

POLICY RESPONSE

Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework – March 2017

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Overall approach

Q2. 1. Do you have any comments on the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 23?

In general, we are in favour of continuity.

Universities will have used the experiences and results of REF2014 to influence strategy and drive change in research activity. Some of this will have been done with a view of the next REF in mind, so as such we would support a proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF2014.

However, some of the changes proposed are arguably not continuity, but instead could lead to a great deal of upheaval. The proposal to submit all research active staff, for example, could be a huge change in the next REF, and has the potential to turn the exercise into an audit of research activity rather than one that identifies and rewards excellence. This change alone would be a big break in continuity.

On other points, maintaining the REF as a peer-assessment exercise, and ensuring that impact is still a fundamental element of the REF are important to keep continuity with the previous exercise.

Unit of assessment structure

Q3. 2. What comments do you have about the unit of assessment structure in REF 2021?

This is an area where continuity is welcomed, especially as many research strategies will have been established with REF structures in mind. The current number of Units of Assessment, grouped into four Main Panels is appropriate and effective.

Allowing sub-panels to introduce additional criteria / profiles would be in keeping with peer-review principles of research assessment. The assessment framework

Q3. 2. What comments do you have about the unit of assessment structure in REF 2021?

should consist of common approaches across disciplines, while also allowing panels to include additional information where appropriate. An obvious aspect is the use of metrics in some panel decision making.

Expert panels

Q4. 3a. Do you agree that the submissions guidance and panel criteria should be developed simultaneously?

Yes

Comments:

The proposed timetable for appointment of panels will be easier to manage, but the sub-panel appointees will need to find an effective way to engage with representatives of sub-panels when developing the criteria. The risk is that this could be as large an exercise as appointing a complete sub-panel, and so may negate the benefits of the proposed appointment process. There is potential for the next REF to be significantly different to the previous one if some of the proposals (for example) on staff selection and submission are implemented. If this is the case, then the guidance will need to be clear in outlining new approaches, and in supporting institutions in making possibly unfamiliar and challenging decisions about their submission. This suggests that the sooner the guidance is issued, the better.

Q5. 3b. Do you support the later appointment of sub-panel members, near to the start of the assessment year?

Yes

Comments:

If sub-panel members are appointed later than in previous exercises, then it will be vital to ensure they are well-trained and have time to establish panel relationships and working methods prior to beginning the assessments.

Q6. 4. Do you agree with the proposed measures outlined at paragraph 35 for improving representativeness on the panels?

Yes

Comments:

Ensuring the panel appointment process draws from the widest possible pool of reviewers is vital to enable the next REF to fairly assess any form of research submitted. Improving equality and diversity is vital improve representation of different producers and forms of research

Staff

Q10. 7. Do you have any comments on the proposal to use HESA cost centres to map research-active staff to UOAs and are there any alternative approaches that should be considered?

We do not support the proposal to use HESA cost centre data. We also object to the notion of a general 'all-in' approach to staff selection and submission. Both of these proposals risk diminishing the autonomy and independence of institutions to make decisions about their REF submission.

The use of HESA data is inappropriate. It was not designed for this purpose and will mislead both in terms of the activity staff are undertaking any the discipline areas in which they conduct research. Using HESA cost centre data is likely to lead to institutions across the sector amending staff contracts with the REF in mind.

Universities employ staff on contracts that encompass teaching and research, even when an individual is not at that specific point in time undertaking research activity. It provides a structure within which staff, particularly new staff, can develop research skills and capacity in order to move to a position of research independence. It is common for staff to begin in teaching positions and develop their career in that way. The sector has also been encouraged to ensure that teaching is influenced and underpinned by research and scholarship – and a broad-based contract enables individuals to move between the two activities.

A further issue is that this approach does not recognise the diversity of the staff working in universities. Many universities – especially modern universities – are populated by practice-based and employer-based staff. This proposal risks these staff being treated differently as a different class of academic, even if they are

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working within departmental teams and contributing to research activity (which may be applied, translational or impact focused areas of research that do not produce outputs in the same way as traditionally-designed research).

The proposals will also create disputes as universities attempt to include or exclude staff from submission, or request that they are submitted to a UoA that doesn't map directly on to the HESA cost centre. This will require an appeals process, managed by the four funders, that seeks to settle disagreements. This will add to the cost and burden of the management of the REF, both centrally and institutionally.

