



Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

Review of Research Excellence Framework (REF)

As announced in the Spending Review 2015, the government is taking forward a review of the Research Excellence Framework (REF) to ensure that future university research funding is allocated more efficiently, offers greater rewards for excellent research and reduces the administrative burden on institutions.

The review will be chaired by the President of the British Academy and former World Bank Chief Economist Lord Nicholas Stern. He will be assisted by a high-level steering group of experts, including:

- Professor Julia Black, Professor of Law and Pro-director for Research, London School of Economics
- Professor Sir Leszek Borysiewicz, immunologist and Vice-Chancellor, Cambridge University
- Dame Professor Vicki Bruce, psychologist, Newcastle University
- Professor Linda Colley, historian, Princeton University
- Gareth Davies, Director General of Business and Science, BIS
- Professor Alex Halliday, geochemist, Oxford University and Vice-President and Physical Secretary, The Royal Society
- Professor Julia King, The Baroness Brown of Cambridge, engineer and Vice-Chancellor, Aston University
- Professor Anton Muscatelli, economist and Vice-Chancellor, Glasgow University
- Professor Sir John Tooke, medical scientist, UCL and Past President, Academy of Medical Sciences

Lord Stern is expected to deliver his review of the REF to the government in summer 2016.

We will also be establishing an advisory group to help inform and support the review. We have invited officials from each of the Devolved Administrations, alongside the Treasury to be involved in the advisory group and will also ensure the review is able to draw on expertise from within the research sector on the detailed operation of the REF. In this way we can ensure the review takes full account of the benefits of REF as a UK-wide process.

Terms of reference

1. The review will investigate different approaches to the evaluation of UK higher education research performance which can encourage and strengthen the emphasis on delivering excellent research and impact, while simplifying and reducing the administrative burden on the HE sector.
2. The review will draw on the evidence from the evaluation of REF2014 and will consider other models of research performance assessment, which could provide robust means of informing future research funding allocations.
3. The review will provide options for future iterations of the REF focusing on a simpler, lighter-touch method of research assessment, that more effectively uses data and metrics while retaining the benefits of peer review. The review should ensure that a future process identifies and supports excellent research across the UK, including dynamic changes in research quality and emerging areas of research excellence, retains the frequency of approach of the current REF arrangements (at 5-6 year cycle) and secures the confidence of the HE/Academic sector.

Background on the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is an exercise that takes place every 5-6 years to assess the quality of research produced from UK universities. The results of the REF are used by higher education funding bodies across the UK to inform the allocation of annual Quality-Related (QR) research funding to individual higher education institutions. This is the university block grant for research, which for English universities is allocated from the £4.7 billion pa science and research budget, and amounted to ca £1.6 billion in 2015-16.

Over thirty years the REF and its predecessors have driven a sustained improvement in the quality and productivity of the UK research base. However it also places an operational and admin burden on both the HE funding bodies and on individual universities and academics. Costs for undertaking REF2014 have been estimated at £246 million of which £232 million were costs to the HE sector. It is important that the approach to research assessment is proportionate to the role and benefits.

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