

REF2021 Outputs sub-profile: Criteria and definitions of starred levels

[REF2021 Guidance on submissions](#) (page 84)

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.

Notes on the criteria and definitions of the starred levels

- ‘World-leading’ quality denotes an absolute standard of quality in each unit of assessment.
- ‘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.

REF2021 Outputs criteria and level definitions

[REF2021 Panel criteria and working methods](#) (page 34)

Originality will be understood as the extent to which the outputs makes an important and innovative contribution to understanding and knowledge in the field. Research outputs that demonstrate originality may do one or more of the following: produce and interpret new empirical findings or new material; engage with new and/or complex problems; develop innovative research methods; methodologies and analytical techniques; show imaginative and creative scope; provide new arguments and/or new forms of expression; formal innovations; interpretations and/or insights; collect and engage with novel types of data; and/or advance theory or the analysis of doctrine, policy or practice; and new forms of expression.

Significance will be understood as the extent to which the work has influenced, or has the capacity to influence, knowledge and scholarly thought, or the development and understanding of policy and/or practice.

Rigour will be understood as the extent to which the work demonstrates intellectual coherence and integrity, and adopts robust and appropriate concepts, analyses, sources, theories and/or methodologies.