

Research Excellence Framework: Second consultation on the assessment and funding of research

Summary of responses

March 2010

Introduction

1. From September to December 2009, the four UK higher education funding bodies consulted on proposals for the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The consultation document 'Research Excellence Framework: Second consultation on the assessment and funding of research' (HEFCE 2009/38) is available in full at www.hefce.ac.uk/ref.
2. This document provides a summary analysis of the responses to the consultation.
3. We received a total of 534 responses, as follows:
 - 142 from higher education institutions (HEIs)
 - 33 from departments or other groups within an HEI
 - 258 from other organisations, groups or associations
 - 101 from individuals.

The list of respondents is at Annex A.

General points

4. There was universal or very widespread support for:
 - a. The continuation of quality-related research funding as part of the dual support system, to be allocated on the basis of research excellence.
 - b. Research excellence to be assessed through a process of expert review, informed by indicators.
 - c. The assessment to be undertaken on a UK-wide basis, with reference to international standards.
 - d. The quality of research outputs to be the primary factor in the assessment and the vitality of the research environment to be a significant factor.
5. There was widespread acceptance or support in principle for the inclusion of impact as a distinct factor in the assessment, subject to the development of a robust method for assessment and an appropriate weighting for this element. A significant minority of responses objected to the inclusion of impact, although their concerns appeared to reflect proposals made by other funding bodies for considering the potential impact of research before it is started, rather than the historical impact of work done in the past, as we had proposed.

6. Many supported the continued publication of the assessment outcomes in the form of profiles. Some respondents argued that the REF should reward excellence wherever this is found, although some suggested it should provide additional reward for concentrations of excellence.

Assessing the quality of research outputs

Research staff

7. There was widespread support for institutions continuing to select staff whose outputs would be assessed, except from a very small number of respondents who argued that institutional selection leads to unfair treatment of staff, or that it does not provide a complete picture of research activity.

8. There was broad support for a tighter definition of staff eligible to be selected, focusing more clearly on the responsibility or role of staff in undertaking research. Many wished to avoid the difficulties experienced following the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) in monitoring the selection of eligible staff.

9. Some respondents commented on whether or not the proportion of staff submitted should be a factor in the assessment. Views were mixed on this point, although those who commented agreed that the proportion of staff submitted should be published at the end of the exercise, and generally agreed in principle that critical mass should be considered in the assessment (this is discussed further below).

10. Many respondents supported the proposal that where staff on fractional contracts with the submitting institution undertake their main research activity elsewhere, there should be some means of establishing their research connection with the submitting institution.

11. Some commented on whether the number of outputs submitted per person should be scaled according to their full-time equivalence (FTE); with most of these disagreeing on the basis that FTE does not provide a clear indication of the proportion of an academic's time spent undertaking research.

12. A small number of respondents made suggestions to reduce pressures to recruit staff close to the census date, for example, by requiring a minimum period of employment at the submitting HEI prior to the census date.

13. There was broad support for constraining the eligibility of 'Category C' staff as proposed (limited to staff employed by the NHS, Research Councils or another organisation to undertake research at the institution); although a number of respondents queried why emeritus or some other categories of staff should be excluded.

14. Some other issues relating to staff selection were raised:

- whether the activity covered within the impact and environment elements of the REF would be linked explicitly to the selected staff, or to the wider 'unit'
- whether there would be a need for 'Category B' staff to reflect research income and research students associated with staff who left the institution prior to the census date

- how early-career researchers would be defined
- the eligibility of staff on secondments.

Research outputs

15. There was widespread support for including all types of research output (including 'grey literature', outputs not published in conventional form, and so on) to be assessed on an equal footing. There was general agreement that in all cases there should be evidence of the research process.

16. Some further comments were made in relation to the scope of research outputs:

- some proposed that the REF should require submitted outputs to be available through open access
- some cautioned that intellectually influential academic outputs should not be de-emphasised in the context of encouraging applied and translational research
- a small number of responses queried how panels would assess 'grey literature'
- a small number suggested that reviews can be significant and should be eligible as research outputs.

17. Views were mixed about the proposal to reduce the maximum number of outputs per researcher from four to three. The arguments in favour of four included:

- concerns that fewer outputs would reduce the 'discriminatory power' and hence robustness and confidence in the exercise
- the risk of 'grade inflation'
- that this would not necessarily achieve the objective of reducing burden on panels because it may lead to an increase in the volume of staff submitted
- that panels could in any case sample the outputs to be reviewed in detail, whether they receive three or four outputs per person.

18. Those who favoured three outputs did so in order to reduce the burden on panel members, especially in the context of the proposed broader panels, and felt this to be appropriate if the time-window for the REF were reduced to five years (given the proposal for the REF to complete in 2013). Some suggested that reducing the maximum number to three would help support equalities and diversity.

19. Although some disagreed, many respondents supported the principle of 'double weighting' outputs of exceptional scale and scope – so long as clear, up-front criteria for what would count as a double-weighted output can be provided, and the risk to institutions of submitting such outputs avoided. This was recognised as challenging, and some responses made suggestions about how to approach this:

- a. Double-weighted outputs should be defined in terms of the effort involved in producing them and should therefore apply to all types of outputs (not just monographs).
- b. The decision about whether an output should be double-weighted should be taken before its quality is assessed.

- c. Where a double-weighted output is submitted, an additional output could be submitted in 'reserve' in case the double-weighting is rejected (avoiding risk to the institution).
- d. Some suggested the criteria should be applied consistently at Main Panel level; others suggested sub-panels should exercise discretion.

