

# Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework

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## Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework

To	Heads of higher education institutions in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland Organisations with an interest in commissioning and using academic research including businesses, public sector bodies, charities and other third sector organisations Individuals and organisations with an interest in research assessment in higher education
Of interest to those responsible for	Research, planning
Reference	2015/xx
Publication date	[month] 2015
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### Executive summary

#### Purpose

1. This document sets out the proposals of the four UK higher education (HE) funding bodies for the second Research Excellence Framework (REF) for the assessment of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). The proposals seek to build on the first REF, conducted in 2014.

#### Key points

2. The four UK higher education funding bodies are consulting on detailed arrangements for research assessment in a second Research Excellence Framework (REF). We propose an overall approach that is based upon the framework implemented in REF 2014, subject to refinements that may be made in the areas set out in this consultation, as informed by responses.

3. The full set of consultation questions is available at Annex A.

4. We invite responses from HEIs and other groups and organisations with an interest in the conduct, quality, funding or use of research. This includes businesses, government and public sector bodies, charities and other third sector organisations.

**Action required**

5. Responses to the consultation should be made using the online form provided on the HEFCE website ([www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)) by midday on xx 2016.

## Introduction

### Background

6. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) was first conducted in 2014, following extensive development and consultation with the higher education (HE) sector and wider organisations with an interest in the use of research. The REF built upon the well-developed assessment process established in the UK by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), and added several major new features, including the assessment of research impact. Full details on the REF and its development are available on the REF website, [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk).

7. In view of the significant changes introduced into REF from the RAE, the funding bodies undertook a comprehensive programme of evaluation activities. The outcomes from our evaluation have highlighted the overall success of the exercise, as well as the areas where further refinements may be necessary. A list of the evaluation projects and wider set of evidence used to inform this consultation, and details of where to find further information about the projects, is available at Annex B.

8. Following REF 2014, we have taken an open approach to considering the options for future research assessment that will most effectively meet our aims (see below, paragraph 11), while placing the minimum burden possible on submitting institutions. This approach included revisiting the question of whether metrics could provide a feasible alternative to peer review, and increasing our understanding of the UK's HE research system in an international context<sup>1</sup>. Through analysis of the evaluation and wider evidence we have gathered, the funding bodies conclude that the REF remains the most appropriate mechanism for continuing to support our world-class research base through the selective allocation of funds and provision of robust reputational and accountability information.

9. The evaluation evidence has also informed the development of our proposals for consultation, as set out in this document. A theme we have identified as emerging from the evidence is a desire for continuity in the next exercise with REF 2014 where possible and for any changes to be incremental, in recognition of the additional burden involved where new processes are introduced. This desire has been expressed in relation to the arrangements for assessing impact in particular, given that the process was a new feature of REF 2014 and a significant amount of time was invested by institutions in staff

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<sup>1</sup> *The Metric Tide: Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management* (2015); Jamil Salmi, *Research Funding and System Performance: A Review of International Higher Education Systems* (Forthcoming 2015). Both available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk).

training on this aspect<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, we have taken the framework as implemented in 2014 as our starting position for this consultation, with proposals made only in those areas in which our evidence has suggested there may be a need or desire for change. In developing our proposals, we have been mindful of the level of burden indicated, and have identified where certain options may offer a more deregulated approach to the previous framework. It is not our intention to introduce new aspects to the assessment framework that will increase burden.

10. Of the proposals we have set out, two of the more significant areas for consultation relate to the outcomes from the assessment: consideration of whether the 4\* quality level should be split into two, to better reflect the panels' ability to make more granular judgements at this quality level; and a proposal to increase the weighting of impact to 25% of the overall quality profile (see paragraphs 107-110). These proposals are raised here to enable respondents to reflect on them as other areas for consultation are considered.

### **Aims and principles of research assessment**

11. The funding bodies' shared policy aim for research assessment is to secure the continuation of a world-class, dynamic and responsive research base across the full academic spectrum within UK higher education. It is our expectation that this will continue to be achieved in a future REF through its following threefold purpose:

- to inform the selective allocation of funding for research
- to provide accountability for public investment in research and produce evidence of the benefits of this investment
- to provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks, for use within the HE sector and for public information.

12. The conduct of a future exercise will continue to be governed by the following principles:

- Equity: the fair and equal assessment of all types of research and forms of research output.
- Equality: promoting equality and diversity in all aspects of the assessment.
- Transparency: the clear and open process through which decisions are made and information about the assessment process is shared.

13. The funding bodies consider that all UK higher education institutions (HEIs) should be eligible to participate in the REF<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See RAND Europe, *Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation (findings and observations)* (March 2015), p. xiv; *Evaluating the 2014 REF: feedback from participating institutions* (March 2015), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> In England only this also includes HEIs' connected institutions.

## Responding to the consultation

14. The sections below set out issues and proposals relating to certain aspects of a future REF exercise. We are seeking views on aspects of the following features of the assessment framework:

- Overall approach
- Unit of assessment structure
- Expert panels
- Staff
- Collaboration
- Outputs
- Impact
- Environment
- Outcomes and weighting
- Proposed timetable

15. We invite views in response to the questions posed throughout the sections listed above. A summary of the questions is available at Annex A. Responses to this consultation are invited from any organisation, group or individual with an interest in research or research assessment. Responses to the consultation should be made using the online form provided on the HEFCE website ([www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk)) by midday on xx 2016.

16. A downloadable word version of the response form is also available on the HEFCE website to facilitate the process of responding to the consultation, but this should not be submitted directly. Only responses received through the online form will be reviewed and included in our analysis. All responses made through the online form by the deadline will be considered.

17. Following the deadline, HEFCE will copy responses from:

- institutions in Scotland to the Scottish Funding Council
- institutions in Wales to the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
- institutions in Northern Ireland to Department for Employment and Learning.

18. We will be holding a number of consultation events for HEIs during the consultation period. The events will outline the questions and proposals, and will provide an opportunity for institutions to raise any issues for clarification and discussion. Registration will be available online, using the form provided alongside this document. HEIs across the UK may register up to two delegates each for these events.

## Next steps

16. The responses to this consultation will be considered by the boards (or equivalent) of the funding bodies in mid-2016. Initial decisions on the next REF will be announced in summer 2016.

17. We will commit to read, record and analyse responses to this consultation in a consistent manner. For reasons of practicality, usually a fair and balanced summary of responses rather than the individual responses themselves will inform any decision made. In most cases the merit of the arguments made is likely to be given more weight than the number of times the same point is made. Responses from organisations or representative bodies which have high relevance or interest in the area under consultation, or are likely to be affected most by the proposals, are likely to carry more weight than those with little or none.

18. We will publish an analysis of the consultation responses and an explanation of how the responses were considered in our subsequent decision. We may publish individual responses to the consultation within the summary. Where we have not been able to respond to a significant and material issue raised, we will usually explain the reasons for this.

19. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case the four UK funding bodies. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means that responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. For further information about the act see the Information Commissioner's Office website, [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) or, in Scotland, the website of the Scottish Information Commissioner <http://www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/ScottishInformationCommissioner.aspx>.

## **Proposals for consultation**

### **Overall approach**

19. As outlined above (paragraph 9), the funding bodies propose an overall approach to research assessment in a future exercise based upon the framework implemented in REF 2014, subject to refinements that may be made in the areas set out below, as informed by responses to this consultation. The overall approach will therefore include the assessment of research outputs, impact and environment by expert panels using peer review, informed by appropriate metrics where applicable.

20. With respect to the timing of the next exercise, we note that there is some support for a longer period between REF 2014 and its successor than the six years between RAE 2008 and REF, to reduce the impact of the regulatory burden involved in participating in the exercise. From our perspective, the timing of the next exercise needs to strike the right balance in offering stability of funding and minimising where possible the significant effort involved in the assessment process, while providing an opportunity to recognise improving performance in a timely fashion. Building on our experience from REF 2014, it

is the funding bodies' view that a period of six years strikes an appropriate balance. This would mean an assessment year in 2020, with the outcomes being available to inform the allocation of funding from 2021-22. We welcome views on this proposal. For ease of reference, we refer to the next exercise as 'REF 2020' in the remainder of this document, but this is not intended to imply that our view on the timing is firmly fixed.

**Question 1a:** Do you agree with the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014?

**Question 1b:** Do you agree with the proposed timing of the next exercise in 2020?

## Unit of assessment structure

21. The revised UOA structure in REF 2014 introduced fewer, broader UOAs across which the panels operated with a greater degree of consistency; some of the revised UOAs delivered a range of strategic and administrative benefits for submitting institutions and advantages for the panels during the assessment. Some issues were identified for a small number of areas within the revised structure, however, including reduced visibility of research quality and disciplinary differences in panel working methods. For instance, there was inconsistency of approach across institutions submitting to the four UOAs covering the engineering disciplines, which affected the comparability of outcomes in some areas and unevenly distributed workloads across the engineering sub-panels.

22. It remains our aim in REF 2020 to support consistency across the panels, further encourage the submission of interdisciplinary research (see paragraphs 63-64 below), continue to minimise the fluidity between the UOA boundaries and give regard to the distribution of workload across panels. Therefore, where a strong case is made for revisions to the UOA structure, these will be made within the existing two-tiered panel structure and according to our intention to retain fewer, broader UOAs.

23. There are advantages in retaining the structure as it was in REF 2014, including for reasons of continuity and comparability of outcomes. Additionally, it will be important not to lose the administrative advantage provided by the alignment of HESA cost centres to the REF UOAs which was introduced during the previous assessment period.

24. We are seeking views on whether issues encountered with the UOA structure in 2014 warrant revisions to the structure for REF 2020. In cases where it is felt revisions should be made, we are seeking views on the most appropriate alternative configuration, in accordance with our wider aims outlined above (paragraph 22). We note that Sub-panel 17: Geography and Archaeology raised specific concerns about the structure of their UOA in the panel overview report produced at the end of the assessment<sup>4</sup>, and we

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<sup>4</sup> *Overview report by Main Panel C and Sub-panels 16 to 26 (2015)*, p. 30. Available at [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk).

have received correspondence suggesting particular consideration should be given some subject areas, including forensic science, criminology and film studies. We also welcome views on these points.

25. Some of the REF 2014 UOAs received very high volumes of submissions, and covered a wide range of disciplinary areas, for example, UOAs 1: Clinical Medicine and 3: Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy. However, some of the advantages arising from the configuration of these UOAs, as well as the ability to make multiple submissions in UOA 3, provide a balance to some of the challenges associated with size. It is our intention to retain the structure of these UOAs in REF 2020, and we invite views on this proposal.

26. The evidence we have gathered to date has shown a general preference for continuity over radical change in the next REF. We are, however, open to considering alternative approaches to the configuration of UOAs that will address some of the issues encountered previously, while meeting our aims set out at paragraph 22. For example, one approach to the assessment could include allowing sub-panels to determine at the criteria-setting stage whether a separate sub-profile for outputs should be provided for distinct areas covered by their sub-panel. This would have the advantage of providing visibility for distinct disciplinary areas in terms of research output quality, while continuing to provide the benefits derived from the broader sub-panels, such as increased consistency of assessment and streamlined processes for assessing interdisciplinary research.

<p><b>Question 2:</b> What comments do you have in relation to the UOA structure in REF 2020?</p>
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## **Expert panels**

### **Development of criteria**

27. As described above, we propose that the exercise continues to be based upon expert review. For this purpose, panels will be appointed that include leading experts in their fields – both those working in UK HEIs, as well as international members on the main panels – and individuals with experience in commissioning and using research. We propose to retain the two-tiered structure, in which groups of sub-panels work together under the oversight and guidance of main panels. It is our view that this structure will continue to build upon increased consistency in terms of process and standards of assessment across the sub-panels.

28. Experience of REF 2014 indicates that there may be scope for further improvements to consistency through the simultaneous development of the submissions guidance and assessment criteria, in collaboration with the main panels. This would include the appointment of main panels only for the development of panel criteria

(including main and sub-panel chairs, as well as international and research-user main panel members). The sub-panel members and assessors would be appointed at a later point in the exercise, near to the start of the assessment year<sup>5</sup>.

29. There are both advantages and disadvantages to adopting this approach, on which we would like your views. The simultaneous development of the submissions guidance and assessment criteria would offer a more coherent and straightforward set of guidelines for institutions. Sub-panel chairs could consult their subject communities on the criteria, which would be a more efficient approach than appointing full sub-panels. However, the later recruitment of sub-panel members may affect the sense of involvement and ownership that sub-panels have expressed towards the criteria-development process.

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

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

### **Representativeness of the expert panels**

30. Analysis of the REF 2014 panel membership highlighted that some but limited progress had been made in improving the representativeness of the membership since the RAE. Demographic information was not collected at the point of nomination, thereby preventing analysis of the appointed members with the context of the wider pool of nominees. In considering this issue, EDAP recommended that in a future exercise the funding bodies should identify ways of more effectively mainstreaming equality and diversity considerations amongst all participants, at all stages of the appointment process<sup>6</sup>.

31. In response to these findings and recommendations, we propose a number of measures to improve the representativeness of the panels for REF 2020:

- The appointment of main and sub-panel chairs should continue to be made through an open application process; members of the selection panels will receive equality and diversity briefings; demographic information will be collected from all applicants to enable subsequent monitoring
- Other main panel members and sub-panel members and assessors will continue to be appointed via a nominations process, in recognition of the scale of appointments, for which an application process would not be feasible

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<sup>5</sup> *REF manager's report* (2015), p. 28. Available at [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk).

<sup>6</sup> *Equality and diversity in the 2014 REF: A report by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP)* (2015), p. 12. Available at [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk).

- All nominations will be made via an online form, which will require mandatory demographic information to be provided for each nominee; this information will be used solely for the purposes of monitoring, and not for selection purposes
- All main and sub-panel chairs will receive equality and diversity briefings prior to the process of selecting panel members

32. We have followed an approach in previous exercises of inviting nominations from academic associations and other bodies with an interest in research, excluding mission groups, individual UK HEIs and groups within or subsidiaries of individual UK HEIs for reasons of conflict of interest. Self-nomination was also excluded. We welcome views on whether this approach continues to be appropriate, or whether nominations could be opened up to all organisations and individuals.

33. If we continued to follow the nominations approach used for REF 2014, we are likely to receive a pool of candidates that are endorsed by the subject communities that they represent. To further improve the representativeness of the appointed panels in this approach, we could introduce a requirement for nominating bodies to develop and apply a code of practice on the fair selection of candidates for nomination. In a similar approach to that followed by HEIs for the selection of staff in REF 2014, nominating bodies would be required to submit codes of practice for review by EDAP before being invited to submit nominations for panel members. Such an approach is likely to ensure much greater account is taken of equality and diversity issues in the nominations process; however, there are also burden implications associated with this that may limit the eventual number of bodies able to submit nominations. The process would also require a comprehensive review of the list of nominating bodies (see below, paragraph 35).

34. Alternatively, an open nominations process would potentially deliver a much larger candidate pool. In order to inform the selection of panel members from the candidate pool, all nominations would need to be accompanied by evidence to indicate the nomination had the support of the relevant subject community – in cases of HEI, mission group or self-nomination, support that extended beyond the nominating organisation or individual. There is less scope in this approach for promoting fair practice in the nominations process, but we are seeking views on whether the more open nature of this approach is likely to increase the representativeness of the candidate pool. This approach may be more costly to manage, in view of the likely significant increase in the number of nominations submitted, and may also impact on the overall timeframe for the recruitment.

35. In either approach, it will be necessary to update the list of nominating bodies to ensure all those organisations (beyond HEIs) with an interest in research and that would like to make nominations to a future exercise are included. The REF 2014 list of nominating bodies is provided alongside this document online for review.

**Question 4:** Do you agree with the proposed measures for improving

representativeness on the panels, outlined at paragraph 31?

**Question 5a:** Which of the options described at paragraphs 32-34 do you think is preferable for nominating panel members?