Universities will lose the autonomy to make decisions about the most appropriate UoA to submit to, and as such this could harm the assessment of their research. It may also discourage interdisciplinary research if universities lose the ability to submit to multiple UoAs.

Submitting all staff will also likely have the impact of making the sector appear lower quality than it did at the last exercise. A volume measure will be created – probably by league table compilers – to highlight the overall research intensity of a university, encouraging judgements and perceptions to be formed. The overall UK research sector could be damaged by this approach.

Q11. 8. What comments do you have on the proposed definition of 'research-active' staff described in paragraph 43?

The definition of research-active staff is going to make a huge impact both in and outside the context of the REF. There is a risk that the chosen definition could affect career choices by researchers and employment choices by institutions that are rational for the REF but not for the longer term.

Selectivity has always underpinned research assessment. An all-in exercise will deprive institutions with research concentrated in a few areas of being able to fully demonstrate their excellence. This proposal needs to work for all of the sector, not just research-intensive institutions.

Q11. 8. What comments do you have on the proposed definition of 'research-active' staff described in paragraph 43?

Some universities do not conduct research across their entire discipline portfolio, some have established strengths but are developing research capacity, while some have decided to focus in specific areas of research (be it for reasons of staff expertise, locality, competition, employer interest). The selective approach in the previous REF and RAEs enabled those universities to put forward their best research for assessment, without any sense of penalty or disadvantage on the other areas of their portfolio.

An all-in approach will mean that universities would be forced to submit staff in areas when they are not necessarily involved in research. It may also mean that staff who are at the early stages of their career development will become eligible for submission. Both of these potential consequences risk creating a disincentive to universities to support departments engaging in research.

A definition of research-active needs to be reached that is neither too expansive nor too restrictive. It should also be clear, and not be one that results in disputes. The phrase 'significant responsibility to undertake research' is unhelpful. It defines an individual's status, not activity, and as such lacks clarity. Would an individual be included if they have responsibility to undertake research, but for various reasons do not? What if an individual undertakes research, but does not have a contractually responsibility to do so?

It is not clear that the definition as stated is able to accommodate practice-based and employer-based staff.

It is important that the definition is flexible enough so that individuals are not penalised if they move away from undertaking research for a period of time. Equally, if someone undertakes research infrequently they should not be excluded from the exercise.

Any definition should be the subject of further consultation, and should be one that provides institutions with as much autonomy and discretion as possible. It should be a definition that can be applied across the entire census period, rather than just on the specific census date that is applied to REF staff selection. This would mean that, in the event that individuals were research-active (whatever that definition comes to mean) in the early stage of the census period, but subsequently moved into a non-research role, remain eligible for submission.

Q12. 9a. The proposal to require an average of two outputs per full-time equivalent staff returned?

An average number of outputs per FTE staff is a reasonable way to manage volume.

Q13. 9b. The maximum number of outputs for each staff member?

We do not support minimum or maximum numbers of outputs for each staff member. That is not full decoupling, and would remove autonomy, independence and discretion from institutions.

Decoupling staff from outputs could well promote the work of a UoA more broadly. Any minimum requirement of outputs for each staff members submitted would need to be considered in light of equality and diversity arrangements. There is a risk that, although all staff will be submitted, a small number of staff will be responsible for the outputs. This could be the case regardless of what minimum of outputs is applied.

Requiring at least 1 output per staff member submitted means that institutions may be forced to put forward both staff and research that is not appropriate for research assessment, or not of a reasonably quality for assessment.

Requiring a minimum number or a maximum number is also not full decoupling. Again, it forces the hands of institutions and removes their autonomy to select research that is appropriate for submission. For example, if a member of staff is new in post, or an early career researcher how has only produced one output during the census period, that research would need to be submitted without any consideration of the views of either the individual or institutional.

By contrast, a maximum number of outputs could mean that a highly-productive researcher is penalised by not being able to put forward all of their work for contribution and consideration.

Full decoupling of outputs would require no minimum or maximum no of outputs. If universities lose the ability to select staff because of the proposals in paragraphs 40-44, then only full decoupling will ensure they have the autonomy and independence to make decisions about what research is submitted to the next REF. As much discretion and responsibility as is possible should rest with institutions.

Q14. 9c. Setting a minimum requirement of one for each staff member?