Assessment criteria

20. There was broad support for the criteria for assessing outputs to remain 'rigour, originality and significance' and to define 'significance' broadly (covering intellectual influence and/or significance beyond the academic sphere).
21. Some responses commented on the proposal to include statements of 'user significance' for outputs, where appropriate, to aid the assessment. This was generally supported subject to limiting the use of such statements to appropriate Units of Assessment (UOAs) and types of outputs, to ensure that the burden on institutions will be proportionate. Some raised concern about the overlap between these statements and the impact element of the REF.
22. We had proposed to continue with a five-point scale for the outputs sub-profile, with an amendment to the definition of 4* to raise the standard at this level. There was limited support for this, and some argued that continuity with the RAE would be important to avoid uncertainty and the reputational implications for the UK research base if the overall proportion of work rated at 4* were to reduce because of a change in the assessment standards. A small number of responses suggested it would be preferable to introduce an additional 5* level if we aim to increase discrimination at the top end.

Citation information

23. There was general but cautious support for or acceptance of the use of citation data to inform but not replace expert review in some disciplines. Some respondents proposed abandoning the use of citation information in the REF and many urged caution or expressed reservations for a number of reasons:
 - the cost and burden involved
 - the difficulties associated with 'normalising' citation data
 - the difficulties in using such information consistently within a UOA that covers diverse fields of research or a range of pure and applied work (which have marked differences in citation patterns)
 - potentially adverse implications for equalities and diversity, particularly for early-career researchers
 - the potential for differential treatment of outputs that are not included in the citation databases, or that are published too recently to accumulate citations
 - uncertainty about the value of the information to panels.
24. There was general agreement that panels should decide whether to use citation information, and if so to decide and explain clearly how they will use the data in advance

of submissions. Some respondents disagreed with our proposal that certain science-based UOAs should by default use citation information, arguing that all panels should exercise this choice.

25. There was a clear consensus that the use of citation information would not be appropriate in the arts, humanities or most of the social sciences, and some argued that their possible use should not even be considered by panels in these areas. Some other subject associations expressed views about the appropriateness of citation information in their areas of research, or which would be the most appropriate source of citation data.

26. Some regarded the types of citation indicators we presented in the consultation document as overly complicated, and generally suggested the use of raw citation counts with simple benchmarks (though there was no clear agreement about the appropriate level of granularity for the benchmarks, and some noted the shortcomings of benchmarking at UOA level). A number of institutions stressed that they would need access to the same data, including benchmarks, available to the panels.

27. Some respondents commented that the bibliometrics pilot exercise and the lessons drawn from it had been useful. (Further information about the bibliometrics pilot exercise is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/ref.)

Assessing the impact of research

Inclusion of impact in the REF

28. There was widespread support for or acceptance in principle of the explicit assessment of impact in the REF from institutions, mission groups, research 'users' and other funders, and from a clear majority of the national academies, learned societies and academic subject associations. Many felt it is important to recognise and demonstrate the vital role of research in contributing to the economy and society; to remove barriers to engagement between researchers and wider audiences; or to provide accountability for the substantial levels of public funding for research.

29. Almost all of these responses qualified their support by highlighting the substantial further work needed to develop a robust and credible method of assessing impact, and to avoid potential risks or unintended consequences. (The challenges to assessing impact are discussed further below.) Hence they proposed the weighting of impact should be lower than 25 per cent (typically suggesting 20, 15 or in some cases 10 per cent) for the first REF exercise, potentially rising in future exercises.

30. Many also raised concerns about the timetable for developing a sufficiently robust approach, doubting that the pilot exercise alone will resolve all the key issues.

31. A small number of these responses (notably some of the 'user' representatives) argued the weighting should be no lower than 25 per cent or should be raised to 30 per cent, though they recognised this should be contingent on the success of the pilot exercise.

32. A minority of responses, notably the University and College Union (UCU), some of the academic associations, individual departments, individual researchers and others,

opposed or objected to assessing the impact of research in the REF, even with a lower weighting. The UCU submitted a petition to withdraw the impact proposals, signed by 17,500 people, although the petition presented the proposals as seeking to predict the impact of research before it is carried out, rather than assessing 'historical' impacts as we had proposed. Their key concerns were that the REF would harm long-term, curiosity-driven research or disadvantage arts and humanities research, or that the challenges involved in assessing impact would be insurmountable.

33. A small number of responses suggested that it is important to evaluate the impact of research, but not as part of the REF.

34. Some responses requested greater clarity about the policy intentions in assessing impact, and some suggested the policy aims or the definitions of impact for the REF and those of the Research Councils should be aligned.

Defining impact and the scope of the assessment

35. There was universal support for a wide definition of impact, to include social, economic, cultural, public policy and services, health, environmental and quality of life benefits (including from industry representatives, who agreed that there should not be a narrow economic focus). Many also argued that international impacts or international development should explicitly be included as a type of impact. Many, particularly in the arts and humanities, suggested including impact through teaching students or training postgraduate researchers. Some suggested including impact through public engagement, academic impact or impact on other academic disciplines.

36. Many stressed the importance of ensuring that only impacts arising from high-quality research should be rewarded through the REF. Some responses queried how the panels would verify this, given that the research may not have been assessed in the RAE or submitted as outputs to the REF. Some suggested using 'proxies' such as other peer review processes and requested that the impact pilot exercise should test how this can be done in a 'light-touch' way.

37. Many raised concerns or sought clarification about the 'overlap' between the three elements of the REF, with 'outputs' including 'user significance', and 'environment' including 'engagement with users'. They generally suggested a more equal weighting between impact and environment and/or reducing the overlap by considering 'engagement' only within the impact element.

38. There was widespread agreement that the impact assessment should focus on the submitted unit as a whole and not require evidence of impact from the work of each submitted researcher. A very small number suggested that impact should be assessed at the level of the whole institution.