**Question 5b:** If selecting nominating bodies, do you agree with the proposal to introduce a code of practice?

**Question 6:** Please comment on any additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies.

## Staff

### Selection of staff

36. In order to meet our policy aim for research assessment, as set out in paragraph 11, our primary objective for the process is to identify excellent research of all kinds, as well as the impact arising from excellent research, within the UK HE sector. It is not intended to be a comprehensive assessment of all research activity within the sector. Experience of previous assessments demonstrates that assessing a sample of work of the highest quality is sufficient to provide a robust quality assessment in this context. In REF 2014 and previous exercises, this was achieved through institutions' selective submission of research staff and their outputs, which was premised on the recognition that the institution is best-placed to identify those with substantive research roles.

37. We note that concerns have been expressed about the effect of staff selection upon the comparability of the assessment outcomes. In addition to this issue, we are aware of concerns that the staff selection process was burdensome, divisive, or had divisive potential, and required careful management. An independent review of the costs and benefits of the REF further underlines these points and has identified the submission process for outputs, including review and staff selection, as the main cost driver at both the central and UOA level<sup>7</sup>.

38. In exploring this issue in relation to REF 2020, we have encountered a range of plausible alternatives to staff selection, which are outlined below. Views are invited on the different approaches outlined, as well as any further suggestions on an approach to selecting research for assessment that would best enable the aims of the REF to be met. In considering the arguments for and against alternative approaches, respondents may wish to keep in mind the key principles underpinning the REF (paragraph 12) and comment on the extent to which the different proposed approaches would be in accordance with these.

### Decoupling staff from outputs in the assessment

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<sup>7</sup> Technopolis, *REF Accountability Review: Costs, benefits and burden* (2015). Available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk).

39. In recognition of the burden associated with staff selection, the REF Manager's report made a recommendation to decouple staff and outputs in a future assessment. The report suggests that through this approach, 'the considerable efforts and stresses involved in staff selection and associated equality and diversity procedures could be greatly reduced. Some other complexities, notably relating to multi-authored papers, might also be reduced. However, this approach would require very careful consideration as there will remain a need for a robust volume measure for funding purposes.'<sup>8</sup>

40. In our view, an approach that decoupled staff and outputs would most likely work by determining a set number of outputs to be submitted for each submitting unit according to either the number of eligible staff in the unit, or to a specific number of staff identified through a selection process. In this model, eligible outputs would be those produced by staff employed by the institution on the census date. It is likely that a minimum of one output would need to be submitted against each staff member.

41. An alternative approach could remove the need to identify individual staff at all, by determining the number of outputs for submission according to an average volume of staff employed by the unit over the assessment period. In this approach, all outputs produced by the submitted unit during the period would be eligible for selection. Such an approach would provide recognition of the institution's input into the research outputs produced over the assessment period, and may address some concerns that have been raised about the effect of the REF upon staff recruitment (see below, paragraph 48). However, we anticipate that there would be significant challenges for institutions in identifying and being able to verify the eligibility of outputs as having been produced by the submitted unit during the assessment period. While the new arrangements for open access that include the deposit of some output types in institutional repositories (see below, paragraph 60) may help with this, we are interested in views on the feasibility of identifying and verifying eligibility for all types of output across the period, as well as any other unintended behavioural consequences that may result from this approach.

42. We anticipate that either of these approaches would negate the need for arrangements to account for individual staff circumstances and may contribute significantly towards deregulation in the exercise. However, we are mindful of the potential for these approaches to lead to the under-representation in submissions of research produced by some groups of staff (for example, early career researchers), and welcome views on this issue and its possible impact.

#### Retaining the link to staff

43. Over a series of assessment exercises, we have seen increasing improvement in quality of research submitted, but not in the overall volume of staff submitted. The funding bodies wish to drive up the quality of research activity across the sector, and to

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<sup>8</sup> *REF Manager's Report* (March 2015), p. 105.

achieve this would like to signal our preference for the submission of an increasing proportion of eligible staff who conduct excellent research in future exercises.

44. One approach to achieving this aim, and to address a number of the issues raised in relation to selectivity, is to introduce an approach requiring the submission of all eligible staff. This would require the submission of a set number of outputs per staff member, except in cases where individual circumstances constrained ability to work productively throughout the period. The arrangements in place to account for individual staff circumstances in REF 2014 would therefore be retained in this approach. However, as with the proposal to de-couple staff from outputs, the relative merits of requiring the submission of all eligible staff need to be considered carefully against the disadvantages and any unintended consequences that may result, including for equality and diversity.

45. We are aware of some concern about one possible effect of this approach, in which staff may see changes to contracts of employment that will determine whether they are eligible for submission. We are interested in views on the likelihood and impact of this possible consequence. A permutation to this inclusive approach, which may mitigate such consequences while encouraging the submission of more research-active staff, would be to set a minimum threshold for the proportion of eligible staff submitted, for example, 80%. We are interested in views on the arguments for and against this proposal.

46. Careful consideration needs to be given to the impact on panel workloads in any model that results in a significant increase in the number of staff submitted. This could be addressed through a reduction in the number of required outputs per submitted researcher, or through the use of a sampling approach to the assessment by the panels. Views are sought on this issue.

47. An alternative proposal is to retain staff selection as per the arrangements for 2014, but to require the submission of data on the proportion of staff selected, returning to the procedure adopted by assessment exercises prior to RAE 2008. This information would be provided to the panels to inform their assessment of the environment element of the submission, and would be published alongside the REF outcomes. It is our view that this proposal would offer the most continuity with REF 2014, while encouraging institutions to return all their research-active staff in accordance with our preference as outlined above (paragraph 43). We welcome views on this proposal.

<p><b>Question 7:</b> What comments do you have on approaches to staff or output selection in REF 2020? In your view, which approach is preferable and why?</p>
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### **Portability of outputs**

48. In previous assessment exercises, research outputs were linked to submitted staff and could be returned for assessment by the current employing institution regardless of where the staff member was employed at the time the output was produced. We are

aware of concerns about the effect of this policy upon staff recruitment around the census date and about salary inflation in connection with this, which we would like to explore in this consultation, irrespective of the approach taken to output selection. The approach described above (paragraph 41), whereby the submission of outputs is decoupled from individual staff, would include a significant change to the assessment process in linking outputs wholly with the submitting institution. Aside from this approach, we are seeking views on whether we could find a process that would enable HEIs to benefit from the support they have provided for a significant part of the assessment period to individuals that move HEIs close to the census date. For example, by allowing outputs to be shared proportionally across the current and previous institutions.

**Question 8:** What are your comments on the issues described in relation to portability of outputs?

### Staff identifier

49. Where REF 2020 continues to collect information about individual staff, we are considering the arguments for and against mandating the use of ORCID as the identifier for each staff member submitted, as recommended in the report following the Independent Review of Metrics<sup>9</sup>. We welcome views on this issue. Respondents may find it helpful to review the *Institutional ORCID Implementation and Cost-Benefit Analysis Report* in considering their views on this issue<sup>10</sup>.

**Question 9:** Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for ORCID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2020?

### Categories of staff eligibility

50. The need for categories of staff that are eligible for submission is dependent on the outcome of the approach taken to output selection (see above, paragraphs 36-47). In the event that the submission of outputs remains linked to submitted staff, there are three areas in which we are seeking views.

51. A tighter definition of Category C staff (staff not employed by the submitting HEI, but whose research is primarily focused in the submitted unit) was introduced in REF 2014. As outlined in the REF manager's report, this was successful in enabling the submission of staff employed by embedded research council units, and NHS employees with specific research duties, but excluding those with looser relationships with the

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<sup>9</sup> *The Metric Tide: Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management* (2015), p. xii.

<sup>10</sup> Jisc, *Institutional ORCID Implementation and Cost-Benefit Analysis Report* (2014). Available at <http://orcidpilot.jiscinvolve.org/wp/>.

submitting HEI<sup>11</sup>. As also noted in that report, however, only 304 Category C staff were submitted in REF 2014, likely reflecting the tightened definition as well as changes to research council units that enabled more staff to be returned as Category A. In light of this, we are seeking views on whether there continues to be a need for Category C staff in REF 2020.

52. There is some uncertainty over whether the criteria for allowing the submission of research assistants in REF 2014 were clear enough to enable consistency in practice across submissions. We are seeking views on this issue, and any changes to the definition that may improve clarity in REF 2020.

53. As has been the case in previous exercises, we are aware of some concern raised by the assessing panels about the submission of staff on fractional contracts who hold substantive research posts outside of the UK and whose research is not primarily focused in the submitted unit. To address these concerns, the funding bodies are inviting views on a proposal to require the submission of a short statement outlining the connection of such staff to the submitted unit, where staff selection continues in REF 2020 in a similar manner to 2014. The assessing sub-panel would use the statement to determine the eligibility of the submitted member of staff. Where the panel is satisfied that a clear connection with the submitted unit has been established, the outputs listed against that staff member would be assessed according to the assessment criteria. Where the sub-panel is not satisfied, the staff member would not be considered eligible and would be removed from the submission, along with the listed outputs.

**Question 10:** In your view, does there remain a material need for Category C staff in REF 2020?

**Question 11:** What comments do you have on the definition of research assistants and the issue relating to staff on fractional contracts?

### **Individual staff circumstances**

54. It is our continued aim to support equality and diversity in research careers, and therefore intend that the strengthened measures introduced into REF 2014 will continue in REF 2020 where there remains any staff selection activity. This will continue to support the funding bodies' aim, as outlined above, of increasing the proportion of eligible staff submitted who are conducting excellent research.

55. Following the outcomes from this consultation process, the funding bodies will explore with the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel the most appropriate approach to supporting equality and diversity in research careers. This will include consultation with the sector where significant changes to the staff selection process are introduced. In the event that the staff selection process is substantively similar to REF 2014, the funding

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<sup>11</sup> *REF manager's report* (2015), p. 23.

bodies will explore avenues for simplifying the arrangements, including developing a template for codes of practice. We welcome early views on these tentative proposals.

56. One aspect of the arrangements for individual staff circumstances in REF 2014 that has caused some concern is the definition of an early career researcher. In particular, we are aware of challenges that arose in interpreting the term 'independent researcher'. We welcome suggestions on ways that the definition of an early career researcher can be clarified and enable a more standardised approach to identifying such staff across submitting institutions.

**Question 12:** What comments do you have in relation to individual staff circumstances and the definition of ECRs in REF 2020?

## Collaboration

57. We are considering how the REF can better support collaboration between academia and organisations beyond HE, as highlighted in relation to industry in the Dowling Review<sup>12</sup>. As suggested in the Review, and where the approach to staff selection follows the 2014 approach, this could include allowances similar to those provided for early career researchers for staff members moving into academia from other sectors. We are also exploring whether academics who have taken a year out of academia to work in a non-HE sector should be encouraged by a reduction of one output, with supporting information on the nature and value of the secondment. We welcome views on these proposals.

58. We are also seeking views on ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaborations beyond HE<sup>13</sup>. This could include asking for data about staff mobility between the submitting unit and other organisations outside HE (both inward and outward), which would increase the visibility of this activity in the environment element and may further incentivise behaviour. We welcome views on this proposal.

**Question 13:** What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond HE in REF 2020?

## Outputs

59. The key principles and criteria for assessing research outputs in REF 2020 are not expected to change significantly from those used for the assessment in 2014. There are a number of issues that the panels will need to consider when drafting the panel criteria

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<sup>12</sup> *The Dowling Review of Business-University Research Collaborations* (2015), p. 4. Available at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

<sup>13</sup> *The Dowling Review of Business-University Research Collaborations* (2015), p. 30.

documents, depending on the outcomes from this consultation, including the contribution of authors to co-authored outputs in Main Panels A and B, encouraging more outputs to be double-weighted in Main Panels C and D, and providing more detailed guidance for portfolios in Main Panel D.

### **Open access**

60. One key aspect of the assessment of outputs in REF 2020 has already been established: a requirement that outputs submitted to the next exercise be made available in an open-access form in order to be eligible for submission. The open access policy states that journal articles and conference proceedings accepted for publication from 1 April 2016 will need to have been deposited in an institutional or subject repository. Deposited material should be made discoverable, and free to read and download, for anyone with an internet connection, within the embargo periods specified in the policy. Full details of the policy can be found on our website at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/201407/>.

61. This aspect of the next REF was announced in March 2014 following extensive consultation with the sector, and the policy requirements are not being opened for further consultation in this document. In addition, we propose that credit be given to research environments that can demonstrate where they have gone beyond the requirements of the policy (see below, paragraph 105). It is our intention that this policy will be extended to monographs in exercises beyond 2020. Further information about this is available in Annex C.

### **Outputs due for publication after the submission date**

62. To address concerns raised about the risks of submitting outputs whose publication falls between the submission deadline and the end of the publication period, we are proposing that the submission of reserve outputs be permissible in this case. This would remove the risk of an unclassified score in the event that the output is not published within the publication period. We welcome views on this proposal.

<p><b>Question 14:</b> Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will post-date the submission deadline?</p>
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### **Interdisciplinary research**

63. An underpinning principle of the REF is that all types of research and all forms of research output shall be assessed on a fair and equal basis, including interdisciplinary and collaborative research. To support this, REF 2014 built on a number of enhancements to procedures for assessing this type of research. This included the

configuration of broader UOAs; the appointment of additional assessors on the panels; an interdisciplinary identifier for outputs in the submissions system; arrangements for cross-referral of outputs across sub-panels; recognition of the impact arising from all types of research; and recognition of the support provided for interdisciplinary and collaborative research in the environment template. We are aware, however, that there continue to be concerns about the incentives for and assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF.

64. We are therefore considering whether any additional arrangements should be introduced into REF 2020 to facilitate interdisciplinary research activity and further support its assessment.<sup>14</sup> Our starting position would be the continuation of the arrangements introduced in REF 2014, for example, the option to cross-refer outputs for to other sub-panels. There are a range of further steps that could be taken – some of the suggestions we have received are outlined below. We welcome views on how effective these suggestions may be, as well as arguments for any additional ways to support interdisciplinary research.

- Appointment of interdisciplinary ‘champions’ on the sub-panels: each sub-panel would ensure one of the appointed members has interdisciplinary expertise, who would take on specific duties in the sub-panel for ensuring the equitable assessment of interdisciplinary research submitted, including liaison with ‘champions’ on other sub-panels. This could involve meetings of all ‘champions’ within a main panel area, to further support consistency of assessment.
- Sharing of outputs across sub-panels: where the submission of outputs remains linked to submitted staff, this suggestion would allow a staff member’s individual outputs to be submitted in the most relevant UOA. The corresponding fraction of the staff member’s FTE would travel with the output.
- Mandating the ‘interdisciplinary identifier’ field: as noted above, in REF 2014 a submitting institution was able to identify those outputs it considered to be interdisciplinary, to draw this to the panels’ attention. We note the varied use of the identifier by institutions, and some uncertainty around its purpose. Consistency of use could be improved through making the interdisciplinary identifier a mandatory field in the submission system, which could work in combination with, for example, the role of the interdisciplinary champion in better enabling identification and monitoring of interdisciplinary research outputs in the assessment.
- Explicit section in the environment template: increased visibility could be given to the structures in place within the submitting unit in support of interdisciplinary

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<sup>14</sup> This also follows the findings of a recent quantitative study on interdisciplinary research: Elsevier, *A review of the UK’s interdisciplinary research using a citation-based approach* (2015) and supplementary report: Elsevier, *Interdisciplinary research in REF 2014 submitted publications* (2015). The reports have opened up a number of questions that need detailed exploration through a qualitative study. The funding bodies will commission this study later in 2015.

research by introducing a separate section on it within the environment template. This would build on the arrangements in place for 2014, where information on interdisciplinary structures and support was invited as part of the final section of the template ('collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base').

**Question 15:** What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2020?

### Assessment metrics

65. Informed by the outcomes of the Independent Review of Metrics, we have concluded that metrics should not replace peer review as the primary approach to the assessment in REF 2020<sup>15</sup>.

