

REF2021

Consultation question responses

REF2021 guidance on submissions

Consultation question 1

a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework':

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Please provide any comments on Part 1

Consultation question 2

a. The guidance in 'Part 2: Submissions' is clear:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Please provide any comments on Part 2

Consultation question 3

a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details' is clear:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 1.

Consultation question 4

Possible indicators of research independence are set out at paragraph 130, including a reference to a list of independent fellowships. This list is intended to guide institutions on determining independence for staff holding fellowships from major research funders. The list is not intended to be comprehensive. Do you have any comments on the clarity, usefulness, or coverage of this list?

No. We believe the list, including the context that it is not exhaustive, to be helpful

Consultation question 5

Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

Yes

Please provide any comments on this proposal.

Consultation question 6

In REF 2014, academic staff who were employed by the submitting HEI and based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK were eligible only if the HEI demonstrated that the primary focus of their research activity on the census date was clearly and directly connected to the submitting unit based in the UK. Only a small number of such staff were returned in the previous exercise. These staff are not included in the annual HESA return. In the context of all-staff submission, the funding bodies are concerned about the potential complexity and burden for institutions in consistently identifying those staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK (employed by the submitting HEI) whose primary focus of their research activity on the census date is clearly and directly connected to the submitting unit, and ensuring all such staff with significant responsibility for research are returned. In view of this, at paragraph 122 we have set out a proposal that such staff are ineligible for REF 2021. However, we are aware that this may disproportionately affect some submissions, and may not allow the best presentation of research in some discipline areas, so are seeking views on this proposal.

a. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

Please provide any comments on this proposal.

Consultation question 7

In the 'Decisions on staff and outputs' (REF 2017/04) published in November 2017, the funding bodies set out their intention to develop arrangements to take account of staff circumstances in REF 2021. This decision reflected clear feedback in the 2016 REF consultation that some form of measures to take account of circumstances would be required. The decisions set out that there would be:

-measures to allow staff to be returned without the required minimum of one output where certain exceptional individual circumstances have affected their ability to meet the requirement

-measures to allow an optional reduction in the number of outputs required from the submitting unit overall (intended to recognise the cumulative effect on the output pool where units have higher proportions of staff who have not been able to research productively throughout the period because of individual circumstances, even though they may meet the requirement for the minimum of one output).

During the detailed development of these measures, the funding bodies noted concerns that an approach based upon where there are significant effects of staff circumstances on the unit's overall available output pool, rather than on individuals' contributions to this, may not be sufficient to ensure equality and diversity is fully promoted through the REF exercise. This included concerns that such an approach would not appropriately recognise the effect of individual circumstances on productivity, and the potential for negative incentives (for example, around recruitment) to result from this.

The funding bodies would like to ensure that full confidence is maintained in the approach taken in the assessment process to promoting equality and diversity. We consider that this may best be achieved through measures that will allow defined reductions to be applied for differing types of individual circumstances. This will both recognise the overall effect of circumstances on a submitting unit's output pool, as well as formally recognise the effect circumstances may have on an individual's ability to contribute to the output pool at the same rate as other staff.

We have developed draft proposals based on this approach for consultation, set out at paragraphs 149 to 193.

However, the funding bodies recognise that there are some drawbacks to these proposals, including:

-The level of burden for submitting institutions. The circumstances arrangements in REF 2014 were identified as a key burdensome aspect of the process; however, feedback generally identified that the burden was worthwhile in view of the support for equality and diversity that the arrangements provided.

-Sensitivity around the disclosure process. The proposals set out below would require requests to be submitted in advance and with only the necessary information provided to justify the proposed reduction. This is likely to reduce the level of sensitive information submitted; however, it would still require HEIs to collect and hold verifying information.

-The potential for increased under-representation through the concentration of the submitted output pool. In the 2016 REF consultation, clear concern was raised about the potential for staff with circumstances to be under-represented in the submitted output pool. Given that the output submission requirements in REF 2021 already require a smaller number of outputs than in 2014, the application of significant further reduction is likely to increase this risk.

-Applying reductions in the context of decoupling. As there is no set requirement for an individual's contribution to the submitted pool (beyond the minima and maxima contributions), reductions resulting from individuals' circumstances would need to be applied to the unit's total output requirement.

It would be important in this context to ensure that reductions are being passed on to affected staff in a consistent way across submitting institutions.

Given the issues raised above, we are interested in views on the following:

- a. The proposed approach for taking account of circumstances will achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Please provide any comments on your answer.

b. The potential advantages of the proposed approach outweigh the potential drawbacks identified:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

c. Please provide any comments on your answer.

Please provide any further comments on these proposals, including any suggestions for clarifying or refining the guidance

MillionPlus response:

MillionPlus raised concerns about the potential equality and diversity impacts that might occur from the dual decisions to submit all individuals and to decouple outputs. While we recognise that the guidance in paragraph 161 extensive and covers multiple circumstances whereby individuals may have fewer opportunities to contribute a sufficient number of outputs for the submission to reach the 2.5 per FTE average, the approach is accompanied by a great deal of burden. Primarily, it seems odd that the REF Team recognise circumstances where a lower number of outputs would occur, and specify an appropriate reduction in those cases, but still require institutions to request these reductions and await approval.

A possible way to reduce this burden would be to accept reduction proposals from submitting units without the need for prior request or approval. It should be possible to build on the details already in paragraphs 149 to 193 to provide more guidance to ensure that institutions make these decisions in a responsible way. A threshold could be applied to submitting units below which an audit could take place, but where the permissible reduction is within an acceptable range, those reductions are applied as a matter of course.