39. Many responses stressed that the impact element of the REF should reward HEIs primarily for generating knowledge that contributes to wider impacts, and disagreed with our proposal that the submitted unit should in all cases have exploited the research to achieve impact. They argued that the REF should reward the excellence and impact of research, not knowledge transfer activity, and that exploitation is primarily the role of research users.

40. Some responses queried or commented on the 'ownership' or 'portability' of impacts. Amongst those who commented, most agreed that impacts should be credited to the institution where the research had originally been undertaken, rather than to the institution that employs the researchers at the time of submission to the REF.

41. Many respondents argued that the assessment of impact in the REF should support collaborative and inter-disciplinary research (which is often required to address major societal challenges). They queried how due credit would be given where research undertaken by a number of institutions has contributed to an impact (including through collaborative or interdisciplinary research, or independent activity that built up an influential body of knowledge).

Challenges of assessment

42. There was widespread agreement that there are significant challenges in assessing impact, especially concerning time-lags, attribution, and the verifiability or reliability of evidence. The impact pilot exercise was widely welcomed (more information about the pilot exercise is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/ref) though there were doubts that it will fully resolve all the key issues, and some expectation that the assessment of impact in the first full REF exercise will continue to be somewhat developmental.

43. Almost all agreed with the need for a long time frame for assessing impact, with many suggesting at least 15 to 20 years, or some flexibility between panels to decide what is appropriate. At the same time, some respondents recognised difficulties associated with a long time frame:

- it could exacerbate the challenges of attribution and of tracking information over extended periods, particularly given the movement of staff and wider departmental changes over time
- it could reduce the relevance of the impact assessment as a basis for future funding.

44. Although the proposal to base the assessment largely on case studies was generally supported, respondents queried or raised doubts about the robustness of the evidence of impact, and hence the reliability of the assessment. Some responses suggested the pilot exercise should test approaches to verifying the evidence.

45. Many responses raised challenges for assessing the impact of particular areas or kinds of research, including:

- a. Research in the arts and humanities which has cultural or quality of life benefits. These tend to be diffuse or less tangible and hence more subjective or difficult to evidence.
- b. Fields of research (such as pure mathematics or sociology) that have indirect impact through influencing other disciplines – in these areas the time frames and challenges of attribution would be greater.
- c. Research in emerging or new departments, which may not have had time to build up a portfolio of work with demonstrable impacts.

d. High-quality research that is critical of government policy and is hence less likely to be taken up than research that 'goes with the grain' – but may nevertheless influence public debate.

e. Research within a discipline that has very diverse types of impact – how would a panel grade them on a common scale?

46. Some responses raised concerns about the implications for early career researchers, who are less likely to have achieved impacts from their work.

Evidence of impact

47. The proposal that impacts should be demonstrated largely through case studies was generally supported, although a small number of alternatives were suggested (for example, site visits by panels or the use of questionnaires). Respondents also generally supported the approach to scaling the number of case studies according to the number of staff included in a submission. Some further comments about case studies were made:

- there were concerns about the impact assessment for small units relying on very few case studies
- some responses raised general reservations about the robustness of narrative evidence, although some emphasised the importance of explaining impacts and their relationship to the underpinning research in a narrative
- some queried why one case study for every five or 10 members of staff had been proposed, and a small number suggested that this would not be enough to demonstrate the range of impacts achieved
- some queried or commented on the role of the overall impact statement in producing the impact sub-profile (views were mixed about its importance with a small number of responses suggesting its role should be minimal, but a small number of subject associations argued that the impact statement should be the main part of the evidence and/or that case studies should be optional or very brief illustrative statements).

48. The proposal to include indicators of impact as supporting evidence to inform judgements was generally supported, although many responses highlighted the need to broaden the draft list of indicators and to develop them further, especially for the arts and humanities. Some responses suggested specific indicators to be added to the list. Other comments on the role or use of impact indicators related to:

- the need for each panel to identify appropriate indicators, but without seeking to produce exhaustive lists of indicators
- general difficulties with collecting or verifying indicators that relate to changes external to the institution
- the challenges of producing meaningful indicators of cultural impacts (some responses argued that some forms of impacts should not require quantitative indicators)

- the need to distinguish between outcome indicators and indicators of engagement or other processes that may lead to outcomes
- whether research income from ‘users’ should be an indicator within the impact or the environment element.

49. Many responses anticipated that collecting information about impact will be a substantial burden for institutions, particularly in tracking information over extended periods, and requested that this should be investigated through the pilot exercise. Some also noted the potential burden on research ‘users’ in being asked to provide information.

Assessment criteria and process

50. Many respondents found it difficult at this stage to comment on the proposed criteria of ‘reach’ and ‘significance’ and on the draft definitions of the four starred levels in the impact sub-profile. Some responded that:

- it is not clear how ‘reach’ and ‘significance’ should be combined in cases where an impact is far-reaching but of limited significance; or an impact is highly significant to relatively few beneficiaries
- there was an undue focus on ‘products and processes’ in the draft level definitions
- the terminology of ‘ground-breaking’ and ‘transformative’ would not apply to all kinds of impacts (such as cultural or social impacts).

51. Many responses argued that the definition of impact, the indicators and the criteria for assessment should be varied by the panels as appropriate to the discipline. Some felt there should also be flexibility for panels to vary the weighting of impact, although others favoured a standard (albeit lower) weighting for impact across all panels.

52. Many respondents recognised the importance of involving research ‘users’ in the assessment, arguing that it will be challenging but essential to recruit suitably qualified research ‘users’ in sufficient numbers across all panels. To address this it was suggested that we should maximise the incentives and minimise the costs to ‘users’ of taking part in the assessment, and not regard them as ‘associate’ members. Many also stressed the need to include users, beneficiaries, audiences and representatives from a wide range of sectors.

