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Circular

Research Excellence Framework: invitation to participate in a pilot exercise to assess impact

Date: 7 August 2009
Reference: W09/26HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Response by: Friday 28 August 2009
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This Circular invites expressions of interest from higher education institutions willing to participate in a pilot exercise to help develop arrangements for assessing the impact of research in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2280 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.

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Introduction

1. This Circular invites expressions of interest from higher education institutions (HEIs) that are willing to volunteer to participate in a UK-wide pilot exercise to help develop arrangements for assessing the impact of research in the Research Excellence Framework (REF).

Pilot Exercise

2. HEFCW has been working with HEFCE and the other UK higher education funding bodies on the development of the REF. In July, the HEFCW Council endorsed proposals for the key elements of the REF. We intend to consult formally on detailed proposals for the REF through a UK-wide consultation during autumn 2009.
3. The REF will be a unified framework for assessing the quality of research across all disciplines. It will focus on identifying excellent research, including its impact on the economy and society. Assessment will be undertaken by expert panels based on submissions from HEIs.¹
4. The autumn consultation will include proposals for assessing the economic and social impact of high quality research, as a significant element within the REF. The funding bodies have so far developed their proposed approach to assessing impact through informal consultation with a range of stakeholders from the HE sector, research users, Research Councils and other funders, and expert advice.
5. The funding bodies are in the process of finalising detailed consultation proposals, and have formed a clear view of the framework for assessing impact in the REF. The assessment of research impact will focus on impacts achieved during the assessment period underpinned by high quality research (which may have been undertaken over a longer period). The consultation will propose that submissions for assessment should include three main elements for impact:
 - a number of case studies illustrating the research-driven contribution to economic, social, public policy, cultural or quality of life impacts
 - a statement (made in a standard format) summarising the full range of impacts for the submission as a whole
 - some supporting quantitative indicators.

¹ It should be noted that it is no longer intended to undertake an exercise in 2010 to produce quality assessments for certain disciplines based purely on bibliometric analysis. This element in previous proposals cannot be carried through following the conclusion that bibliometric indicators alone cannot provide a sufficiently robust measure of quality to drive funding allocations in any discipline at present.

6. This element in the assessment process is largely new and comparatively untried. For this reason, and given that the timetable for implementing the overall REF is tight, the funding bodies plan to run a pilot exercise to test and inform the further development of our approach. It is envisaged that the pilot will run from autumn 2009 to mid-2010.
7. The funding bodies plan to pilot the impact proposals in around four to six discipline fields (which for the time being we will define in terms of RAE units of assessment) including at least one field from within each of the following:
 - Medical and life sciences
 - Physical sciences and engineering
 - Social sciences
 - Arts and humanities.
8. Institutions involved in the pilot exercise will be asked to make impact submissions in broadly the form set out above to some or all of the piloted discipline fields. The funding bodies will aim to receive at least 8 submissions in total to each of the discipline fields piloted. We expect to involve a spread of institutions from across the UK and to include a sufficient number to spread the workload effectively. (The other UK HE funding bodies are sending similar circulars to their HEIs.)
9. The funding bodies will set up a mock expert panel for each of the discipline fields piloted to assess the submissions and provide advice and feedback on the process. It is envisaged that membership of the panels will include significant numbers of research users as well as practising researchers.
10. The funding bodies aim to identify the pilot institutions and discipline fields by autumn 2009. A steering group involving senior research user and HEI representatives is being established to oversee the pilot.

Responses

11. HEFCW is keen to ensure that at least one HEI from Wales is involved in the impact pilot. Institutions wishing to express an interest in taking part in the pilot are asked to contact Hannah Chaplin at HEFCE (h.chaplin@hefce.ac.uk) by email by **Friday 28 August 2008**. Responses should be copied to Linda Tiller at HEFCW (linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk).