

GuildHE Press Release

11 May 2022



EMBARGOED UNTIL: 00:01 12th May 2022

World-leading research and exceptional environments for researchers at the UK's smaller and specialist universities in evidence in REF 2021

95% of GuildHE institutions submitted world-leading research to the REF, a remarkable achievement and testimony to the excellence of the sector in key research areas.

GuildHE [1] congratulates our member institutions on their success in REF 2021. The results demonstrate the excellence of research in smaller and specialist institutions, and reinforce the value of supporting that research, wherever it is found. It is an exciting picture of research thriving up and down the UK, delivered by institutions of every type and scale.

GuildHE members represent institutions with a unique experience of the exercise, supported through a dedicated research consortium, GuildHE Research[2], since 2010.

Amongst these institutions there are a number entering the exercise for the first time, having achieved university status as recently as 2018. Their results demonstrate their appetite to develop effective, robust research cultures and their ability to produce quality research with impact in a short time frame[3]. The results represent significant institutional investments in infrastructure and individuals, and are highly impressive from a 'standing start'. Research at these institutions will only be enhanced by access to core funding for these activities and we celebrate their achievements.

A substantial number of members submit to one or just a handful of subject areas of research specialism. The results demonstrate the capacity for these specialist institutions to be at the cutting edge of research in these domains and an ability to generate significant impact. The success of these activities are evidently facilitated by high quality, considered, and robust research environments[4]. There are potential lessons for all institutions in their success in creating world leading research environments and generating impact with targeted and creative deployment of public funds.

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Many of our member institutions continue to grow at a significant rate, achieving key milestones such as Research Degree Awarding Powers between exercises, and springboarding off a successful submission in 2014. They have achieved substantial change in the scale and intensity of their research environments since the last exercise and significant improvements in the quality profile of their research[5]. It will now be imperative for this group to be supported, not only through targeted funding, but also through equitable access to competitive grants, collaborations, and doctoral training partnerships that can build on and extend the excellent research and impact they can clearly achieve.

Professor Anthony McClaran, Vice-Chancellor, St Mary's University Twickenham, and Chair of GuildHE, said: "Excellence, quality, impact and sound research cultures can be developed successfully in a variety of settings, whether they be specialist, teaching intensive, or recent additions to the RDI landscape. This has been achieved with modest investments resourcefully applied. As the sector looks towards future assessments with a new design, there is potential to make even more of the ambitions and abilities of the full diversity of institutions, whatever their location, focus, research intensity, or scale."

Professor John Strachan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of Research & Enterprise, Bath Spa University and Director of GuildHE Research, said: "It is very satisfying to see a significant number of newer institutions represented and recognised in REF2021. It is also very good to note strong and continuing growth in established GuildHE research-active institutions. The UK research infrastructure is rich and diverse and here we see evidence of the strong contribution of small and specialist providers. It is vital that the sector embraces the diversity of approaches to research that is now represented by the REF results".

For further information:

For media queries to GuildHE please email press@guildhe.ac.uk.

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Notes to Editors

1. **GuildHE** is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art,

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design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; the built environment; education; maritime; health and sports. They have teaching staff that are often industry professionals and are close to the industries they serve.

2. **GuildHE Research**, a sub-association of GuildHE, is the research consortium for smaller and specialist higher education institutions. We engage the full diversity of our institutions, people, and places in research and innovation, and advocate for the recognition and support of excellent research wherever it is found. We help our members to embed a positive and constructive research culture, develop robust research and innovation strategies, and establish appropriate infrastructure through which they can drive forward their ambitions.
3. For example; in Allied Health Professions, **University College of Osteopathy** is the only specialist osteopathic institution submitting to the REF, achieving a rating of world-leading in 22% of outputs; **Hartpury University** have achieved 50% internationally excellent impact from its Sport and Exercise submission; and in social work and social policy **University of Suffolk** have been rated 67% world-leading and internationally excellent for outputs, and 100% internationally excellent in impact.
4. For example: in Art and Design, **Falmouth University** have achieved a rating of world-leading or internationally excellent for 100% of their impact and 63% for their outputs; in Performing Arts **Royal Central School of Speech and Drama** have demonstrated an environment for research which wholly (rated 100% 4*) supports world-leading quality and enables outstanding impact, and 83% of impact from research has been shown to be outstanding; in Agriculture **Royal Agricultural University** achieved a rating of world-leading for 50% of its impact submission, and 45% of outputs were rated internationally excellent; in Education **University of St Mark and St John** have submitted impact case studies for assessment for the first time, achieving 100% at an internationally excellent rating.
5. Changes in the structure of the exercise make it challenging to compare submissions from 2014 and 2021. That said, for small and specialist institutions the change between REF cycles is significant in proportion to the scale of their operation. Improvements in quality are evidenced in the submissions. For example: **Newman University** has doubled its overall rating of world leading research and seen 94% of submissions in English rated 3* or 4*; at **Bath Spa University** the amount of research achieving the highest status of 'world-leading' has increased by 60%; **Solent University** has doubled the proportion of 3* and 4* research to 34%.