53. The proposal that ‘user’ members of panels should focus primarily on assessing the impact element of the REF was generally supported, although many also stressed the need for ‘users’ to work alongside academic members (particularly to assure the quality of the underpinning research). Some responses sought further clarification about or commented on:

- what the process would be for appointing ‘user’ members
- the breadth of ‘user’ expertise that would be required
- the exact role of ‘user’ members of the expert panels
- whether there would be a separate ‘user’ panel to assess the impact element, or this would be done by the sub-panel with input from ‘user’ members

- how 'user' members' conflicts of interest would be managed
- the need for international 'user' members.

Impact pilot exercise

54. Many responses welcomed the impact pilot exercise, and some urged that decisions on the method and weighting of impact should not be taken until after the pilot concludes. Many urged the funding bodies to involve the sector and stakeholders in further discussion about the impact pilot outcomes before taking these decisions, and to publish extensive information arising from the pilot exercise. Many were concerned about the limited time available within the proposed timetable to do this.

55. Some responses suggested that the focus of the pilot exercise on five UOAs would limit the wider conclusions that could be drawn from the exercise, given the diversity of impacts across disciplines.

Assessing the research environment

56. There was widespread agreement that the research environment should be a significant factor in the assessment, with many responses emphasising the importance of particular issues to be considered within this element:

- plans and strategies to foster excellent research in the future (with the environment element providing a forward-looking aspect to the assessment)
- data about research income and research students, as important indicators of performance (some stressed in particular the importance of income won through competitive peer-reviewed processes)
- the training and development of research staff and support for early-career researchers (some suggested there should be explicit references to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers)
- activity that contributes to the vitality and health of the discipline, to encourage researchers to undertake activities that support the research base nationally and enhance the standing of UK research internationally
- engagement with research 'users' and the wider public, and institutional support for such activity (although a number of respondents felt that this should be covered in the impact element instead, or that engagement was too broadly defined).

57. Most respondents argued for a more balanced weighting between impact and environment (typically 15 per cent or 20 per cent for both), although some stated they would not wish to increase the weighting for environment above 15 per cent, arguing that it would unduly favour institutions that have been historically well funded for research.

58. Many responses queried or raised concerns about the 'overlapping' information considered within the environment element and the impact element (user engagement and research income from users), suggesting either that these issues should be

considered solely within 'impact', or that they remain within 'environment' but with an equal weighting in the assessment between these two elements.

59. Views about the proposals to consider critical mass within the environment element varied from strong support to cautious acceptance. There was general agreement that appropriate notions of critical mass would vary between disciplines, and that it could not be defined simplistically on staff numbers. Some argued that all panels should consider critical mass, with each developing appropriate definitions and criteria (including, for example, resources, facilities, income and postgraduate researchers). Others argued that this should be approached more cautiously, with panels determining whether, and to what extent, critical mass should be taken into account based on evidence at discipline level about the relationship between volume and excellence, or that critical mass should be considered within the context of a unit's sustainability.

60. There was general support for the intention to align income and research student data with data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), either through using HESA data, or at least using the same definitions and census dates as HESA. If making use of HESA data, postgraduate research students and research income would relate to the unit as a whole rather than be associated with selected staff, and views were mixed about the implications of this. Some argued that it would be appropriate to assess the overall environment in this way, that the differences in numbers would be marginal, and that this change would be the single most burden-reducing measure amongst the proposals. Others expressed concerns that such data would be less meaningful or inaccurate, and that it would no longer be possible to 'normalise' the data by numbers of staff submitted.

61. If aligning with HESA data, some suggested additional sources of income that should be included: facilities time awarded by Research Councils, and research funding from the National Institute for Health Research awarded to partner NHS organisations.

62. There was clear support for developing a structured template for submitting specific information about each aspect of the research environment. Some also argued that panels should assess the information through a consistent process; for example, scoring each section in the template to build up the environment sub-profile, with some scope for panels to vary the weighting associated with each section. Some noted the need to develop level definitions for the environment sub-profile.

63. Many respondents highlighted the consequences of the move to broader panels for describing the research environment: submissions would often include work from separate organisational units within an institution, which may have different approaches to aspects of the research environment. Many argued that submissions should therefore not be expected to present a coherent research environment. Some suggested that the environment template should allow scope to explain multiple organisational units, or that multiple submissions should be allowed in such cases.

Overall excellence profiles

64. There was strong and universal support for outputs being weighted most highly, with REF focusing primarily on identifying and recognising world-class research. Many respondents argued that:

- a. Outputs should be weighted at 60 or 70 per cent.
- b. Impact should be weighted between 10 and 20 per cent, given that development of the methodology is at an early stage, the significant challenges of assessment and the need to build confidence in this aspect of the assessment.
- c. Environment should be more evenly weighted with impact (at 15 or 20 per cent), given the importance of the research environment in underpinning excellent research and its effective sharing with wider audiences.

65. A small number of responses suggested a weighting of 25 or 30 per cent for impact, and were concerned that a lower weighting would discourage high-calibre research 'users' from taking part in the assessment.

66. There were mixed views among those that commented on whether the weightings should be the same for all panels, or panels should be able to vary the weightings. Those who argued in favour of standard weightings did so in the interests of consistency and avoiding potential for 'games playing', but did so on the basis of a lower than 25 per cent weighting for impact.

67. There was general support for combining the three sub-profiles into an overall excellence profile, and for publishing both the sub-profiles and the overall profile. Some commented that the draft level definitions for the overall excellence profile would need to be reworked to reflect their three sub-components. Some responses suggested that the three sub-profiles should be the sole outcome of the assessment and should not be combined into an overall outcome.