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Q15. 10a. Is acceptance for publication a suitable marker to identify outputs that an institution can submit and how would this apply across different output types?

(Grouped answer for 10a-d)

Q15. 10a. Is acceptance for publication a suitable marker to identify outputs that an institution can submit and how would this apply across different output types?

Non-portability of outputs may reduce the likelihood of late-stage 'transfers' with the REF submission period, but it could still create destabilisation after the assessments are announced and individuals choose to move / are targeted for recruitment at the point. Again, there is a risk that it is a proposal that is a better fit for research-intensive universities than for other institutions.

Any changes to staff selection or identification must still keep equality and diversity considerations at the core. New approaches should not discriminate against those at the beginning of their career, those who work part-time, or those who take extended breaks from the workplace.

The process required to implement this proposal – e.g. the notion of 'accepted for publication' and 'demonstrably generated' – will create disputes and mean that resolution panels will need to be established. This will create additional burden both centrally and institutionally.

The changing nature of research employment has increased the number of academics on shorter contracts, who move between universities. Mobility is also seen as a strength – enabling academics to build up a range of experiences from different environments which improved their skills and capacity. Creating new constraints through non-portability could disincentivise mobility among individuals. It may also lead universities to avoid recruiting certain individuals because of the constraints around non-portability. For example, an individual may be deemed less attractive for employment by an institution because they will no longer bring the 'value' of outputs.

Q16. 10b. What challenges would your institution face in verifying the eligibility of outputs?

See answer to 10a

Q17. 10c. Would non-portability have a negative impact on certain groups and how might this be mitigated?

See answer to 10a

Q18. 10d. What comments do you have on sharing outputs proportionally across institutions?

See answer to 10a

Q19. 11. Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for the Open Researcher and Contributor ID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2021?

Yes

Comments:

In principle, this seems reasonable, but we would request the REF Team is clearer in the implications of this proposal. For example, is the identifier relevant to practice-based or employer-based researchers, and if not how will the REF Team prevent this proposal from excluding those categories of individuals?

Q20. 12. What comments do you have on the proposal to remove Category C as a category of eligible staff?

This proposal seems reasonable in light of the argument in the consultation. However, we would request the REF Team conduct further analysis to consider if any particular groups are adversely affected before committing to this proposal.

Q21. 13. What comments do you have on the definition of research assistants?

If there are views that the definition of research assistants in REF 2014 was unclear and led to inconsistent practice, then it would be valuable to ensure that, as part of the development of the guidance on submissions, there is further consultation on this point. It is likely that the proposals regarding staff selection (on the definition of research-active staff and the definition of significant responsibility) will have an influence in this area. As such, all of these, and the definition of independence in the context of the REF, need to be considered together.

Q22. 14. What comments do you have on the proposal for staff on fractional contracts and is a minimum of 0.2 FTE appropriate?

We are concerned that this proposal has the potential to disadvantage institutions with research portfolios that include disciplines where fractional staff are common and such contracts standard practice – for example, creative arts. In institutions where the proportion of staff meeting this category is substantial, it would increase the administrative burden if they had to provide additional information for each member of staff.

A more appropriate approach may be for this additional information to only be required where the staff member had a substantive post at another institution and as such was eligible for submission.

More generally, on questions 12-14, we are concerned at the lack of an equality impact assessment on these proposals. We would urge the REF Team to use the data from REF2014 to consider whether any specific groups may be disadvantaged.

Arguably, of more concern that the staff-eligibility changes proposed in the consultation is that the overall shape of the next REF, should it be implemented as per the Stern Review, will mean that no official consideration will be given to specific staff circumstances. This would have the impact of removing arrangements that encourage equality and diversity in the REF and support individuals and institutions in ensuring that under-represented groups are not unfairly disadvantaged.

This would risk setting back the progress the sector has made in recent years in supporting early career researchers, part-time researchers, women taking periods of maternity leave, and other individuals that have specific circumstances. It risks narrowing the demography of the research community as it fails to acknowledge diversity and encourage a wider inclusion of research staff.

The absence of criteria for acknowledging these circumstance, and by implication, the removal of a policy to encourage universities to submit a diverse range of staff in the next REF could well have damaging impact on the development of researchers in non-standard circumstances. An all-in approach may well work for established researchers, developed in their careers, with no specific circumstances, but it risks harming the broader research base. This will in turn have consequences for the quality of UK research in the long-term.

