

Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework

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I. Respondent details

Responses to this consultation are invited from any organisation, group or individual with an interest in research or research assessment. We will publish an analysis of the consultation responses. We may publish individual responses to the consultation in the summary. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the relevant Freedom of Information Acts across the UK. Responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. Please note that each question has a limit of 500 words.

Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of

- As an individual
- Higher education institution
- Subject association or learned society
- Representative body
- Department or research group
- Business
- Charity
- Public sector organisation
- X Other

Please provide the name of your organisation

The Academy of Social Sciences. The Academy of Social Sciences is the national academy of academics, learned societies and practitioners in the social sciences. Its mission is to promote social science in the United Kingdom for the public benefit.

The Academy is composed of around 1100 individual Fellows, 42 Learned Societies, and a number of affiliates, together representing nearly 90,000 social scientists.

2. Overall approach

1. Do you have any comments on the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 23?

We agree this is important, but this needs to be set out in a clear context: REF is a mechanism for providing accountability for publicly-funded research, and to provide appropriate institutional incentives for enabling high-quality research and research-based impact. This provides a framework for judging the likely empirical impact of some of the changes proposed, and assessing whether or not the likely improvements may bring unintended consequences. We suggest some of these changes will require piloting or the development of further guidelines which bear in mind behavioural responses to changed rules.

3. Unit of assessment structure

2. What comments do you have about the Unit of Assessment structure in REF 2021?

While largely correct, we know that some social science learned societies will have comments, with Geography (itself generating much interdisciplinary research) being an example.

4. Expert panels

3a. Do you agree that the submissions guidance and panel criteria should be developed simultaneously?

- Yes
 No

Comments:

Yes, but this will require full engagement of Main Panel members in developing appropriate submission criteria, and we are concerned about having only one sub-panel representative in developing the guidance. (see 3b below). One proposal might be to include Sub-panel deputy chairs; another might be to involve Chairs or Deputy Chairs from REF 2014 subpanels.

3b. Do you support the later appointment of sub-panel members, near to the start of the assessment year?

- Yes
 No

Comments:

We think that appointment in 2020 is too late. Given the need for calibration (especially in

the light of some of the planned changes) and possible input into main panel guidance, we can see the case for a somewhat later appointment of sub-panel members but are concerned that 'near to the start of the assessment year' is too late.

4. Do you agree with the proposed measures outlined at paragraph 35 for improving representativeness on the panels?

Yes

No

Comments:

While we think these are a useful starting point, we believe that there need to be further discussion and practical steps to improve equality and diversity. We note that this applies not only to demographic characteristics, but the need to ensure representativeness of institutions and newly-developing research fields.

One issue is whether there should be a limit to the number of times particular individuals can serve on or chair panels or sub-panels.

5a. Based on the options described at paragraphs 36 to 38, what approach do you think should be taken to nominating panel members?

5b. Do you agree with the proposal to require nominating bodies to provide equality and diversity information?

Yes

No

Comments:

While we accept that this may entail extra work or costs, we think the issue is important enough to warrant it. Nominating bodies should be required to provide an account of the criteria they used in making nominations, and whether this included equality and diversity considerations.

5. Staff

7. Do you have any comments on the proposal to use HESA cost centres to map research-active staff to UOAs and are there any alternative approaches that should be considered?

We are strongly opposed to this proposal. We will not be alone in pointing out that the HESA cost centres were designed to allocate teaching grants, and do not map well onto research and publications. (For example, consider social scientists working in medical schools). This proposal would not reflect accurately research profiles and publications, and would damage interdisciplinary research and interdisciplinary teaching.

In the short term we support the previous practice by which institutions assigned staff to UoAs as appropriate. In the medium term, we suggest that HEFCE, HESA and institutions work to develop HESA fields relevant to the research field or UoA, which could be updated in annual HESA returns. This would give some underlying 'reality check' to the planned submissions, while allowing flexibility as researchers changed research fields or UoAs evolve. Annual changes larger than some percentage of the average over a number of years could then trigger discussion.

8. What comments do you have on the proposed definition of 'research-active' staff described in paragraph 43?

We note the recent statement by David Sweeney about the definition of 'research active staff'. This is relevant to the issue of defining research 'assistants' who are independently research active as well as the issue of 100% submission.