68. Our proposals that the overall profile should provide differentially greater recognition where units demonstrate excellence in all three areas, to avoid a 'trade off' between excellent research and impacts, elicited some support in principle, but also some requests for further clarification about how this would work in practice. Respondents agreed with the underlying principle that impacts should be rooted in high-quality research but tended to be more concerned to ensure this through the way impact case studies are assessed, rather than the way the sub-profiles are combined.

Panels and Units of Assessment

69. There was strong support for ensuring greater consistency in the assessment across the exercise, to reduce the complexity for institutions in responding to a variety of differing criteria, reduce the scope for potential 'games playing' and increase the comparability of the outcomes. Our proposals for how to approach this were generally supported, including:

- the broadening of Main Panels and rationalising sub-panels in some areas

- all UOAs using the same (or similar) weightings between the three elements, and a consistent approach to constructing the sub-profiles
- the provision of more detailed central guidance with less scope for sub-panels to determine the criteria
- panels varying the criteria or working methods only where justified by disciplinary differences
- a more consistent approach to handling individual staff circumstances.

70. Some responses emphasised the need for flexibility for panels to vary aspects of the assessment as appropriate to their disciplines, and raised some queries about which aspects would be flexible (especially the newly introduced features of the REF).

71. There was widespread support for a two-tier panel structure, with sub-panels working under the guidance of the four proposed Main Panels. There was also general support for reducing the number of sub-panels, largely to encourage greater consistency but also to even out workloads between panels and reduce the number of fluid boundaries between UOAs. A very small number of responses objected to the principle of reducing the number of sub-panels.

72. While rationalisation of panels was generally supported, many respondents argued that our proposed panel structure had gone too far in certain areas, resulting in some sub-panels that are too large and diverse or lack disciplinary coherence.

73. A number of respondents also stressed the importance of ensuring sufficient breadth and depth of expertise among the membership of panels, and felt this could be challenging for larger, broader panels. Some respondents welcomed the suggestion that the number of panel members would be scaled according to the coverage of the panel. Those who commented on the proposed 'sub-groups' had reservations about their informal nature and felt they should be formalised, but raised the prospect that this could in effect replicate the previous panel structure.

74. Many responses suggested additional bodies from a range of sectors that should be asked to nominate panel members. Some respondents suggested there should be greater attention to ensuring broad representation amongst the panel membership from across UK higher education institutions.

75. Many queried whether multiple submissions would be allowed in the context of broader panels. Although some were not in favour of multiple submissions, most of those who commented on this issue argued that where a panel covers disciplines that are not closely cognate, the results should be made available separately for each – either by allowing multiple submissions, or separating the panels. Some suggested that it would be preferable to have separate sub-profiles for the outputs (which could be 'tagged' in the submission) rather than multiple submissions of all three elements in the assessment.

76. Some other general points made about the proposed panel structure included:

- consolidating panels should not jeopardise the robustness of the process or confidence in it

- the importance of moderating the outcomes at Main Panel level to ensure appropriate consistency (some respondents felt that in practice this could be more challenging with a broader panel structure)
- 'smaller' disciplines could be dominated by 'larger' ones and lose visibility within some of the proposed panels.

77. Many of the proposed UOAs were explicitly or tacitly supported, with the following specific UOAs eliciting substantive feedback:

- Allied Health Professions, Dentistry and Nursing:** some respondents queried the rationale behind this combination or felt the diversity of this panel would pose challenges, typically arguing that it would need to operate with several formal sub-groups.
- Psychology:** the proposal to amalgamate this with Psychiatry, Neuroscience and Clinical Psychology in Main Panel A was unanimously supported by the main psychology subject associations. However, some respondents raised concerns about the assessment of the social science aspects of psychology, or the implications for institutional structures.
- Sports-related Studies:** views were mixed about the proposed amalgamation of sports and exercise science with pre-clinical and human biological science. While some were comfortable with this, some respondents had strong reservations that it would lead to a fragmentation of sport-related studies, which is very interdisciplinary, and that this would be particularly unhelpful in the context of making a contribution to the 2012 Olympics.
- Engineering:** many respondents commented on the proposed single panel for engineering. Most of these were concerned that a single panel would be too broad and diverse to effectively identify excellence within each field of engineering, and argued there should be several engineering panels. However, some responses were strongly in favour of a single panel – so long as multiple submissions would be allowed – to promote greater coherence across the engineering disciplines; and some responses noted the pros and cons of either option, requesting further discussion before a decision is made.
- Geography and Environmental Studies:** those respondents that commented mainly agreed that this should be a separate sub-panel to Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences. Some suggested there were alternative possibilities for the appropriate Main Panel for this UOA, and argued that regardless of this there should be partial science, technology, engineering and mathematics protection in funding terms.
- Architecture, Built Environment and Town and Country Planning:** this proposal was welcomed by some, but some suggested the relationship between research in built environment and civil engineering is stronger.
- Sociology and Anthropology:** some respondents argued that these are two clearly distinct disciplines and should be separated. Some favoured amalgamating sociology with social work and social policy, which they regarded as being more

closely linked and often undertaken within the same department in HEIs. However others felt that the Social Work and Social Policy UOA is already very diverse. Some also suggested amalgamating anthropology with area studies (or, at least, the social science aspects thereof).

h. **Area Studies; and European Languages and Studies:** the proposed panels covering area studies (including development studies) and European languages (including European studies) were regarded as lacking coherence, with most responses on this issue favouring a single UOA to cover all language-based studies (other than English which, it was felt, should have a separate UOA). Some of these suggested a separate UOA, within Main Panel C, to cover the social science aspects of area studies and European studies, perhaps amalgamated with development studies and anthropology. Several suggestions were made about the location of linguistics within the proposed panel structure.

i. **Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies:** some respondents, including the main subject associations for philosophy, felt strongly that this combination lacked disciplinary coherence, both in terms of the assessment of research across established disciplinary boundaries and the usefulness of the outcomes for a range of audiences. They argued there should be two separate UOAs, each of which they considered to be sizeable.

j. **History, Archaeology and Classics:** many argued that the scale and breadth of research would merit a separate UOA for history, and that archaeology and classics have distinct characteristics that would not fit well with history. Some argued it would be preferable to amalgamate archaeology with geography and environmental studies given the interdisciplinary nature of research, with a strong field-based element, in both areas. A small number also suggested amalgamating area studies and/or anthropology with these.

k. **Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts:** a small number of responses argued that music should retain its own UOA.

l. **Library, Information, Communication, Cultural and Media Studies:** some responses had strong reservations about this proposal, arguing these fields are not sufficiently cognate to merit a single UOA.