Collaboration

Q23. 15. What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond higher education in REF 2021?

In principle, we support this proposal and would like to see encouraged to consider collaborative efforts for submission. This would obviously include specific arrangements as secondments, but it would be also useful to consider the eligibility of other forms of collaboration and partnership research outside of higher education. A broad definition that encouraged identification of work with small and medium enterprises and other types of professionals beyond large scale industry would be helpful.

Outputs

Q24. 16. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will post-date the submission deadline?

Yes

Comments:

Yes. This will allow flexibility for institutions and ensure that they are able to submit what they wish to.

Q25. 17. What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

Taking the starting point on interdisciplinary work as the approach in the last REF is advisable. Interdisciplinary work was encouraged by the REF Team and the four funders, however, as acknowledged by the Stern Review and the consultation proposals, there are still concerns about this area of research. The next REF guidance should be strengthened to further encourage interdisciplinary research but also to assuage any concerns that institutions could lose out if research they judge to be interdisciplinary is not deemed so by the panels.

One area of concern is the impact on interdisciplinary research that may be caused by the proposals to mandate submission of all research active staff and use HESA data to assign them to a particular UoA. Institutions should be able to make their own decisions about what work is interdisciplinary, based on their acute awareness

Q25. 17. What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

of the detail of the research activity. The proposals on staff selection and submission, if implemented, may well harm rather than help interdisciplinary research as they will rely on 'harder' definitions of an individual's disciplinary allegiance. The proposal to make the interdisciplinary identifier a mandatory field could work to encourage greater selection and identification of interdisciplinary research.

Q26. 18. Do you agree with the proposal for using quantitative data to inform the assessment of outputs, where considered appropriate for the discipline? If you agree, have you any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels at output and aggregate level?

Yes

Comments:

The REF is a peer-review exercise and should maintain this at its core. However, the use of additional metrics should remain an option for individual sub-panels where it is deemed appropriate by the relevant disciplinary community.

Impact

Q27. 19. Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

Yes

Comments:

Maintaining consistency of approach with the previous REF is beneficial, particularly as institutions will have made decision about identifying the impact of research based on the experiences of REF2014.

Q28. 20. What comments do you have on the recommendation to broaden and deepen the definition of impact?

Broadening the definition of impact and how it can be demonstrated will be beneficial, and allow institutions to highlight a wider range of achievements. The next REF provides the opportunity to encourage a broader approach to identifying impact.

The current approach to attributing impact to the institution where the underpinning research was conducted is appropriate where the impact is linked to specific research, but is arguably not compatible with an approach where impact is defined more broadly. Encouraging the identification and assessment of impact based on a body of work, or expertise built up over time is likely to enable a broader range of impacts to be submitted.

The REF has defined research excellence as encompassing three distinct elements: outputs, impact and environment. It is not obvious that all 3 need to be present in equal measure.

For example, it is possible for universities to create impact (for example in their local community or with small businesses) where they have synthesised, applied or translated research generated elsewhere. In a broader approach to assessing impact, it does not necessarily follow that each impact case study has to be linked to specific underpinning research. Allowing institutions to instead identify research that has influenced or informed the impact may be a better approach. In addition, if the impact case study points to examples in policy development, for example, then it is possible that the original user or commissioner may well have been convinced by an individual's expertise across a specific field, rather than based on an individual research output.

Q29. 21. Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and Research Councils UK to align their definition of academic and wider impact?

Yes

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

A more consistent approach to defining, identifying and assessing impact would be of benefit.

Q30. 22. What comments do you have on the criteria of reach and significance?

Encouraging as broad an expansive view of reach and significance is helpful, providing that the guidance produced is clear and understandable. The diversity of research in the sector is best captured when narrow or traditional definitions are avoided.

Q31. 23. What do you think about having further guidance for public engagement impacts and what do you think would be helpful?

We would welcome further guidance in this area, particularly with regard to the distinctions between dissemination and impact.

Q32. 24. Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

Yes

Comments:

We agree that this is appropriate. However, we believe that there is merit in exploring how and whether institutions can submit examples of impact they have achieved even where they were not the institution where the original associated research was conducted. It would be useful to consider how institutions can demonstrate impact due to the synthesis and application of research, regardless of its origin, and how an individual's expertise built up from a body of research can be used to demonstrate impact.