66. With regard to the assessment of outputs, we propose that quantitative data continue to be provided to the panels to inform the assessment of output quality where the sub-panel, through consultation, deems this to be appropriate for the disciplines within its remit. Following the recommendation of the Metrics Review, we intend to explore whether the range and usefulness of the quantitative data provided to the panels can be enhanced, for example, by providing field-weighted citation impact. It is our intention to work with the newly established Forum for Responsible Metrics on this, and welcome views from respondents on this proposal, as well as any suggestions for appropriate output data for consideration by the forum.

**Question 16:** 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 got any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels, which can be considered in discussion with the Forum for Responsible Metrics?

### Impact

67. Our continued policy aim in taking account of the impact of research in REF 2020 is to maintain and improve the achievements of the HE sector both in undertaking ground-breaking research of the highest quality and building on this research to achieve demonstrable benefits to the wider economy and society.

68. The funding bodies consider that the introduction of this new element in UK research assessment in REF 2014 has been successful, and has allowed the demonstration of a wide range of impacts arising from research. An independent two-stage evaluation of the submission and assessment process underlines this overall view, while highlighting a number of key areas for refinement in future.

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<sup>15</sup> *The Metric Tide: Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management* (2015).

69. To enable institutions to build on the success of the first assessment of impact and allow the methodology to be further embedded, our key proposal for impact in REF 2020, is to remain consistent with the REF 2014 process as far as possible, except in the areas indicated below where the evidence suggests some further thought is required. We welcome feedback on this key proposal.

**Question 17:** Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

### **Guidance and criteria**

70. To enhance the complementarity of impact policies across the dual support system, and to underpin our work towards developing a whole system approach to impact, the funding bodies and RCUK propose to align our respective definitions of academic and wider impact. It is our proposal that these definitions would be adopted for use in REF 2020. The proposed definitions are as follows:

- Academic impact: the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances, across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory, application and practice.
- Wider impact: an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.

71. In the evidence we have gathered through our evaluation activity, some challenges have been identified around understanding the criteria of reach and significance; understanding how the criteria would be assessed and weighted; and how they should be evidenced. The view from the panels was mixed with regard to the criteria, with some finding challenging the relationship between reach and significance, and others finding the application of reach in particular more difficult. While it sometimes proved challenging to assess the criteria holistically, it is our view that this remains an important principle to maintain in REF 2020. We welcome views on this issue, and on any further guidance that may be helpful in supporting understanding of reach and significance.

72. Feedback suggests that impact arising from public engagement activity was one of the more challenging types of impact to describe and evidence, and some concern has been expressed by panels that the distinction between dissemination and impact was not clearly understood by institutions in all cases. We are seeking views on whether further guidance is necessary on submitting these types of impact case studies, and what sort of information would be helpful for institutions without being restrictive.

**Question 18:** Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and RCUK to align their definitions of academic and wider impact? If so, do you agree with the proposed definitions set out?

**Question 19:** What comments do you have in relation to the criteria of reach and

significance?

**Question 20:** Please describe your views in relation to whether further guidance for public engagement impacts is necessary, and if so, what sort of information would be helpful.

### **Portability of impact**

73. In REF 2014, impact case studies were submitted by the institution(s) in which the underpinning research had been conducted. This gave recognition to institutions' support of the research underpinning impacts and reflected our aim to assess the impact of a submitting unit, rather than individuals. It also provided a balance to the portability of outputs. We note a mix of views in relation to this issue, with some in favour of impact remaining with the institution, and others advocating for impact to travel with researchers. Arguments for the latter include the more practical, such as challenges in tracing information and evidence relating to staff who have left the institution, as well as perspectives on the principle, particularly where impacts are based primarily on the work of individuals.

74. It is our view that existing approach remains the most appropriate route to assessing impact, whereby impacts are submitted by the institution(s) in which the underpinning research has been conducted. In addition to the arguments outlined above, this will also allow recognition of, and continue to encourage, institutions' strategies for enabling impact, which may be disrupted if impact case studies were made portable.

**Question 21:** Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution(s) in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

### **Impact template**

75. The impact template (REF3a) in REF 2014 described the submitted unit's approach to supporting and enabling impact from its research. The information in the template was intended to provide a more holistic and contextualised assessment of impact than would be possible from case studies alone. It also provided a mechanism for the assessment to take account of particular circumstances that may have constrained a unit's selection of case studies (for example, a new department).

76. The evidence we have gathered suggests there are mixed views on the template from both institutions and panels. Some institutions have described a lack of guidance and uncertainty in completing the template, while others have described different issues such as the limitations of the template's length. REF panellists identified a range of challenges in assessing the template, questioning the effectiveness with which it could reflect institutions' enablement of impact, and raising concerns about its narrative basis.

77. On the other hand, a number of positive views of the template have emerged. Institutions have reflected positively on its role in helping to shape strategy and allow units to demonstrate a breadth of impact activity. Similarly, some panellists felt the template allowed them to better understand what institutions were doing, and the contexts in which impacts occurred.

78. Suggestions for improving this aspect of the assessment broadly include merging the template with the environment template (REF5), to take account of the environment for impact within the context of the wider research environment; retaining the template within the impact element, but refining its focus to provide more factual information; and removing the template completely.

79. In view of the feedback received, and in accordance with our position that REF 2020 should continue to take account of the support for impact provided by submitting units, we have identified the following proposals:

- a. Retain a refined impact template within the impact element of the assessment, at a continued weighting of 20% for the template and 80% for the case studies within the impact sub-profile. The refinements would focus on increasing the use of factual evidence where possible.
- b. Take account of the unit's approach to supporting and enabling impact as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment. The assessment of this section would contribute to the sub-profile for environment. 100% of the impact sub-profile would be attributed to the impact case studies.

**Question 22:** Which of the proposed options do you consider to be the best approach for the impact template in REF 2020?

### **Case study ratio**

80. The aim with impact in REF 2020 will be to assess the impact of the submitted unit's excellent research, not the impact of individuals or individual research outputs. This will continue to recognise the often serendipitous nature by which impact arises and acknowledges that, in a given period, not all research may result in impact.

81. The required number of case studies per submission in REF 2014 is reported as having an effect upon staff selection. In a detailed evaluation of the submission process, RAND identified a 'discontinuity' in submission of staff at the threshold points for additional case studies, and cited anecdotal evidence of the reported role that the number of case studies played in staff selection<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> RAND Europe, *Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation (findings and observations)* (March 2015), pp. 11-12.

82. We have outlined below some possible approaches that have been suggested to mitigate the effect of the required number of case studies upon staff selection. We recognise that this issue is related to the approach that is taken to output selection, so we have indicated in the suggestions set out below to which model it relates.

- Overlapping ranges: in this model, relevant to a selective approach to submission, the FTE boundaries would overlap, providing institutions with a choice about the number of case studies to submit in the overlapping areas and potentially spreading the ‘cliff-edge’ effect on staff selection. The table below illustrates this sort of approach.

<b>Number of Category A staff submitted (FTE)</b>	<b>Required number of case studies</b>
Up to 14.99	2
12-24.99	3
22-34.99	4
32-44.99	5
42 or more	6, plus 1 further case study per additional 10 FTE

- Fractional weighting: in this model, also relevant to a selective model, the choice between submitting an additional case study or reducing the number of staff selected is eased by weighting the weakest case study in proportion to the number of FTE over the threshold. So with 16 FTEs, the case study with the lowest score would only be weighted 0.1 of the other two<sup>17</sup>.
- Link to eligible staff: in this model, the required number of case studies would be determined by the average number of eligible staff employed in the unit over the assessment period. In this approach, the number of required case studies per band would need reviewing to ensure the burden of submission does not increase. It would be our intention to determine a scale that most closely approximates the number of case studies required in 2014. This approach could be applicable to all models of output selection. This would break the link to submitted staff in the event of a selective model; in a decoupled model, it would use the same data on the number of eligible staff to determine the number of case studies required.

83. In REF 2014 the minimum number of case studies required was set at two, in recognition of the weighting of the case studies within the impact element (80%) and to mitigate the risk for individuals, given that case studies may be based upon the work of

<sup>17</sup> Royal Statistical Society, *Report from the RSS Working Group on Research Excellence Framework (REF) League Tables* (2015). Available at [www.rss.org.uk](http://www.rss.org.uk).

individual academics. We aware that the minimum requirement of two case studies proved challenging for some very small units (fewer than 5 FTE), and that the ratio requirements overall may have been difficult for new units that did not have as long a period of underpinning research to draw upon.