We would certainly have questioned the proposal to use existing HESA fields to establish the number of research active staff. One reason would have been differences in policies on staff contracts, and another would have been the difficulty of defining independent research activity for the heterogeneous category of research assistants, where the 2014 guidance was not altogether appropriate. One concern is whether the weight placed on obtaining external grants in REF2014 is appropriate across all disciplines in deciding whether a 'research assistant' was independently research-active.

We are pleased therefore by the recent statement suggesting that there will be further discussion about how to define 'research active' staff, and how to do so in a way that is evidence-based. We welcome an approach that minimises the scope for 'gaming' while reflecting the heterogeneity of research across disciplines. Clarification by a proper discussion between institutions and funding bodies may be helpful for individuals too, both research assistants and other teaching and research staff. Individuals may be concerned that their research prospects are not hindered, and there will be equality and diversity considerations too, for instance for early career researchers or those returning from parental leave.

Any measure would need to encourage mobility of those who develop research activity over time. We would assume any measure might then become a HESA field. Taking some average of the number of research-active staff over a number of years (rather than any one-off census date), combined with decoupling, could provide a flexible framework for including all staff who produce an eligible publication. This will of course have implications wider than REF and discussion with individual staff will be essential, with possible advantages (by way of clearer expectations and appropriate institutional strategies for career support) and disadvantages (where institutional and individual expectations differ).

One advantage is particularly relevant to social sciences and humanities, where, especially in institutions focussed on teaching and knowledge transfer, small numbers of genuinely research active staff may conduct outstanding research, since social sciences and humanities do not always require the larger infrastructures of science disciplines. We note too that any definition of research-active staff across the range of institutions is likely to affect the profile of impact case studies; this should be borne in mind in the further discussions about more consistently defining this category of staff.

If a definition were a HESA measure, changes in annual returns could be monitored and those above a certain threshold in the year or two before REF submissions could trigger discussions about submissions policies.

9. With regard to the issues raised in relation to decoupling staff and outputs, what comments do you have on:

9a. The proposal to require an average of two outputs per full-time equivalent staff returned?

9b. The maximum number of outputs for each staff member?

9c. Setting a minimum requirement of one for each staff member?

If the plans for further discussions about defining 'research active staff' are accurate, then it would seem suitable that one indicator would be the production of at least one published piece of research over the period covered by any REF.

10. What are your comments on the issues described in relation to portability of outputs, specifically:

10a. Is acceptance for publication a suitable marker to identify outputs that an institution can submit and how would this apply across different output types?

We suspect that acceptance for publication will prove difficult to audit and that publication date (or its equivalent in appropriate areas) is more straightforward to assess and would create less burden. See also our answer to Q.10c. If some degree of non-portability is needed, auditing it by research publication date would seem sufficient.

While we understand the desire to 'reward' institutions within whose auspices research was produced, there are sufficient incentives already which include incentives to keep and build on the work of productive researchers, and do not wish to unduly hamper individual mobility. In addition, we are concerned that the audit burden of establishing where research was 'substantially produced' would be disproportionate, whereas publication date is simpler, and in effect established a mechanism for sharing research outputs for mobile researchers.

10b. What challenges would your institution face in verifying the eligibility of outputs?

10c. Would non-portability have a negative impact on certain groups and how might this be mitigated?

On balance, we do not support full non-portability of outputs. We accept that, taken together with a focus on the institutional incentives provided by the REF, and the decoupling of outputs, there is logic in proposing non-portability, as it retains a focus on institutional, rather than individual behaviour.

Despite this, we believe that it is a step too far. We believe that some accounts of the

'gaming' and 'transfer market' rest on anecdote rather than evidence. We believe there are other means of addressing this issue. We are concerned that non-portability will not only affect the careers and prospects of early career researchers but will unbalance the relationships between institutions and the individuals who actually carry out research.

If institutions create an enabling research environment, then individuals will have incentives to stay, but if their research can be 'held' by an institution they leave, it is unclear that institutions will have a balanced set of incentives. We are also concerned that it will have unintended consequences in hindering mobility of researchers to an extent that is harmful to research quality.

We remain sceptical that the combination of reducing the freedoms of individual researchers and hindering overall mobility is a proportionate response to concerns over 'gaming'. Changing the rules to ensure submission of all research active staff, taking an average measure rather than having a one-off cut-off date, and introducing rules against some particular exploitations of loop-holes seem more proportionate and protect research mobility and the balance of incentives between institutions and individuals. See also our response to Q. 14.

10d. What comments do you have on sharing outputs proportionally across institutions?

See Q.10b.

11. Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for the Open Researcher and Contributor ID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2021?

Yes

No

12. What comments do you have on the proposal to remove Category C as a category of eligible staff?

13. What comments do you have on the definition of research assistants?

See Q.8

14. What comments do you have on the proposal for staff on fractional contracts and is a minimum of 0.2 FTE appropriate?

Whereas in general, we think 0.2 FTE is appropriate, an exception might be made in the case of staff with appointments at non-UK HEIs.

Some anecdotal accounts suggested that this international transfer market that might need further consideration, especially given the use of 0.2 FTE for researchers at North American universities where the 'summer money' system means that what are otherwise full-time

contracts at their home institution are not disrupted by a 0.2 FTE appointment in the UK.

On the other hand, the importance of international research collaborations should not be disproportionately hindered. We wonder if a rule that in the case of those with appointments in international HEIs, a higher fraction (of say 0.3 or 0.4 FTE) as an eligibility requirement might be enough to dis-incentivise collaborations that are undertaken mainly to affect REF.

This, coupled, with an average calculation of FTE over a number of years, rather than on a one-off census date, would significantly reduce the incentives for 'gaming'. The proposal for a narrative statement should include some guidance about what constitutes a substantive research relationship, and could include behavioural indicators such as co-authorship, grant-holding at the submitting institution, postgraduate research supervision, etc.

6. Collaboration

15. What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond higher education in REF 2021?

7. Outputs

16. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will postdate the submission deadline?

- Yes
 No

17. What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

We welcome the continued emphasis on the importance of interdisciplinary research, and the steps proposed in the consultation. We think however that they could go further. We predict that over time the proportion of interdisciplinary research will grow, and increasing proportions are likely not only to span sub-panels within a main panel but may cross panels as well.

We note that it is important to distinguish interdisciplinary research underpinning a publication from the research output itself. We do not think the extra work involved in making this a mandatory field for all submissions is necessarily the right way forward, given the extra burden it will bring. Guidelines should help clarify the issues institutions may want to consider in flagging an output as 'interdisciplinary'. Many pieces of interdisciplinary research may in fact result in discipline-based publications.

We believe that researchers themselves may be best placed to nominate a research output as requiring cross-panel referral, which we think will remain the main means of assessment.

This does however require early addressing by the sub-panels of which publications to cross refer, and is another argument in favour of earlier appointment of sub-panel members than shortly before assessment commences.

While the appointment of an 'interdisciplinary champion' may be helpful, we think that more can be done to ensure appropriate handling. It would be possible for instance to look at the outputs submitted to sub-panels in 2014 and map major topics common for cross-referral to ensure appropriate panel membership.

Where interdisciplinary work forms an important part of a UoA's submission, it would seem appropriate to encourage a discussion of this in the environment template. We do not however favour giving 'extra credit' for this, as this will increase transaction costs at institutional level (and could lead to greater inconsistency), will inhibit the organic growth of such research, and risks confusing the interdisciplinary research itself with the outputs produced by it.

Finally, we note that there will be 'interdisciplinary' impact case studies as well and their handling too will need consideration.

18. Do you agree with the proposal for using quantitative data to inform the assessment of outputs, where considered appropriate for the discipline? If you agree, have you any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels at output and aggregate level?

Yes

No

Comments:

We note that the appropriate quantitative measures will be different for different disciplines, and it will be helpful to involve learned societies in considering what these might be.

We commend the statement by the Forum for Responsible Metrics:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Documents/forum-for-responsible-research-metrics-response-to-REFconsultation2017.pdf>.

8. Impact

19. Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

Yes

No

Comments:

Consistency will be important but where major new elements are proposed (which we support) – such as the inclusion of impact arising from a body of work rather than a single output, which may involve public service, or public engagement (see below) – we think consistency should not be the only consideration.

We have concerns that, given the differences between panels in how they judged impact, and given the importance of widening the definition, there may need to be a period of piloting and certainly the development of further guidelines (not rules, and not templates, but perhaps providing examples) and that this will require clear communication well in advance of submission dates if these changes are to take hold and be applied consistently.

20. What comments do you have on the recommendation to broaden and deepen the definition of impact?

We welcome many of the recommendations to broaden and deepen the definition of impact. We will discuss these here and in other answers below.

We do NOT however support the proposal that ‘academic impact’ should be handled as impact case studies. First, we believe the best way to capture these is by way of outputs (most impact on academic research fields or pedagogy is in fact captured in publications, and if it is significant we think it is almost certain to be evidenced in publications), or in the environment template. Allowing academic impact case studies would largely result in double-counting.

