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# Analysis of REF2021 Impact Case Studies for the SHAPE disciplines

## Invitation to Tender

### *Rationale*

The publication of REF2021 results marks an important moment for institutions and researchers, as this constitutes the principal mode of research assessment in the UK, and one that only occurs every few years. This presents an opportunity for the research community to take stock of what has happened over recent years, and to recognise the achievements and successes of research across the UK. The impact case studies submitted to REF2021 offer a rich, qualitative dataset that has real potential to illustrate this.

The British Academy is the UK's National Academy for the Humanities and Social Sciences and a key advocate for the SHAPE disciplines (Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts for People and Society). The Academy is aiming to “tell the story” of research impact across the SHAPE disciplines through REF2021, using the case study dataset as a window in the first instance to the rich and diverse impact across sectors, places and people that our disciplines provide.

For this research commission, the British Academy is working in association with the Academy of Social Sciences. The Academy of Social Sciences is a national academy of academics, practitioners and learned societies in social science. Both organisations are aiming to coordinate and complement other analytical activities going on in the sector. The research to be commissioned here will provide a solid evidence base on which the British Academy and the Academy of Social Sciences, as well as others, can build upon to articulate the value of research in these disciplines, with respect to the impact that they have on UK society, and around the world. To this end, the commissioned research is expected to use the REF case study database as a starting point and as a resource which provides the most coherent evidence base that is widely available, but it must not result in a set of findings which only sees impact through this lens.

### *Research questions*

The overarching research question for this project is: *What are the stories, successes and cumulative effects on people, the economy, policy and society of the impact of research in the SHAPE disciplines as demonstrated by the REF 2021 impact case study data?* This immediately leads to the most important element for this study which is a deeply evidence-based and creative analysis of the characteristics, typologies and diverse understandings of what impact in the SHAPE disciplines looks like, and why. What are the macro and micro-level characteristics of impact in the SHAPE disciplines? For example, to what extent is the reach of impact local, national, or international across SHAPE? Is the significance greater in some sectors or types of impact than in others? Other characteristics might include stakeholders/end users, interaction with industry across different sectors, influence on public policy, etc. We will be looking specifically in the tender responses for initial ideas about what characteristics might be feasible to identify, and how we can use this as a solid foundation for future analyses of impact in our disciplines.

Secondary research questions that we are interested in and will help to focus the work requested in this tender are:

- *What are the ways in which SHAPE research impact can be analysed to tell the ‘big picture’ stories across multiple case studies and disciplines, as well as the ‘micro-level’ stories that might be at individual levels or across thematic/grand challenge areas? We will be looking for the successful tenderer to come up with a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods and approaches to answer this question, in particular helping us to build up a sense of where proxy measures and sector-level data might be able to be developed for certain kinds of impact.*
- *How does SHAPE research impact relate to “grand challenges” facing the economy and society, locally, nationally and internationally? We will be looking for the successful tenderer to identify and propose innovative ways to map this, including diverse approaches across different kinds of grand challenges.*
- *How inter- and multi-disciplinary is research impact across the SHAPE disciplines? Can the case studies give us an insight into the multidisciplinary nature of SHAPE disciplines supporting impact within their respective main and sub-panels? How do SHAPE disciplines support impact in Main Panels A and B and vice versa? What can we learn from this?*
- *How diverse is the impact across the SHAPE disciplines? Are there clusters of impact in particular areas, and can we determine anything about the nature of that impact and the type of insights SHAPE disciplines lead to from that clustering?*
- *What has been the influence of the British Academy as a research funder in terms of impact?*

These questions should be seen as helpful to prospective tenderers to gain a sense of our thinking and ambitions, but are not intended to be exhaustive, nor prescriptive. However, it is critical that the tenderers understand that though we expect the REF impact case study database to be the most useful and comprehensive dataset available for this piece of work, we are not ourselves constrained by this and would like this research to provide a wider foundation on which we can build.

Finally, as noted in the rationale, for this commission we are also working in association with the Academy of Social Sciences. We therefore will also require all the data and analysis to be broken down by the two sectors (arts and humanities, and social sciences), and, where possible, by discipline so as to enable more granular analysis in due course by different disciplinary sub-groupings.

### *Programme of work*

One logical way to approach this piece of work would be through advanced text analysis methods. But this tender is not prescriptive about the methods that should be used, and we welcome different methodological approaches in any submissions including detailed qualitative as well as creative quantitative approaches.