84. We are interested in exploring suggestions for ways in which the challenges for small and new units can be reduced in REF 2020. For example, where the impact template remains an explicit part of the impact element, the weighting of the template and case studies could be altered for such units to 50% each. Units of 4.99 FTE or fewer could then submit one case study, while new units (defined as those starting up within the assessment period for REF 2020) could submit one fewer case study than the required number for their size. This weighting would reflect the increased focus on the strategy for enabling impact in new units and would reduce the weighting on one case study for very small units. Views are invited on this proposal.

**Question 23:** What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration? What are your comments in relation to reducing the challenges of impact for small and new units?

### **Case study template**

85. The case study template (REF3b) in REF 2014 was an open-field template, designed to enable submitting units across all UOAs to clearly explain and demonstrate the impact of their research.

86. To better support the assessment and audit of case studies, we propose that case studies are submitted via a web form in REF 2020 that will include a number of mandatory fields to capture some of the basic details about the impact being described, as follows:

- Name of submitting institution
- Unit of assessment
- Title of case study
- Names and roles of staff conducting the underpinning research ('role' at time when the underpinning research was conducted)
- Dates of employment by the submitting unit for staff conducting the underpinning research
- Period in which the underpinning research was carried out
- DOI for each underpinning research output listed (where applicable)

87. In addition, there are a number of further optional fields that could be introduced into the case study template to standardise the information that is collected, for example, name of research funder (where applicable). The addition of fields such as this would primarily facilitate the use and analysis of case studies following the end of the exercise,

rather than for the assessment process itself, although the information would still be available to the panels. We are seeking views on the arguments for and against including this type of additional field in the case study template.

**Question 24:** Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to better support the assessment and audit process?

**Question 25:** What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

## Underpinning research

88. We propose that examples of impact in REF 2020 must be underpinned by excellent research produced by the submitting unit in the period 1 January 1999 to 31 December 2019.

89. The window in which the underpinning research could have been produced was found to be broadly acceptable, with excellent examples of impact of many different types submitted across the panels. Analysis of the submitted case studies indicates that the time lag across the UOAs fell well within the window allowed, including in UOA 16: Architecture, Built Environment and Planning, which had an additional five years in REF 2014.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, we propose to retain the length of the window, the starting point for which would become 1 January 1999 in REF 2020 across all UOAs.

90. We are committed to the principle of rewarding and incentivising the impact of excellent research. However, we note that some issues were encountered by both submitting institutions and assessing panels in ensuring the two-star eligibility criterion was met. We would therefore like to explore how the quality threshold for the underpinning research can be more clearly defined, to support consistency in the assessment, and what additional guidance could be provided on evidencing quality.

91. We are aware of concerns that the requirement in REF 2014 for the impact to be underpinned by research prevented the submission of impacts arising from activities connected to wider expertise and / or reputation, resulting from a body of scholarship or academic career as a whole, rather than research specifically. For example, government-appointed advisers, who may be appointed on the basis of expertise and whose role is often to advise on the wider use of evidence beyond their own research outputs. We are open to exploring arguments outlining how these impacts could be incorporated, but would need to balance this against our contention that for the purposes of the REF the principle of a link to underpinning research remains central.

**Question 26:** Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research (Jan 1999-Dec 2019)?

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<sup>18</sup> KCL, *The nature, scale and beneficiaries of research impact* (March 2015), pp. 45-6.

**Question 27:** How could the quality threshold for research be more clearly defined for REF 2020? Do you have suggestions for improving the guidance on evidencing quality?

**Question 28:** What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from expertise?

### **Evidence for impact**

92. Our evaluation activity has highlighted the provision of evidence as one of the most challenging aspects of the submission process for impact, as well as presenting issues for the assessing panels.

93. In considering how best to refine this aspect of the process in REF 2020, it is helpful to distinguish the wider concept of 'evidence' into two separate categories:

- audit evidence: corroborating information that underpins the truth of the claims being made in the case study, for audit purposes
- assessment evidence: information and indicators within the case study that will enable the panel to make a judgement on the reach and significance of the impact(s) described.

#### Audit evidence

94. Following REF 2014, the panels raised some concern about the limited access they had to corroborating evidence during the assessment process. One option to address these concerns would be to require the submission of all corroborating evidence along with the case studies. This would offer panels greater access to evidence that, for the most part, institutions may already have held and would circumvent the need for institutions to be involved in the audit process. However, as highlighted in the REF Manager's report, consideration should be given to the potential increased burden on both institutions and the panels, as well as to providing an avenue for additional information about the impact to be submitted. For panels, careful consideration would need to be given to whether and how audit evidence should be used, without informing judgements about the quality of the impact described.

#### Assessment evidence

95. Analysis of the REF 2014 case studies highlighted that in some instances more standardised numerical measures could be used (for instance, quality-adjusted life years, where relevant). Use of consistent units across case studies may better support the

panels' assessment, and will further enable analysis of impact at a national level following the assessment.

96. However, these benefits need to be balanced with our intention to enable the submission of all eligible impacts. We recognise there may be some concern that the use of standardised measures may signal a hierarchy of evidence within which not all types of impact can be demonstrated.

97. As recommended in the Metrics Review, we are exploring the role that quantitative data could play as supportive evidence for the impact case studies, including the extent to which a set of guidelines on suggested types and standards of data may be useful. It is our intention to explore these issues with the Forum for Responsible Metrics, and we welcome initial views on this issue to feed into this work.

**Question 29:** With regard to the issues raised in relation to evidencing impact –

- What comments do you have on the suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?
- What are your initial views on the development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?
- Do you have any other comments on evidencing impacts in REF 2020?

#### **Submitting examples of impact returned in REF 2014**

98. We would like to explore with the sector the principle of and practical issues involved in submitting examples of impact in REF 2020 that were submitted as a previous version to REF 2014, where the research is still delivering impact arising in the REF 2020 assessment period and where the remaining eligibility criteria are met.

99. In defining the rules around submitting these types of case study, the funding bodies would like to strike the right balance between incentivising and recognising longer-term impacts arising from research, and continuing to incentivise the delivery of new areas of impact. We are seeking views on how the rules can be best designed to support this dual aim.

100. An initial issue for consideration is whether there is a need for such case studies to demonstrate any additionality to the example that was submitted in 2014, beyond the continuation of the impact within the new assessment period. We are interested in views upon this question and, where it is thought there is a need for additionality, how this might work in the assessment framework, and how the regulatory burden of any additional requirements can be minimised. Where a need is not seen, we welcome views on the extent to which the panels should be made aware that the example was submitted in REF 2014, or whether any other rules should apply – for example, should submitting

units only be allowed to submit impacts returned in 2014 as a certain proportion of their case studies? What are some of the other issues that may be relevant to submitting impacts returned in REF 2014?

**Question 30:** What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2020 that were returned in REF 2014?

## Environment

### Overall approach

101. Concerns about the narrative nature of the environment template have been raised by the REF panels through our evaluation process. In line with this feedback, and recommendations made in the Metrics Review, we propose to introduce a more structured template for the environment element of the assessment in REF 2020, which incorporates more quantitative data. It is our view that through decreasing the narrative elements of the template and increasing the use of data which are already collected and held by institutions, a more deregulated approach to the environment element could be adopted. It will be important that the data provide a clearer picture of the submitting unit than was the case in 2014, where the panels found challenging the disconnection between the data provided and the submitted staff. We are also considering whether to introduce a separate section focusing on interdisciplinary research, as set out above (paragraph 64).

102. It is our intention to work with the Forum for Responsible Metrics to develop appropriate indicators for the research environment, our starting point for which, as noted, will be to consider data which are already collected and held by institutions. We invite initial suggestions to inform this work.

103. Following the recommendation made in the REF Manager's Report, the funding bodies do not intend to schedule a formal period for data adjustments in REF 2020 where HESA data is used as part of the assessment<sup>19</sup>. This is in view of the disproportionate resource required to undertake this activity, and to further encourage institutions to ensure HESA returns are as accurate as possible.