Interdisciplinary research

78. There was general recognition of the growing importance of interdisciplinary research. Views were mixed about whether our proposals would be sufficient to ensure that interdisciplinary research would be assessed on an equal footing.

79. Some felt that they would be sufficient, given the move to broader panels, the inclusion of support for collaborative and interdisciplinary research within the environment element, and measures for handling interdisciplinary submissions within and between panels.

80. Some were concerned that more should be done, particularly to address perceptions about the treatment of interdisciplinary research and to ensure appropriate

interdisciplinary expertise within panels. While some felt that the discipline-based panel structure posed challenges for the assessment of interdisciplinary research, they did not suggest alternative structures for the assessment.

Researcher mobility

81. Those who commented on the proposals to support the mobility of researchers between HE generally welcomed and supported them, particularly the extension of individual staff circumstances to include researchers recruited from business or other sectors. A small number of responses qualified their support by cautioning that mobility should not be encouraged 'as an end in itself' rather than for the benefits it can bring.

Equalities and diversity

82. There was widespread support for the proposed measures to promote equalities and diversity, especially the proposals to ensure a more consistent approach to the handling of individual staff circumstances. A very small number respondents believed that selection of staff for assessment by institutions results in 'unfair and punitive' treatment of staff.

83. A number of respondents made further suggestions to strengthen the equalities measures, for example:

- to strengthen monitoring of staff selection through HESA data
- to consider how institutions foster equalities and diversity within the environment element of the assessment (some suggested this should include explicit reference to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers)
- to submit requests and take decisions about individual staff circumstances in advance of the submission deadline
- to include caring responsibilities among the list of individual staff circumstances
- to systematically identify early career researchers as a separate category of staff
- clearer guidance on the impact of disabilities
- to require institutions to centralise their internal processes for considering individual staff circumstances, rather than determining this at UOA level
- to strengthen requirements for institutions to undertake an equalities impact assessment.

84. Some responses raised concerns about the use of citation information, or suggested that this should be abandoned, for equalities reasons. Some also requested further consideration of the equalities implications of assessing the impact of research, or requested that the funding bodies should undertake an equalities impact assessment of the REF.

Timetable

85. There were general concerns about the proposed timetable. Some responses felt that it could be workable if the impact pilot is completed and guidance is published by the funding bodies in a timely fashion; and recommended that we should keep the timetable under review given the need to develop a credible approach to assessing impact.

86. Most responses argued for extending the timetable, typically by one year, in order to more fully develop and build confidence in the impact element, and for operational reasons. They highlighted several pressure points in the timetable:

- a. The short period available to digest the results of the impact pilot exercise and involve the community before taking decisions and issuing guidance about the assessment of impact.
- b. The time allowed for panels to develop their criteria appears significantly shorter than was the case in the RAE, which would limit in particular the time they would have to develop criteria and indicators of impact.
- c. The limited time for institutions, after receiving the guidance, to collect robust information and prepare submissions on impact in particular. Some noted there could be particular challenges involved in terms of gathering historical information dating back 10 or 15 years (including relating to staff who are no longer at the institution), and gathering information from external sources to demonstrate external impacts.

Accountability burden

87. Respondents generally accepted the level of burden involved in the REF. Many anticipate that the overall level of burden would be similar to the RAE or could increase in comparison due to the impact element. While a small number of responses (particularly from smaller institutions) raised general concerns about the level of effort involved in participating, some argued that the robustness of the process should not be compromised by efforts to reduce burden.

88. Many of our proposals to reduce burden were generally supported, and some additional ideas were suggested, for example:

- abandoning the use of citation information
- not allowing very small submissions
- increasing the interval between assessment exercises
- national support for developments in research information systems.

Annex A List of respondents to HEFCE 2009/38

Higher education institutions

Aberystwyth University
Anglia Ruskin University
Arts University College Bournemouth
Aston University
Bangor University
Bath Spa University
Birkbeck College, University of London
Birmingham City University
Bishop Grosseteste University College Lincoln
Bournemouth University
Bradford University
Brunel University
Buckinghamshire New University
Canterbury Christ Church University
Cardiff University
City University London
Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London
Coventry University
Cranfield University
De Montford University
Durham University
Edge Hill University
Edinburgh College of Art
Edinburgh Napier University
Glasgow Caledonian University
Glasgow School of Art
Glyndwr University
Goldsmiths University
Harper Adams University College
Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh
Heythrop College
Imperial College London
Institute of Cancer Research
Institute of Education, University of London
Keele University
King's College London
Kingston University
Lancaster University
Leeds Metropolitan University
Leeds Trinity
Liverpool John Moores University
London Business School

