

How to Review a CS Paper for REF

Steve Furber & Chris Taylor, 26 June 2015

General

In the REF papers are scored for originality, significance and rigour.

Good papers characteristically explain the context of the research in a way that is intelligible to anyone in CS. If the work is important the paper should say so, to as wide an audience as possible, but without hype.

Only new research contributions are evaluated; papers that build on earlier work are evaluated on the basis of added value – this is especially an issue where the earlier work was submitted to an earlier RAE/REF. Review papers are therefore generally scored low unless a good case is made that they add value by integrating the earlier work in some innovative way.

Originality

Does the paper say something new, important and interesting?

What is the contribution to knowledge?

Significance

Does anyone care about what the paper contributes to knowledge?

Citation data may (or may not) contribute to the evidence here, as may the 100 words – best paper prize, use by industry, etc.

Rigour

Rigour is about methodology, and should be taken in the context of the paper. Thus a formal methods paper may score well for mathematical rigour whereas a human factors paper may score well for sound experimental methodology.

Citation data

Citation data is difficult to interpret and is generally unavailable for papers published towards the end of the REF period anyway. A paper with good citations for its area may get nudged up a notch on significance. A paper which claims “influential” or similar in its 100 words but has few citations may get nudged down!

What makes a 4* paper?

It is very difficult to define the 3*/4* boundary, but as a guideline, a substantial paper in a high-quality journal would normally be 3*. For 4* there must be something singular that causes the paper to rise above most other papers in this category.

In practice boundaries are defined relative to all submissions across the UoA, so there is no static definition.