104. As set out above (paragraph 58), following the recommendations made in the Dowling review, we are also seeking views on ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaborations beyond HE<sup>20</sup>.

**Question 31:** Do you agree with the proposal to improve the structure of the environment template and introduce more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment? If you agree, do you have suggestions of data already held by institutions

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<sup>19</sup> REF Manager's Report (2015), p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> The Dowling Review of Business-University Research Collaborations (2015), p. 30.

that would provide panels with a valuable insight into the research environment?

## Open access

105. In addition, as noted in our policy on open access in the next REF, it is our intention that credit will be given to submissions that can demonstrate how the unit's approach to open access is above and beyond the policy requirements in terms of the type of outputs that are published on an open access basis, and where outputs are presented in a form that allows re-use of the work. We propose that this information is provided through a statement detailing the unit's open access strategy, and supported with data on the unit's open access outputs and type of licencing. We welcome views on this proposal.

106. We are also interested in views on ways in which we can incentivise units to more effectively share and manage their research data. This is in accordance both with our role on the UK Open Research Data Forum, which is developing a concordat on open research data, and with our invitation from Government to consider how open data could be rewarded as part of future REF assessments<sup>21</sup>. The concordat aims to help ensure that the research data gathered and generated by members of the UK research community is made openly available for use by others wherever possible, in a manner consistent with relevant legal, ethical and regulatory frameworks and norms<sup>22</sup>. As with the previous exercise, research datasets and databases that meet the REF definition of research will be eligible for submission in the outputs element of the assessment.

**Question 32:** Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

**Question 33:** What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to more effectively share and manage their research data?

## Outcomes and weighting

### Outcomes

107. The outcomes of REF 2014 demonstrated the world-leading and continuously improving performance of UK research. In assessing submissions and applying the criteria, panels reported their ability to identify a range of research activity meeting the definition of 4\* quality, but noted that the scoring scale did not provide sufficient room to reflect the more granular judgements they were able to make. To better reflect this granularity, and to ensure there is room for UK research to demonstrate continuing

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<sup>21</sup> The UK Open Research Data Forum website is at [www.researchinfonet.org/research-data/open-research-data-forum/](http://www.researchinfonet.org/research-data/open-research-data-forum/); 'Grant letter' from BIS to HEFCE (2015). Available at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk).

<sup>22</sup> The draft concordat is available at <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/research/opendata/>

improvement, we are considering the arguments for and against dividing the 4\* category in to two – this could be, for example, by having a 4\* and 5\*, or 4b\* and 4a\*. Where a division of the 4\* category is made, it would apply across all three elements of the assessment. We welcome views on this proposal.

**Question 34:** What are your views on dividing the 4\* level in to two, to better reflect the granularity of the panels' judgements?

## Weighting

108. The introduction of impact in REF 2014 was intended to achieve our aim to maintain and improve the achievements of the higher education sector, both in undertaking excellent research and in building on this research to achieve demonstrable benefits to the wider economy and society. When developing the exercise, the funding bodies considered that a weighting of 25 per cent for impact would give due recognition to these benefits, ensure that the assessment was taken seriously by all key stakeholders, and make the benefits of research explicit and public. However, given that the impact assessment was still developmental, the decision was taken to reduce the weighting of impact to 20 per cent for the first exercise, with the intention of increasing it in subsequent exercises.

109. Our evaluation activity on REF 2014 provides evidence of significant change taking place within institutions with regard to impact activity, both in response to the REF as well as the requirements of funders more widely, and highlights the overall success of the process. In view of our intention in a future exercise to continue incentivising activity that achieves wider benefits from research, and in recognition of the success of impact in 2014 as well as the recommendations made in the Witty and Dowling reviews, we propose to increase the weighting of impact to 25% in REF 2020<sup>23</sup>.

110. We are interested in views on this proposal, and how it may be most appropriate to alter the weighting of the output and environment elements – for example, should the weighting for outputs remain consistent at 65%, with environment weighted at 10%, or would it be preferable to reduce the weighting of both elements by 2.5%? Consideration of the overall weightings of the elements is also related to discussion of the impact template as, in the event that it is integrated into the environment element, the move would in effect increase the weighting of the impact element further.

**Question 35:** Do you agree with the proposal to weight the impact element at 25% in REF 2020?

**Question 36:** If the weighting of impact moves to 25%, what are your views on how

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<sup>23</sup> *Encouraging a British Invention Revolution: Sir Andrew Witty's Review of Universities and Growth* (2013), p. 37. Available at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk). *The Dowling Review of Business-University Research Collaborations* (2015), p. 4.

the outputs and environment elements are weighted?

**Proposed timetable for REF 2020**

111. As indicated above (paragraph 20), it is our view that the most appropriate timing for a future exercise is at an interval of six years, with the outcomes reported in December 2020. An indicative timetable for an exercise according to this proposal is set out below. This timetable does not include information on key areas upon which we are consulting, for example, the appointment of members and assessors to the REF panels (see above, paragraphs 28-29).

112. In the event that the staff selection process follows a similar arrangement to REF 2014, we propose altering the timing of the census date from October to July, as shown in the indicative timetable below. This seeks to respond in part to feedback received on the challenges encountered by institutions in negotiating multiple dates and deadlines in REF 2014. It will also enable HESA data to be used in validating information about eligible and submitted staff, thereby minimising audit requirements on institutions.

1 August 2013	Start of period for income and impacts
1 January 2014	Start of period for outputs
Midday, xx 2016	Consultation deadline
Mid-2016	Initial decisions on the next REF
Mid-2016	Appoint panel chairs
2017	Publish guidance on submissions and panel criteria
2018	Invitation to HEIs to make submissions
31 July 2019	Census date for staff eligible for selection (where applicable) End of assessment period (for research impacts, the research environment and related data)
November 2019	Closing date for submissions
31 December 2019	End of publication period for publication of research outputs and outputs underpinning impact case studies
2020	Assessment year
December 2020	Publication of outcomes
Spring 2021	Publication of submissions and reports

**Question 37:** What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2020?

**Question 38:** Are there proposals not referred to above that you feel should be considered? If so, what are they and what is the rationale for their inclusion?

## **Annex A: Questions for consultation**

### **Overall approach**

Question 1a: Do you agree with the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014?

Question 1b: Do you agree with the proposed timing of the next exercise in 2020?

### **Unit of assessment structure**

Question 2: What comments do you have in relation to the UOA structure in REF 2020?

### **Expert panels**

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

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

Question 4: Do you agree with the proposed measures for improving representativeness on the panels, outlined at paragraph 31?

Question 5a: Which of the options described at paragraphs 32-34 do you think is preferable for nominating panel members?

Question 5b: If selecting nominating bodies, do you agree with the proposal to introduce a code of practice?

Question 6: Please comment on any additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies.

### **Staff**

Question 7: What comments do you have on approaches to staff or output selection in REF 2020? In your view, which approach is preferable and why?

Question 8: What are your comments on the issues described in relation to portability of outputs?

Question 9: Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for ORCID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2020?

Question 10: In your view, does there remain a material need for Category C staff in REF 2020?

Question 11: What comments do you have on the definition of research assistants and the issue relating to staff on fractional contracts?

Question 12: What comments do you have in relation to individual staff circumstances and the definition of ECRs in REF 2020?

## **Collaboration**

Question 13: What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond HE in REF 2020?

## **Outputs**

Question 14: Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will post-date the submission deadline?

Question 15: What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2020?

Question 16: 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 got any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels, which can be considered in discussion with the Forum for Responsible Metrics?

## **Impact**

Question 17: Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

Question 18: Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and RCUK to align their definitions of academic and wider impact? If so, do you agree with the proposed definitions set out?

Question 19: What comments do you have in relation to the criteria of reach and significance?

Question 20: Please describe your views in relation to whether further guidance for public engagement impacts is necessary, and if so, what sort of information would be helpful.

Question 21: Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution(s) in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

Question 22: Which of the proposed options do you consider to be the best approach for the impact template in REF 2020?

Question 23: What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration? What are your comments in relation to reducing the challenges of impact for small and new units?

Question 24: Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to better support the assessment and audit process?

Question 25: What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

Question 26: Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research (Jan 1999-Dec 2019)?