London Metropolitan University
London School of Economics
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine
London South Bank University
Loughborough University
Manchester Metropolitan University
Middlesex University
Newcastle University
Newman University College
Northumbria University
Norwich College of the Arts
Nottingham Trent University
Open University
Oxford Brookes University
Queen Margaret University
Queen Mary, University of London
Queen's University Belfast
Robert Gordon University
Roehampton University
Royal Academy of Music
Royal College of Art
Royal College of Music and Conservatoires UK
Royal College of Nursing
Royal Holloway, University of London
Royal Northern College of Music
Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (RSAMAD)
School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
School of Pharmacy, University of London
Scottish Agricultural College
Sheffield Hallam University
Southampton Solent University
St George's, University of London
St Mary's University
Staffordshire University
Swansea Metropolitan University
Swansea University
Teesside University
The Central School of Speech and Drama
Trinity St David University of Wales
University College London
University College Plymouth St Mark & St John
University for the Creative Arts
University of Aberdeen
University of Bath
University of Bedfordshire
University of Birmingham

University of Bolton
University of Brighton
University of Bristol
University of Cambridge
University of Central Lancashire
University of Chester
University of Chichester
University of Cumbria
University of Derby
University of Dundee
University of East Anglia
University of East London
University of Edinburgh
University of Essex
University of Exeter
University of Glamorgan
University of Glasgow
University of Gloucestershire
University of Greenwich
University of Hertfordshire
University of Huddersfield
University of Hull
University of Kent
University of Leeds
University of Leicester
University of Lincoln
University of Liverpool
University of Manchester
University of Northampton
University of Nottingham
University of Oxford
University of Plymouth
University of Portsmouth
University of Reading
University of Salford
University of Sheffield
University of Southampton
University of St Andrews
University of Stirling
University of Strathclyde
University of Sunderland
University of Surrey
University of Sussex
University of the Arts London
University of the West of England
University of Ulster

University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
University of Wales, Newport
University of Warwick
University of Westminster
University of Winchester
University of Wolverhampton
University of Worcester
University of York
York St John University

Departments or groups within an HEI

Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, University of Wales
Department of Engineering, University of Hull
Department of Geography, Loughborough University
Department of Geography, University College London
Department of Geography, University of Hull
Department of German Studies, University of Nottingham
Department of German Studies, University of Warwick
Department of Music, University of Nottingham
Department of Theatre, Film and Television Studies, Aberystwyth University
Faculty of English Language and Literature, University of Oxford
Faculty of History and Social Sciences at Royal Holloway, University of London
Faculty of Medieval and Modern Languages, University of Oxford
Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Oxford
Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Cambridge
Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford
Faculty of German Studies, Newcastle University
History Department, University of Aberdeen
Humanities Research Centre, Sheffield University
Nursing and Physiotherapy, University of Birmingham
Research Institute for Irish and Celtic Studies, University of Ulster
School of Arts, Culture and Environment, University of Edinburgh
School of Clinical Sciences, University of Nottingham
School of Community Health Sciences, University of Nottingham
School of Geography, University of Nottingham
School of Health Sciences, University of Southampton
School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham
School of Humanities, University of Southampton
School of Law, Birkbeck College
School of Media, Film and Music, University of Sussex
School of Modern Languages, University of St Andrews
School of Nursing, Midwifery and Physiotherapy, University of Nottingham
School of Nursing & Midwifery, University of Dundee
School of Slavonic and East European Studies (SSEES), University College London

Other organisations, groups or associations

1994 Group

Academy of Computing, BCS, The Chartered Institute of IT

Academy of International Business, UK and Ireland Chapter

Academy of Marketing

Academy of Medical Sciences

Academy of Social Sciences

Advanced Institute of Management Research (AIM Research)

Age Concern/Help the Aged

Architectural Humanities Research Association

Association for Contemporary Iberian Studies

Association for French Language Studies

Association for German Studies

Association for Learning Technology (ALT)

Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland

Association for Photography in Higher Education

Association for Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA)

Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France

Association for the Study of Modern Italy

Association for the Study of Welsh Language and Literature

Association of Art Historians, Design History Society and Society of Architectural Historians

Association of British and Irish Lusitanists

Association of Business Schools

Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)

Association of Heads of Psychology Departments

Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland

Association of Law Teachers

Association of Professional Music Therapists

Association of Social Anthropologists

Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

Association of University Professors and Heads of French

Association of University Research and Industry Links (AURIL)

Bibliographical Society

BIS Expert Group for Women in STEM

Board of Celtic Studies Scotland

Britain and Ireland Association for Political Thought

British Academy

British Academy of Management

British and Irish Orthoptic Society

British Association for American Studies

British Association for Applied Linguistics

British Association for Canadian Studies

British Association for Chinese Studies

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

British Association for Information and Library Education and Research (BAILER)
British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies
British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences
British Commission for Maritime History
British Educational Leadership Management and Administration Society (BELMAS)
British Educational Research Association
British Forum for Ethnomusicology
British Geophysical Association
British Heart Foundation
British International Studies Association (BISA)
British Library
British Medical Association
British Philosophical Association
British Society for Ethical Theory
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
British Society for Oral & Dental Research
British Society for Phenomenology
British Society for the History of Science
British Society of Criminology
British Society of Gerontology
British Society of Rehabilitation Medicine
British Sociological Association
Cancer Research UK
Cardiff Institute for Co-operative Studies
Carnegie Research Institute, Centre for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion
Chartered Institute of Architectural Technologists (CIAT)
Chartered Institute of Marketing
Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers
Chartered Society of Physiotherapy
Chief Scientist Office, Scottish Government Health Directorates
Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE)
Civil Aviation Authority
College of Occupational Therapists
Committee of Departments of Accounting and Finance (CDAF)
Committee of Heads of Law Schools
Committee of Heads of University Geoscience Departments (CHUGD)
Committee of Professors in Operational Research (COPIOR)
Committee of Professors of Statistics, UK and Ireland (COPS)
Comparative Literature Association
Confederation of British Industry (CBI)
Conference of Professors of accounting and Finance (CPAF)
Conference of the Heads of Planning Schools (CHOPS)
Consortium of Institutes of Advanced Studies
Council for College and University English and The English Association
Council for Higher Education in Art & Design (CHEAD)
Council for Hospitality Management Education