Q33. 25. Do you agree that the approach to supporting and enabling impact should be captured as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment?

No

Comments:

The importance of impact has been highlighted consistently since it was first proposed to be part of the assessment exercise. The government has been clear to

Q33. 25. Do you agree that the approach to supporting and enabling impact should be captured as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment?

promote an understanding of the value of research investment. Given this importance, we are concerned that it may not send the right signals to wrap in the information obtained via the impact template into the environment template. It may also lead to submissions being more risk averse in the impact submission as each case study would be 'worth' more without the inclusion of an overall impact statement. This could lead to institutions being conservative in their approach to impact case studies.

Q34. 26. What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration?

The number of impact case studies submitted should be allowed to increase compared to REF2014 to provide opportunities for institutions to put forward their best examples, although it may be sensible to suggest a maximum number per UoA. A limit will be helpful to manage burden, but the potential consequence of changes to staff selection could mean that case studies that would not have otherwise be submitted will need to be included.

Q35. 27. Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to support the assessment and audit process better (paragraph 96)?

Yes

Q36. 28. What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

We are not convinced that this will be appropriate. If the intention is to only use the information for post-exercise evaluation, then anything provided should be removed prior to panels receiving submissions for assessment. Panels will be influenced by what they see; if they are not to use information, they should not see it

Q37. 29. What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from research activity and bodies of work, as well as from specific research outputs?

We believe that there is merit in exploring how and whether institutions can submit examples of impact they have achieved even where they were not the institution where the original associated research was conducted. It would be useful to consider how institutions can demonstrate impact due to the synthesis and application of research, regardless of its origin, and how an individual's expertise built up from a body of research can be used to demonstrate impact.

Q38. 30. Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research activity (1 January 2000 - 31 December 2020)?

Yes

Comments:

We believe this timeframe is appropriate, but it should be considered by panels to ensure consensus within subject communities.

Q39. 31. What are your views on the suggestion that the threshold criterion for underpinning research, research activity or a body of work should be based on standards of rigour? Do you have suggestions for how rigour could be assessed?

We believe that the focus of the assessment of impact should be on the impact. We are not convinced that in order to achieve high quality impact, the associated research must always be of two-star standard. We would welcome further consultation about loosening this criteria to enable a greater variety and diversity of impact to be identified. This is particularly important if impact is broadening to include submission of wider research activity and bodies of work.

Q40. 32a. The suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?

We believe this has the potential to increase burden without delivering additional benefit.

Q41. 32b. The development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?

This may be appropriate for some panels, depending on the nature of the research activity and impact. However, it may not be relevant for all units of assessment. It risks standardising the approach to identifying and evidencing impact, which may prevent institutions from submitting diverse or innovative examples.

Q43. 33. What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2021 that were returned in REF 2014?

This should be possible where it is clear that additional / new impact that have taken place in the new census period can be identified.

Environment

Q44. 34a. Do you agree with the proposal to change the structure of the environment template by introducing more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment?

No

Comments:

There is a risk in requiring more quantitative data. If this is not data that is already centrally collected (e.g. via HESA) then it could lead to additional burden on institutions to collect, audit and submit this data. It is important to ensure that any new data requirements take into account the diversity of the sector and can be met by all institutions with undue or disproportionate burden. It is also important to ensure that institutions can provide narrative and context in their submissions about their strategies and approaches. It may be detrimental to institutions to lose this element of the environment template.

Q46. 35. Do you have any comment on the ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaboration beyond higher education?

It is possible for universities to create impact (for example in their local community or with small businesses) where they have synthesised, applied or translated research generated elsewhere. In a broader approach to assessing impact, it does not necessarily follow that each impact case study has to be linked to specific underpinning research. Allowing institutions to instead identify research that has influenced or informed the impact may be a better approach.

Q47. 36. Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

No

Comments:

We do not believe this is appropriate. The submission eligibility rules on open access should be sufficient for driving change in this area.

Q48. 37. What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to share and manage their research data more effectively ?

There is merit in this, but the practicalities and the potential burden needs to be considered in more detail before any implementation in terms of influencing the submission and assessment processes.

Institutional level assessment

Q49. 38. What are your views on the introduction of institutional level assessment of impact and environment?