We are most interested in the rigour of the approach and the detail with which it can respond to the questions listed above. The British Academy and the Academy of Social Sciences are able to provide a list of UOAs that corresponds to our definition of SHAPE disciplines, and within that additional sub-disciplinary groupings, such as the social sciences, the humanities or the arts.

In relation to the final research question above, we can also provide a list of those case studies where the British Academy is mentioned as a funder. However, further work would be required to clean this list and also establish a tiering of case studies where the British Academy is a primary/secondary funder or involved in other ways.

Our preference is for a piece of work that can respond to all of the questions listed above. We understand that proposals may not be able to address all of our research questions, but we encourage tenderers to indicate the trade-offs in exploring some questions over others. It is most critical that we are able to build on this work in the longer term to allow us to add depth of understanding to the impact and benefits of the SHAPE disciplines in a range of areas.

We expect outcomes from this project to include as a minimum a written report, suitable for publication on the British Academy's and the Academy of Social Sciences' website, including data visualisations as appropriate. We will require peer review as part of this process. We will also require a more internally focused report and database-type output which clearly indicates for us how case studies were tagged and identified according to different types of impact so that we can build this up with other areas and evidence of impact over time.

We anticipate that the commissioned team will consult and work closely with staff at the British Academy and Academy of Social Sciences throughout the project, and provide at least one interim report as well as regular oral updates through meetings. A small steering group comprised of British Academy and Academy of Social Sciences staff, Fellows and other stakeholders as deemed appropriate will be set up to help oversee this work and the project team will be required to present to this group at least three times: in a kick-off meeting, at an interim report, and at final report stage.

We expect to notify the successful tenderer by Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> December 2022, and work should commence as soon as possible thereafter in early 2023. An initial kick-off meeting to agree the approach should be held in the week commencing 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at the latest, and an interim project meeting with an interim report update should be delivered by Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March. A final draft report should be submitted by Friday 30<sup>th</sup> June, with the final report due on 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023. An expected timetable is set out below.

01/11/2022	Tender is released
12/12/2022	Tenders due by 10.00am
23/12/2022	Successful tender is notified
w/c 16/01/2023	Kick off meeting
w/c 20/03/2023	Interim report due

17/05/2023	Opportunity to present to the Academy of Social Sciences Council for early testing of findings and/or analysis
24/05/2023	Opportunity to present to the British Academy's Research and Higher Education Policy Committee for early testing of findings and/or analysis
30/06/2023	Draft final report due
July 2023	Report is reviewed by the joint Steering Group and then recommended for review to the British Academy's Research and Higher Education Policy Committee, as well as the Academy of Social Sciences' Trustees
01/08/2023	Comments from review stage received by report team and incorporated as appropriate
01/09/2023	Final report due

Depending on the methods proposed and questions addressed, we expect to receive bids across a range of values, but no bid should exceed £145,000, excluding VAT. We encourage submissions at any level if they demonstrate value for money and meet the proposal assessment criteria. The terms of payment will be 50% payable on commission, including delivery of an initial inception report, 30% on acceptance of interim findings and report, 20% on acceptance of the final report.

### *Proposal assessment criteria*

- The strength, rigour, creativity and quality of the proposed approach and methodology to answering the research question(s)
- The expertise of the researcher / research team in the subject area
- The experience of the researcher / research team in conducting studies using similar research methodologies and the track record in delivery
- The demonstrated value for money.

### *Response to this brief*

The British Academy is administering the contract. Please submit your response to this brief by **10.00am on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022** to [c.mckenzie@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:c.mckenzie@thebritishacademy.ac.uk). Your response should be no more than 3000 words (excluding CVs of the researcher / research team), and include:

- Your approach to undertaking this work, including justification of methodology and question(s) addressed.
- Details of the data sources, communities and networks which you propose to access in order to complete the work.
- Anticipated outputs from the work, including a final report and associated dissemination material.
- Any risks or difficulties that you foresee with this project, and any steps that might be taken to mitigate them.
- Relevant experience that you have to undertake this work.
- Your proposed timescales to undertake this work, including proposed number of days allocated.
- Break-down of estimated costs.

CVs of all individuals making a significant contribution to the commission should be provided alongside this document.

For further information, queries, or to express an intention to apply, email [c.mckenzie@thebritishacademy.ac.uk](mailto:c.mckenzie@thebritishacademy.ac.uk)