Question 27: How could the quality threshold for research be more clearly defined for REF 2020? Do you have suggestions for improving the guidance on evidencing quality?

Question 28: What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from expertise?

Question 29: With regard to the issues raised in relation to evidencing impact –

- What comments do you have on the suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?
- What are your initial views on the development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?
- Do you have any other comments on evidencing impacts in REF 2020?

Question 30: What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2020 that were returned in REF 2014?

## **Environment**

Question 31: Do you agree with the proposal to improve the structure of the environment template and introduce more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment? If you agree, do you have suggestions of data already held by institutions that would provide panels with a valuable insight into the research environment?

Question 32: Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

Question 33: What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to more effectively share and manage their research data?

### **Outcomes and weighting**

Question 34: What are your views on dividing the 4\* level in to two, to better reflect the granularity of the panels' judgements?

Question 35: Do you agree with the proposal to weight the impact element at 25% in REF 2020?

Question 36: If the weighting of impact moves to 25%, what are your views on how the outputs and environment elements are weighted?

### **Proposed timetable for REF 2020**

Question 37: What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2020?

### **Other**

Question 38: Are there proposals not referred to above that you feel should be considered? If so, what are they and what is the rationale for their inclusion?

## Annex B: List of evaluation and wider evidence

Category	Name
<b>REF documentation</b>	<i>REF Manager's report</i> (March 2015)
	<i>Equality and diversity in the 2014 REF: A report by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP)</i> (January 2015)
	<i>REF 2014 Panel overview reports</i> (January 2015)
	<i>Analysis of panel membership</i> (July 2011)
<b>REF evaluation (commissioned)</b>	RAND Europe, <i>Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation (findings and observations)</i> (March 2015)
	RAND Europe, <i>Preparing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation (approach and evidence)</i> (March 2015)
	RAND Europe, <i>Assessing impact submissions for REF 2014: An evaluation</i> (March 2015)
	Technopolis, <i>REF Accountability Review: Costs, benefits and burden</i> (July 2015)
	Elsevier, <i>A Review of the UK's Interdisciplinary Research using a Citation-based Approach</i> (July 2015)
	Elsevier, <i>Interdisciplinary research in REF 2014 submitted publications</i> (July 2015)
<b>REF evaluation (internal)</b>	<i>Evaluating the 2014 REF: feedback from participating institutions</i> (March 2015)
	<i>Feedback from the REF 2014 Panels</i> (forthcoming, 2015)
	<i>Selection of staff for inclusion in the REF 2014</i> (August 2015)
	<i>Review of the REF in the Media</i> (forthcoming, 2015)
<b>Wider work relevant to future REF</b>	KCL, <i>The nature, scale and beneficiaries of research impact</i> (March 2015)

The REF impact case study database

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*The Metric Tide: Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management (July 2015)*

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Jamil Salmi, *Research Funding and System Performance: A Review of International Higher Education Systems* (Forthcoming 2015)

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## Annex C: Open access and monographs

1. We have already stated that monographs and other long-form research outputs are not required to be made available in an open-access form to be eligible for submission to the next REF<sup>24</sup>. In the long term, however, we want to see the benefits that open access has brought to journal articles extended to other research outputs, including monographs<sup>25</sup>. We therefore wish to signal our intention to move towards an open-access requirement for monographs in the exercise that follows the next REF (expected in the mid-2020s). Given the length of time required to produce and publish monographs, we are giving this signal now to give due notice to the sector.

2. As Professor Geoffrey Crossick confirmed in his report, *Monographs and Open Access*,<sup>26</sup> monographs are a vitally important and distinctive vehicle for research communication in many disciplines, and they must be sustained in any moves to open access. There are clear benefits to extending open access to books, but there are substantial complexities involved in doing so. The above report recommended that funders develop policies to encourage moves towards open access for monographs, but also set out in detail a number of issues that would need to be tackled before open-access monographs could become widespread.

3. The report concluded that:

- Open access offers both short- and long-term advantages for monograph publication and use; many of these are bound up with a transition to digital publishing that has not been at the same speed as that for journals.
- There is no single dominant emerging business model for supporting open-access publishing of monographs; a range of approaches will coexist for some time and it is unlikely that any single model will emerge as dominant.
- Printed books will continue to be preferred for extensive reading and may form a part of many future business models; they will therefore to a considerable extent continue to be available alongside their open-access versions.

4. The report also highlighted particular challenges around the open licensing of monographs, the inclusion of third-party copyrighted material in monographs, and the technicalities of digital book publishing, all of which would need to be treated with appropriate flexibility in designing policies to encourage open access.

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<sup>24</sup> For details of our open access policy for journals and conferences in the next REF, see [www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/oa)

<sup>25</sup> By monographs we mean authored books, edited books, scholarly editions, book chapters and exhibition catalogues.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2015/monographs/Title,101531,en.html>

5. It is not our intention to set out any detailed open-access policy requirements for monographs in a future REF exercise in this **annex**. However, setting a direction of travel now will allow academics, institutions, publishers and others to take appropriate steps. We see a clear need to develop some **principles** that can govern the introduction of a policy requirement in future.

6. Despite open access for monographs being at an earlier stage than for journals, this is a rapidly developing area. There is a clear need for better ongoing monitoring of the various initiatives to ensure that progress can be gauged, policies can be coordinated, and opportunities can be seized. To this end, the Universities UK-led Open Access Implementation Group, chaired by Professor Adam Tickell, is considering establishing in due course a sub-group to monitor developments in relation to open-access monographs following Professor Crossick's report and to stimulate and coordinate further work. We anticipate that the principles set out below can be developed further with the input of that Group, but we would welcome comments on these principles from all interested parties to be directed in the first instance to [openaccess@hefce.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@hefce.ac.uk). Further details of the Group will be made available in due course.

### **Principles for a future policy on open access monographs**

- a. **There are powerful and valid reasons why open access should be extended to monographs and other long-form publications.** Open access has brought substantial benefits to scholarly communication in journals; within reason, and in as far as it is practical for them to do so, it is right that other research outputs are required to take advantage of open-access options. We wish to see a gradual but definite move towards open access for monographs.
- b. **There will be legitimate reasons why a monograph cannot be open-access, and we will be flexible about the proportion of monographs submitted to a future exercise that will be expected to meet open-access requirements.** Such reasons include, but are not limited to: the lack of viable electronic or open-access publishing options for some monographs; problems created by significant dependence on the inclusion of copyrighted third-party material in the monograph; or a substantial dependence on royalty payments for sustaining an author's research endeavours.
- c. **In as far as it is practicable, the version that is made open-access should be academically equivalent to the final published version of record.** This will often mean that the open-access version reflects all academically necessary textual and presentational elements. However, policies should be flexible in allowing author manuscripts, deposited in a repository, to meet the requirements where the author is confident that these manuscripts reflect an academically correct version of the monograph.

- d. **The monograph should at least be free to read, and ideally be licensed in a way that gives freedom to copy and reuse the published material.** The community should move towards adopting more permissive licenses, such as the Creative Commons Attribution licence (CC BY), when these are congruent with disciplinary norms and practices. More restrictive licences, such as the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs (CC BY-NC-ND), should be considered as acceptable alternatives for open-access monographs to allow norms and practices around more permissive licensing to evolve and be monitored.
- e. **The monograph should be free to access in its entirety, ideally immediately upon publication.** Partial access would not be sufficient, and may put the academic integrity of the monograph at risk. Embargoed access should be the exception, not the norm, and should ideally apply only to author-driven open access models, e.g. repository deposit.
- f. **There should be no requirement that any one particular business model be used to deliver open-access monographs.** The current models of open-access book publishing should be permitted, but we recognise that author-facing publishing charges are very high and cannot work at scale. Further experimentation is required to identify and develop business models that are cost-effective and scalable, paying due attention to the need for the monograph publishing ecosystem to remain sustainable, innovative and diverse.
- g. **Further work is needed to improve the academic acceptability and long-term accessibility of digital books.** A print copy of the monograph should to a considerable extent continue to be available, even when the primary mode of dissemination is online open access, and further work is needed by publishers to deliver improvements in digital publishing technology.