Consultation question 8 a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs':

- Strongly agree

- **Agree**

- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree

- Strongly disagree

b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 2.

Consultation question 9

A glossary of output types and collection formats is set out at Annex K, to provide increased clarity to institutions on categorising types of output for submission. Do you have any comments on the clarity and usefulness of this annex?

MillionPlus response

This information is clear and will be useful

Consultation question 10

Paragraph 206.b sets out the funding bodies' intention to make ineligible the outputs of former staff who have been made redundant (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy). This proposal reflects the funding bodies' view that, in recognition of the HEI's intentions regarding the post, including such outputs would not be consistent with the principle of non-portability. It also responds to concerns about the potential negative incentives that may be created in including these outputs. Do you agree with this proposal? Please provide any further comments.

Consultation question 11

As set out in paragraph 260, the funding bodies consider that the fullest and most favourable impression of research in the submitting unit will be presented where coauthored outputs are returned only once within the same submission (in one UOA by an institution), aside from the exception outlined in paragraph 261. This approach is aligned with the decoupling of staff and outputs in REF 2021; however, the funding bodies note concerns that have been raised about the extent to which this will sufficiently recognise collaborative research activity within institutions – particularly in the broader UOAs that will often receive submissions comprising multiple departments in an HEI. In view of these concerns, we are seeking views on this issue.

a. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of coauthored outputs only once within the same submission?

MillionPlus response

This proposal might conflict with proposals elsewhere that are designed to encourage interdisciplinary work. It may also be the case that individuals involved in this work could also be people covered by the rules on reductions (e.g. if an academic working on collaborative research has had periods of extended leave to the extent that a coauthored output may comprise a significant proportion of their output during the publication period).

b. Please provide any comments on this proposal.

Consultation question 12

Proposals are set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing data on research activity cost for outputs submitted in UOA 4. The aim of these proposals is to recognise the differing balances of research activity costs in submissions made in UOA 4 through the provision of additional information to the funding bodies

that is captured through the REF submission process. We are seeking views on these proposals during the consultation period on the following points:

- a. How feasible do you consider to be the approach set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing information on the balance of research activity of different costs within submitting units?
- b. Are the examples of high cost and other research activity sufficiently clear to guide classification?
- c. Please provide feedback on any specific points in the guidance text as well as the overall clarity of the guidance

Consultation question 13 The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 3.

Consultation question 14 a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data':

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 4

Consultation question 15 a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment':

- Strongly agree
- **Agree**
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 5.

Consultation question 16

Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A–M.

REF2021 panel criteria and working methods

Consultation Question 1:

Do the UoA descriptors provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs?
Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

Consultation question 2

Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 3, Section 1: Submissions:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 3, Section 1: Submissions:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Please comment on the criteria in Part 3, Section 1: Submissions, in particular on

- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria
- where referring to specific main panels, please state which one(s)

MillionPlus response:

MillionPlus welcomes the increased emphasis on interdisciplinary work and the clearer descriptions and definitions. These points, in addition with the establishment of the IDAP, will hopefully improve the confidence of institutions to submit interdisciplinary work. It may be useful, however, to include further detail on how the individual panels will consider interdisciplinary work to ensure full clarity and confirmation that there will be no advantage or disadvantage. For example, knowledge of the areas of expertise of panel members might offer reassurance to submitting institutions, who may otherwise fear that their outputs will be examined by people with expertise in the different disciplines, but without sufficient expertise in the interdisciplinary overlaps.

It might also be useful to reserve the option to update and adapt the panel criteria and working methods following the survey of submission intentions to take into account the nature of the interdisciplinary work that is being submitted, or to encourage greater levels of submission.

Consultation question 3 (Part 3, Section 2: Outputs):

Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 3, Section 2: Outputs:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 3, Section 2: Outputs:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Please comment on the criteria in Part 3, Section 2: Outputs, in particular on:

- the proposed criteria for double-weighting outputs in Main Panels C and D, and on whether requests to double weight books should automatically be accepted
- whether Annex C 'Main Panel D –outputs types and submission guidance' is helpful and clear
- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are as where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria.

Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s).

Consultation question 4 (Part 3, Section 3: Impact):

c. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 3, Section 3: Impact:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 3, Section 3: Impact:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

c. Please comment on the criteria in Part 3, Section 3: Impact, in particular on:

- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria

Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s)

Consultation question 5 (Part 3, Section 4: Environment):

Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 3, Section 4: Environment:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 3, Section 4: Environment:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Please comment on the criteria in Part 3, Section 4: Environment, in particular on:

- Whether the difference in section weightings across main panels is sufficiently justified by disciplinary difference (paragraphs 322 and 323)
- whether the list of quantitative indicators provided at www.ref.ac.uk is clear and helpful
- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria
- Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s)

Consultation question 6 (Part 4: Panel procedures):

Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 4: Panel procedures:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 4: Panel procedures:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

c. Please comment on the criteria in Part 4: Panel procedures, in particular on:

- where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made

Consultation question 7 (Part 5: Panel working methods):

a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in Part 5: Panel working methods:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Overall, the criteria are clear in Part 5: Panel working methods:

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

c. Please comment on the criteria in Part 5: Panel working methods, in particular on:

where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made

Consultation question 8: overall panel criteria and working methods

Overall, the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

b. Please comment on the balance between consistency and allow for discipline-based differences between the main panels