Council for the Mathematical Sciences
Council of Academic Byzantinists
Council of Deans of Health
Council of Heads of Built Environment
Council of Information Systems Professors (CISP)
Council of the British Association for Korean Studies
Council of University Classical Departments
Council of University Heads of Pharmacy
Countryside and Community Research Institute
Crafts Council
Dental Schools Council
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
Department of Energy and Climate Change
Development Studies Association
Difficult Airway Society (UK)
Doctoral Midwifery Research Society
Economic History Society
Educators for Reform
Engineering Professors' Council
Engineering UK
Environment Agency
Environment Research Funders' Forum
Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)
Geological Society
Group of 28 Law academics
Group of 42 Law and Legal Theory academics
Group of academics and clinical researchers funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
Group of early career academics and postgraduate students in the humanities and social sciences
Group of leading Sport and Exercise Science schools
Guild HE
Heads of Celtic Departments and former members of RAE Celtic Studies sub panel
Heads of Chemistry UK
Heads of Department of the Society for Academic Primary care
Heads of Geography Departments
Heads of Research at the Independent Research Organisation (IROs)
Heads of University Centres of Biomedical Sciences (HUCBMS)
Health Services Research Network
Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
Higher Education Wales
History & Policy Group
History and Education Society Great Britain
History Research Wales
History UK (HE)
Housing Studies Association

Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)
Institute of Nursing Research
Institute of Physics
Institution of Chemical Engineers
Institution of Civil Engineers
Institution of Engineering and Technology
Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (IOSH)
INVOLVE
Joint Committee for Psychology in Higher Education
Joint Committee for Specialist Training in Dentistry
Joint University Council (JUC) Social Work Education Committee (SWEC)
Leisure Studies Association
Library and Information Science Research Coalition
Linguistics Association of Great Britain (LAGB)
Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association
Medical Schools Council
Members of the RAE 'English Language and Literature' sub panel
Members of the RAE 'French' sub panel
Members of the RAE 'German, Dutch and Scandinavian Languages' sub panel
Members of the RAE 'Iberian and Latin American Languages' sub panel
Members of the RAE 'Italian' sub panel
Mendeley Ltd
Mental Health Nurse Academics (UK)
Microsoft Research, Cambridge
Million+
Mind Association
Modern Universities Research Group (MURG)
Multiple Sclerosis Society
National Action Research Programme on Public Engagement in Higher Education
National Association for Music in Higher Education
National Association of Writers in Education
National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
National Union of Students
NIHR Leadership Forum Members
Operational Research Society
Organisation Women in German Studies
Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain
Political Studies Association (BSA)
PraxisUnico
Professors and Heads of Electrical Engineering (PHEE)
Public Administration Committee of the Joint University Council
Public Money & Management
Regional Studies Association
Remote Sensing and Photogrammetry Society
Research and Teaching Group

Research Concordat Strategy Group
Research Councils UK (RCUK)
Research Forum for Allied Health Professionals
Research Information Network
Royal Academy of Engineering
Royal College of Anaesthetists & National Institute for Academic Anaesthesia
Royal College of Obstetricians & Gynaecologists
Royal Economic Society
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
Royal Historical Society
Royal Institute of British Architects
Royal Mencap Society
Royal Musical Association (RMA)
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain
Royal Society
Royal Society of Edinburgh
Royal Society of Literature
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
Russell Group
Scots Philosophical Association
Scottish Educational Research Association
Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA)
Scottish Historical Review Trust
Social Policy Association
Social Policy Committee of the Joint University Council
Social Research Group, Scottish Government
Society and College of Radiographers (SCoR)
Society for Dance Research
Society for French Studies
Society for Italian Studies
Society for Old Testament Study
Society for Research into Higher Education
Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies
Society for the Social History of Medicine
Society for the Study of Artificial Intelligence and Simulation of Behaviour (SSAISB or AISB)
Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature
Society of Antiquaries of London
Society of Biology
Society of General Microbiology
Society of Legal Scholars
Standing Conference of Heads of European Studies
Standing Conference of Heads of Schools of Architecture (SCHOSA)
Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD)
Standing Conference on Dance in Higher Education
Study of German Politics (IASGP)

Subject Committee for Archaeology
The Association of Tourism in Higher Education
The Institute of Development Studies
The Royal Astronomical Society
The Royal College of Midwives
UK Academy for Information Systems (UKAIS)
UK and Ireland Forum for Archives and Records Management Education and Research
UK Collaborative on Development Sciences
UK Computing Research Committee (UKCRC)
UK Council of Heads and Professors of Sociology
UK Network of Health Promotion Academics
UK Research Councils' Rural Economy and Land Use Programme
UK Resource Centre for Women in Science, Engineering & Technology
United Kingdom Council for Area Studies Associations
United Kingdom Deans of Science (UKDS)
Universities and Colleges Information Systems (UCISA)
Universities Association for Lifelong Learning
Universities Council for the Education of Teachers (UCET)
Universities Scotland
Universities UK (UUK)
University Alliance
University and College Union (UCU)
University and College Union (UCU) Scotland
University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES)
University Council for General and Applied Linguistics (UCGAL)
University Council of Modern Languages
University Departments of Economics (CHUDE)
University Forum for Human Resource Development (UFHRD)
Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Vitae
Wellcome Trust
Welsh Medium Higher Education Sector Group
Women's History Network
Writetoreply.org

List of abbreviations

FTE	Full-time equivalence
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
REF	Research Excellence Framework
UOA	Unit of Assessment
UCU	University and College Union