Encouraging more and greater inter/multidisciplinary approaches to the next REF is a positive move. However, it is difficult at this stage to see how a top-down approach identifying institutional-level case studies will achieve this. It may be that a level of aggregation that is higher than UoA but lower than whole-institution could be more effective.

Q49. 38. What are your views on the introduction of institutional level assessment of impact and environment?

However, much of the impact submitted by institutions will have its origins within units of assessment and so it is likely that this new approach will be one of duplication for no real benefit. Similarly, much of the information about environment is available via centrally collected data. It is difficult to see what additional value will be added by asking institutions for more information in this area.

One area for consideration that we would strongly support is the inclusion of a criteria on return on investment. This would enable institutions to demonstrate the value of their research strategies, and encourage a wider understanding of activity and investment beyond the total sum of money available in an institution.

Outcomes and weighting

Q51. 40. What comments do you have on the proposed approach to creating the overall quality profile for each submission?

Q52. 41. Given the proposal that the weighting for outputs remain at 65 per cent, do you agree that the overall weighting for impact should remain at 20 per cent?

No

Comments:

The importance of impact, and the argument that government investment in research should lead to returns (whether economic, social or others), is not supported by the recommendation to leave the weightings unchanged. It is right that outputs should attract the highest weighting, but the importance of impact could be strengthened by increasing the weighting to at least 25%, and potentially reducing outputs to 60%. The Stern Review was clear that outputs should be not less than 65% so this could prove unworkable. The only other option would be to reduce the weighting of the environment profile, but it may be that anything less than 15% for this section sends signals about a lower level of importance. If environment continues to be assessed in the REF, and as such institutions must pay attention to it in submissions, then it needs to attract a rating. Notwithstanding the recommendation in the Stern Review, there is more 'room' in the outputs profile than there is the environment profile. A combined

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output and impact profile weighting of 85% remains a strong signal of the importance of both, while providing additional emphasis on impact. It maintains the primacy of outputs, and still ensures they are worth multiple times more than either impact or environment. An increased weighting for impact will send signals about the importance of ensuring value from the government's investment in research. Leaving the profile weightings as they are is a missed opportunity to encourage additional focus on the impact of research. It also means that the outcomes of the next REF in terms of ratings and funding may look very similar to REF2014. Universities will have engaged with a hugely disruptive process that they cannot afford to not take part in, but without much or any additional reward for those efforts. It prompts huge questions about making significant changes to the process if the outcomes will remain the same.

Proposed timetable for REF 2021

Q54. 43. What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2021?

The proposal appears reasonable. However, if the next REF is significantly different from the previous REF (e.g. if major change to staff selection is implemented and / or the approach to impact is broadened) then it may be beneficial for changes to be phased in over more than one REF cycle. This will give institutions ample time to adapt, and will not disrupt or negate research strategies decided upon as a consequence of performances in the last REF. It will also allow time to consult further in some areas, and pilot where necessary.

Other

Q55. 44. Are there proposals not referred to above, or captured in your response so far, that you feel should be considered? If so, what are they and what is the rationale for their inclusion?

We believe that further consideration needs to be given to phasing in changes. We do not believe it would be appropriate to implementing all changes for the next REF. We also believe the REF Team needs to consider where piloting may be necessary before introducing changes.

Q55. 44. Are there proposals not referred to above, or captured in your response so far, that you feel should be considered? If so, what are they and what is the rationale for their inclusion?

Additional comments on Q7

Submitting all staff removes the autonomy of institutions to select their best research and put that forward for assessment. The REF (and the RAE before it) is designed to identify and reward excellent research. The proposal to submit all staff risks turning the next REF into something more akin to an audit of institutional activity in research instead of an assessment of research excellence.

The REF assessment clearly needs criteria and definitions on what triggers the decision to include staff in the exercise. Removing institutional discretion and autonomy on this completely is the wrong way to encourage positive engagement in REF. Universities should be able to use their judgement within a framework, rather than have the decision taken out of their hands entirely, or made using an arbitrary rule.

Consideration should be given to a particular level of research activity – e.g. staff can only be included if they have allocated above a certain percentage of their time to research. This approach would allow universities to use workforce allocation models to inform their decisions, and decisions would be auditable. We would not support open publication of this information, but universities should expect to be in a position to justify their decisions if asked to do so by the REF Manager.