But we think there is a more important reason not to add academic impact to the impact case studies. The need for the impact agenda was partly result of the systemic disincentives that previous RAEs provided to focus on publications rather than impacts outside academia. Impact case studies redressed the incentives for universities and researchers. It provides transparent descriptions that legitimise the public-funding of research and so provides a form of accountability for their use.

If academic impact case studies are treated under the impact agenda, we are concerned that there will be a clear behavioural response, with many academics and institutions submitting cases based on claims of academic impact. Since the number of impact case studies is likely to (and should) remain roughly the same, this will result in decreasing incentives for wider societal impact case studies, undermining the very aims of the original reasons for the introduction of an impact agenda. We note too that impact case studies are not meant to provide a list of all possible impacts according to some putatively ‘true’ measure. Instead, it is meant to redress institutional and individual incentives to look outside academia, and to show why research matters. We strongly urge HEFCE to retain the outward focus of impact case studies.

We cover the issue of impact based on a broad body in Q.29 and the issue of public engagement in Q.23.

21. Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and Research Councils UK to align their definition of academic and wider impact?

Yes

No

If yes, what comments do you have on the proposed definitions?

On the whole this would be helpful as long as it is clear that not all research is required to have wider impact.

22. What comments do you have on the criteria of reach and significance?

We think it is important to note that these not be interpreted to suggest that only internationally recognised research can have reach and significance. Much social science impact may be far more local and have significant impact by using such evidence.

23. What do you think about having further guidance for public engagement impacts and what do you think would be helpful?

There is of course relevant social science research on public engagement. But we think a first issue is for HEFCE to give clear guidance on what it means by public engagement. There is a school of thought that public engagement only matters if there is some clear measure of ‘change’ – that is, that engagement is a pathway to impact.

Another values engagement for its own sake: research, including not only science research but also social science and humanities research – should be concerned about public engagement for its own sake, to produce a better educated public, inform public discourses, or increase the support for research, as one of its roles in a democratic society. On the whole, we think the field of public engagement in science takes the wider view, and it is one we support. That is, public engagement with robust and objective science research is a positive good and seeking evidence that something changed is neither always feasible nor worth the extra costs it could entail. Our perception of the handling of this issue is that different main panels took different views on this, with the science panels feeling more comfortable with the wider view.

We would welcome HEFCE clarification of this issue and think that further guidance could be developed to this effect. It would be useful to state that public engagement is a valued impact in its own right, but that the panels will be looking for evidence of sustained and meaningful engagement with the wider public or sub-publics outside academia.

Evidence would need to be provided that the engagement was sustained, actively reached large numbers of the relevant group (one or two tweets with high metrics, or downloads on excellent sites like The Conversation, a large proportion of whose readers are academics will not be the strongest measures).

Instead, it should be possible to show that across a number of pathways and for a period of time there was strong public engagement, with results discernible in discussions and outputs of others (e.g., TV productions and reviews and viewership, newspaper articles, citations in testimony given by others to Parliamentary committees, and so on).

If a strong case can be made on measures such as these, we think clear guidance should be given that impacts that showed what proportion of the public had for instance changed its mind and so on would not be necessary. We would be happy to discuss this issue further with HEFCE should that be helpful.

24. Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

Yes

No

Comments:

Yes, but we note that pragmatically it is often easier to write a convincing impact case study when the researcher involved can help to do so. Since the aim is for institutions to provide appropriate support for impact, irrespective of whether researchers stay for a very long time or not, it is clearly logical to allow submission of impact case studies where researchers have left.

We note too that institutional support may be particularly important for early career researchers, and institutions will want a diverse portfolio of possible case studies since impact does not depend solely on the efforts of researchers.

However we note that if the research continues after a researcher has moved to another HEI, and if it continues to generate additional impact, it should be a permissible impact case study for the new institution too. In practice, given that impact is not always neatly traceable to individual pieces of research, this may result in some double submissions and we suspect HEFCE will need to provide some guidance about this.

If the claim is made on the basis of a body of research or expertise provided by this (see Q.29) then we think it will only be possible to submit a case study at the institution where the researcher currently works, since the incentive that is being sought would seem more likely to involve the current institution.

25. Do you agree that the approach to supporting and enabling impact should be captured as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment?

Yes

No

Comments:

We think that including the impact statement within the environment template is indeed the most sensible way to proceed.

