter of research in themselves, which brings to light differences of scope and even definition; what is a citation, and are their differences in quality? Altmetrics haven't been around that long, so there is no long-term analysis showcasing their value. Unsurprisingly, with the breadth and variety of underpinning sources, altmetrics offer a new and innovative look into a much broader picture of the impact of a research output, fulfilling the aim of the impact agenda by demonstrating influence beyond traditional metrics.

Many sources that Altmetric tracks, in particular policy documents and patent citations, were added after REF 2014. At the time of the last REF exercise, the Altmetric Explorer for Institutions, with crucial functionality such as HR/CRIS



system synchronisation and reporting facilities, was not available. Also, in subsequent years we have added additional functionality to the Altmetric Explorer which allows for better evaluation and reporting such as Field of Research (FOR) categorization of outputs; analysis by institution for benchmarking, and filters for Open Access and Funders. For REF 2021, the capabilities of Altmetric Explorer for Institutions makes the task of identifying potential impact beyond academic credentials much easier to carry out. Altmetric can be used to gather evidence to underpin the impact and add to the narrative, which will be beneficial to institutions, particularly in the light of the revised and updated guidance on the next REF which introduced additionality in the context of impact assessment.

Additionality and altmetrics

New on the horizon for the Impact element in REF 2021 is the aspect of additionality, i.e. the potential 'recycling' of previous impact case studies in terms of new, additional impact according to the definitions set out in Research England's working methods and guidance. Additionality of impact can and will form part of the forthcoming REF exercise.

How can Altmetric help in cases that may qualify for recycling in the event of additionality? REF 2014 impact case studies can be re-analysed to determine attention and engagement gathered since the last round of REF, whether they are in the form of news coverage, blogs, policy documents or patent citations. Searching for Altmetric mentions using a case study's DOI (or indeed set of DOIs) and superimposing the results onto the same search carried out at the time of REF 2014 gives an indication of the altmetrics gathered since the last REF exercise.

Qualitative aspects of altmetrics

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Looking at an individual researcher's publication(s) and analysing the portfolio with the Altmetrics Explorer yields interesting insights that may help impact coordinators and administrators to narrow down or pinpoint new leads with

respect to additionality. This is one way to gain an emerging picture of impact beyond academic citations.

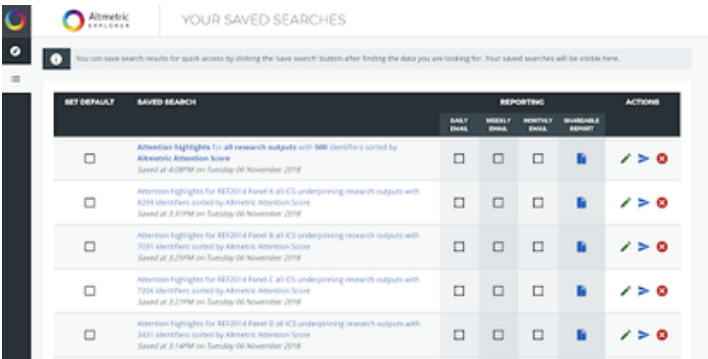
Mentions and citations later in the life cycle of a scholarly output may lead to an investigation into why a paper published years ago now features in the news. Is it because of a patent or policy document? Why is a movie clip citing the DOI now? These questions can be answered with the Altmetric Explorer to find leads and track down further evidence to underpin impact case studies.

Here’s what Explorer for Institutions can do for you:

The Explorer for Institutions is an intuitive platform that enables you to monitor the online activity surrounding academic research. Browse by author, group or department for your own institution, benchmark against peer organisations, report on the outcomes of outreach activity, and integrate the insights the data provides into evaluation and review processes.

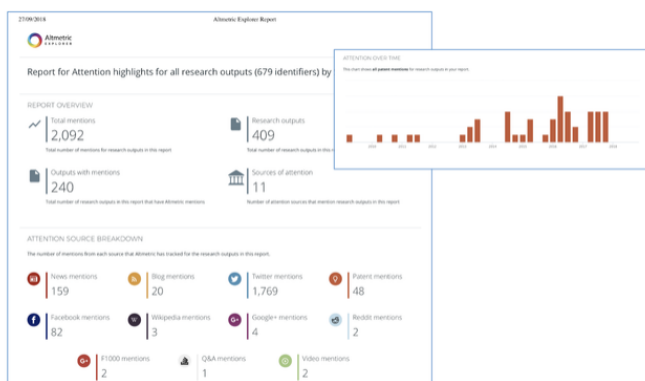
- Saving time: aggregating data from different sources takes a lot of time, sometimes weeks. A DOI, or lists of DOIs, for each individual researcher,

UoA, organisational unit or any other grouping that you can think of can be saved conveniently in one place, and revisited any time, giving up-to-date results.



- Flexible reporting and analysis: dashboards, visuals and bespoke reports can be shared easily in a range of formats. Reports and visuals can be gathered at any time. It is easy to perform a quick scan of the mentions for a selection of outputs. Perhaps you can identify leads to some future impact case studies there. Looking at your entire institutional or UoA scholarly output, you may find figures and statistics that could support your institutional or UoA environment statement.





Will Altmetric data and tools help you prepare for REF2021?

Altmetric data and tools can help you efficiently answer questions around the impact aspect of an institution's REF preparations:

- Better understanding and comparison: an instant institutional view of altmetrics can inform the Environment statement. With the Altmetric Explorer for Institutions you can enhance your understanding not only of a discipline within your own institution, but also that of other institutions. For example, if you want to check an institution's 'climate change' footprint on social media or policy documentation, the institutional Explorer allows you to do that.
- A way to get into contact with academics: many academics do not know where to find out about alternative metrics, or think that they are irrelevant in academia. Talking to academics in the context of REF, and in particular Impact, is a challenging task. Pointing researchers to the variety of methods of engagement with their research outputs is a useful way to start a conversation with them.
- Quickly find research that is worth pursuing around impact based on various sources (from mention to research), especially in cases where the research output hasn't specifically come up or been mentioned in the context of impact. Analysing the entire corpus of an institution (or a sub-organisational part of it, or an artificial grouping such as a UoA) to potentially find research in your institution or UoA that hasn't made its way to the REF offices and administrators yet.
- Use the Altmetric Explorer to find potential new leads (from research to mention) based on existing research brought forward in the analytical set of the Explorer. This can assist in the additionality aspect of old REF 2014 Impact case studies in particular.

Altmetric tools could prove a very valuable, efficient and time-saving tool to help gather evidence, point the way

towards areas not thought about yet, and provide leads for new angles of investigation in the write up of Impact case studies in the run up to the REF 2021 submission.

Our custom reports

Our consultancy team can provide custom reports that deliver data and detailed insight into your institution's performance that will help you form your submission for REF2021 and maximise your outcomes.

From helping you discover and identify quality research outputs and their context, gather impact corroboration and evidence, and inform your submission strategy, we offer in-depth insights on outputs (including Open Access compliance where necessary), impact and environment.

For more information on how altmetrics and the Explorer for Institutions can help you prepare, email ben@altmetric.com