That said, the guidance for what sorts of issues might be covered in the impact section would be welcome across the sector.

26. What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration?

27. Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to support the assessment and audit process better (paragraph 96)?

Yes

No

28. What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

29. What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from research activity and bodies of work, as well as from specific research outputs?

We welcome the widening of impact to include impact resulting from bodies of research and the underpinning expertise that gives since our reading of the research on extra-academic impact shows that much impact is not provided by a clearly traceable route from a single piece of research to its translation into a discernible impact. Carol Weiss' work, though old, is still very good on the underlying issues.

However we think that there will need to be some guidance about this, both to clarify the issues for institutions and to engender some greater consistency between panels and sub-panels. For instance, we think a form of impact that was probably underplayed in REF2014 (and that certainly requires institutional support and resources) is when researchers are asked to assume part-time roles in public service – for instance, as specialist advisors to Parliamentary select committees or public enquiries or international commissions. This almost always arises because of the individual's perceived expertise based on a body of research. Is this *prima facie* evidence of impact? How will the underpinning research be assessed?

Again, our perception is that many of the science panels took a more pragmatic approach to this, while social science panels looked for further impact evidence to show what difference it made that the particular person did the role. We think clarification would be helpful both to encourage a wider range of submissions about such work and align the incentives of institutions to provide teaching relief and so on, and also to encourage greater cross-panel consistency. Early meetings of the main panel chairs and members should help develop this work, with experts brought in as necessary. We accept that guidance will not be in the form of 'rules' or templates, but some discussion of the issues in the HEFCE guidance about submissions, with examples, would be helpful to both these aims.

We would encourage this guidance to be developed across panels; while individual panels will have disciplinary differences in examples and so on, the underlying issue (where does the evidence chain for 'impact' need to stop?) needs to be handled more consistently.

30. Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research activity (1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020)?

Yes

No

31. What are your views on the suggestion that the threshold criterion for underpinning research, research activity or a body of work should be based on standards of rigour? Do you have suggestions for how rigour could be assessed?

We are concerned that a standard of rigour may introduce another complexity. We wonder if making some global judgement about reach and significance across the research as a whole will be sufficient, though even there guidance would need to be given about such a judgement is to be made.

32. Evaluation of REF 2014 found that provision of impact evidence was challenging for HEIs and panels. Do you have any comments on the following:

32a. The suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?

32b. The development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?

We would cite the work done by Jonathan Grant at <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/policy-institute/publications/Analysis-of-REF-impact.pdf> and the difficulty in providing standard quantitative measures if the range of case studies and the narrative of their impact.

While numbers should be used where relevant, we would be concerned if research that could show it had saved 'x' lives or 'y' amount of money were therefore automatically ranked higher than research that prevented a bad policy change or that resulted in more diffuse impacts that could not easily be translated into numbers.

32c. Do you have any other comments on evidencing impacts in REF 2021?

33. What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2021 that were returned in REF 2014?

Given the long-term nature of some impacts, we agree that it would be right to allow submission of case studies previously returned in REF2014.

But we think this should require genuine evidence of additional impact since the last submission. (It should not need to demonstrate any research additionality). In such cases it should be clear that the case study was previously submitted and the previous case study could be submitted as well as a form of audit check. This would encourage re-submissions only when there was genuine additional impact to consider.

We can envision cases where this would indeed be the case. A statement that such resubmissions would be welcome but would need to show additional impact and that only the additional impact would be assessed according to the same criteria used for other case studies would seem helpful.

Again we see this as a question of ensuring appropriate alignment of the assessment with institutional incentives.

In some cases impact will genuinely be long-term and it is important that there not be impediments to it (either by disallowing such submissions or creating a higher hurdle of assessment). Nor would we favour setting any quota on these. But assessing only the

additional impact and submitting the previous case study as an audit trail would seem to provide appropriate incentives.

9. Environment

34a. Do you agree with the proposal to change the structure of the environment template by introducing more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment?

Yes

No

Comments:

We agree with the proposal to introduce more structure, and welcome to the involvement of the Forum for Responsible Metrics. We think this will help give content and verifiability to some claims.

That said, we would not want the structured element to displace all narrative. Narratives give context, will raise issues that cannot be quantified, and we suspect too that drawing them up may actually be helpful to the HEIs.

It will be important the metrics are suitable for different disciplines and that panels are given guidance about how to use them so they do not become a form of over-reliance on metrics by default.

34b. Do you have suggestions of data already held by institutions that would provide panels with a valuable insight into the research environment?

35. Do you have any comment on the ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaboration beyond higher education?

36. Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

Yes

No

Comments:

While we support the move to ensure greater openness of research publications of all types, we remain of the view that there are disciplinary differences in the models appropriate for different disciplines.

Our latest publication on this issue was <https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Independent-Review-Panel-for-RCUK-OA-Policy-Implementation-AcSS-final-submission-12-09-14.pdf> and much has changed since then. But we do not think a one-size fits all approach is appropriate.

Perhaps even more important, it is unclear to us that bundling extra institutional requirements into the REF will be helpful. (See our answer to Q.s 38-39) Who will judge efforts above and beyond those required?

How will this retain a focus on research quality, importance of impact and the granular assessment of these, as well as a reduction of transaction costs? We believe there are other policy mechanisms to continue to incentivise this work.

37. What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to share and manage their research data more effectively?

We distinguish open access to publications from sharing research data.

The social sciences have a good record with sharing data; it has long been a requirement of all major social science funders, both public (ESRC) and private (research philanthropies) that data be offered and documented for deposit in the appropriate research archive.

We believe that funders of medical and other research could do much more to ensure data sharing regimes. But as with Q.36 we think the more direct route to leverage rather than using REF may be a better way forward.

10. Institutional level assessment

38. What are your views on the introduction of institutional-level assessment of impact and environment?

We are strongly opposed to the introduction of an institutional level assessment of impact and environment. We do not think the Stern review made a clear case for it, and we have concerns about its use.

While we understand that many of the strategies that underpin successful impact and research are institution-wide, in practice institutions make strategic choices about which disciplines, researchers and so on to support. This helps focus different institutions on different issues, and drives up quality. But many of these strategic choices won't be stated in the institutional statements. Most will in any case be reflected in the environmental templates, outputs and impact case studies of particular UoA.

We believe that the institutional support for work is best shown at the level at which outputs and impact case studies are produced. We believe most impact will be produced via different departments and indeed the examples of institutional quoted by Lord Stern are largely capable of being mapped onto UoAs.

Even where strategies are interdisciplinary (or inter-departmental), they are capable of being included in the statements of more than one UoA. Most interdisciplinary is not institution-wide but operates as concrete research with clear research agendas between particular teams, and it is this should be incentivised by REF. The proof of the success of institutional strategies should result in tangible outcomes for research outputs and impact case studies.

We also think this will enable the inappropriate use of REF by producing a super-league table and question whether that is helpful or desirable in what is a multifactorial causal environment.

We would support an extended section in the impact section of the environmental template for information about the institutional policies and support for the work, which could reflect the institutional support and form part of the assessment work of panels. This affects too our answer on the proposed weighting in Qs. 4-42 below.

39. Do you have any comments on the factors that should be considered when piloting an institutional-level assessment?

II. Outcomes and weighting

40. What comments do you have on the proposed approach to creating the overall quality profile for each submission?

As above, we do not support the creation of separate institutional assessment, but rather the inclusion of information about institutional strategies and support in the appropriate environment statements of UoAs. This would reduce the scope for spurious reputational assessments and focus attention on the tangible results of those strategies.

This would support a return to the weightings used in REF2014: 65% for research outputs; 20% for impact and 15% for environment. See also our answer to Q.41

41. Given the proposal that the weighting for outputs remain at 65 per cent, do you agree that the overall weighting for impact should remain at 20 per cent?

- Yes
 No

Comments:

We do not have a fixed view on this. We would not wish impact weighting to be less than 20%.

If it were felt to be appropriate to increase impact case study weighting to 25% we would suggest that it reduce the weighting given to the environment, whose effects should be reflected in outputs and impact case studies.

42. Do you agree with the proposed split of the weightings between the institutional and submission-level elements of impact and environment?

- Yes
 No

Comments:

As above, we do not favour an institutional-level submission and assessment.

12. Proposed timetable for REF 2021

43. What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2021?

Given our comments about the need for guidance in some areas, and this will require work by main panels, we think the timetable is very tight. If it comes to a choice between adhering to the timetable and developing appropriate guidance, we would favour relaxing the timetable. An early decision would be required.

13. Other

44. Are there proposals not referred to above, or captured in your response so far, that you feel should be considered? If so, what are they and what is the rationale for their inclusion?

14. Contact details

If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

policy@acss.org.uk