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**REF** 2017/01

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# Initial decisions on the Research Excellence Framework 2021

This document sets out the first set of the funding bodies' initial decisions on the Research Excellence Framework following the recent consultation. A further set of decisions will be taken on the remaining aspects of the framework in the autumn, incorporating further consultation activity.

**This document is for information.**

**REF**2021 Research  
Excellence  
Framework

## Initial decisions on the Research Excellence Framework 2021

To	Heads of HEFCE-funded higher education institutions Heads of higher education institutions in Northern Ireland Heads of higher education institutions in Scotland Heads of higher education institutions in Wales Heads of alternative providers in England Subject associations Organisations with an interest in commissioning and using academic research including businesses, public sector bodies, charities and other third sector organisations
Of interest to those responsible for	Research, Planning
Reference	REF <b>2017/01</b>
Publication date	September 2017
Enquiries to	Gina Reid tel 0117 931 7392 email <a href="mailto:info@ref.ac.uk">info@ref.ac.uk</a>

### Executive summary

#### Purpose and key points

1. This document sets out the funding bodies' decisions on several aspects of the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Our letter accompanying these decisions 'Initial decisions on REF 2021' (HEFCE Circular letter 33/2017) sets out further information about the background and about additional aspects of the framework on which we are holding further discussions. This document sets out decisions in relation to the following aspects of the REF:

- Assessment of output quality, in relation to interdisciplinary research, outputs due for publication after the submission date, and assessment metrics.
- Collaboration.
- Harmonised definitions of impact.
- Assessment of impact.
- Unit of assessment (UOA)-level environment.
- Institutional-level assessment.
- UOA structure.
- Recruitment of the expert panels.
- Outcomes and weightings.
- REF development timetable.

2. This document also:
- Invites individuals to apply to become sub-panel chairs.
  - Invites organisations and associations with an interest in research to provide updated contact information, in preparation for the nominations process for panel members.

### **Action required**

3. We are updating our list of nominating bodies, ahead of inviting nominations for panel members later in the autumn. The REF 2014 list of nominating bodies is available on the REF website ([www.ref.ac.uk/panels/panelmembership/](http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/panelmembership/)). We will shortly write a letter to organisations on this list, asking them to confirm their interest in nominating panel members and to provide us with up-to-date contact information. Subject associations and other organisations with an interest in research conducted by UK higher education institutions that would like to make nominations but do not receive this letter, should contact us by email at [admin@ref.ac.uk](mailto:admin@ref.ac.uk) by **Friday 15 September 2017**.
4. Individuals wishing to apply to become sub-panel chairs should refer to the particulars available at Annex B. Applications are due by **noon on Wednesday 11 October 2017**.
5. Higher education institutions and other groups and organisations with an interest in the conduct, quality, funding or use of research are invited to provide their views on the proposed approaches to the submission of staff and output portability, and the eligibility of institutions to participate in the REF. Further information is set out in HEFCE Circular letter 33/2017.

## Background

6. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It was first conducted in 2014, and replaced the previous Research Assessment Exercise. The REF will be undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies: the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), and the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE). The exercise will be managed by the REF team based at HEFCE and overseen by the REF Steering Group, consisting of representatives of the four UK higher education funding bodies.

7. As laid out in the Higher Education and Research Act (2017), from 1 April 2018 HEFCE's research and knowledge exchange functions will move to a newly created council, Research England, within the new organisation UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This will involve joint responsibility with the other three funding bodies for undertaking the REF, with the REF team based at Research England from this date.

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

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

9. In addition, Lord Stern identified three further roles fulfilled by the REF:

- To provide a rich evidence base to inform strategic decisions about national research priorities.
- To create a strong performance incentive for HEIs and individual researchers.
- To inform decisions on resource allocation by individual HEIs and other bodies.

10. The conduct of the exercise will continue to be governed by the following principles:

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

11. Following an independent review of the REF in 2016, led by Lord Stern, the funding bodies consulted on the implementation of the next exercise in 2021<sup>1</sup>. We received 388 responses to the consultation. A detailed summary of responses will be available on the HEFCE website shortly.

12. Following the consultation, the funding bodies have taken a number of initial decisions on several high-level aspects of the framework, including: measures to support interdisciplinary research further; arrangements for assessing impact and the environment at unit of assessment (UOA) level; decisions relating to institutional-level assessment; and information about the UOA structure and recruitment of panels.

13. We are undertaking further engagement activity in some areas before finalising the arrangements, including on: the eligibility of institutions to participate in the exercise; submission of staff; and output portability. We have set this out in further detail, along with information on how to share your views, in 'Initial decisions on REF 2021' (HEFCE Circular letter 33/2017)<sup>2</sup>.

## **Initial decisions on REF 2021**

### **General features**

14. Consultation respondents broadly welcomed the intention to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014, in order to minimise burden, enable strategic planning and allow comparability across exercises. Consistency with REF 2014 will be retained in the following general features of the exercise:

- a. The assessment outcomes will be the products of expert review, informed by indicators where appropriate.
- b. The assessment will be undertaken by an expert sub-panel for each UOA, working under the guidance of the four broader Main Panels.
- c. For each submission, three distinct elements will be assessed – output quality, impact and environment.

### **Assessment of output quality**

#### Interdisciplinary research

15. The Stern review underlined 'the essential role of interdisciplinary research in addressing complex problems and research questions posed by global social, economic, ecological and political challenges'<sup>3</sup>. In view of the majority support for our proposals, and following initial advice from the Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP), we will implement the following procedures to support interdisciplinary research further, in addition to the wider enhancements introduced in 2014:

- a. Each sub-panel will have at least **one appointed member** to oversee and participate in the **assessment of interdisciplinary research** submitted in that

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<sup>1</sup> The Stern review, 'Building on Success and Learning from Experience' (2016) is available online at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/research-excellence-framework-review>. Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework' (HEFCE 2016/36) is available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201636/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201636/).

<sup>2</sup> Available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/CL\\_332017/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/CL_332017/).

<sup>3</sup> 'Building on Success and Learning from Experience', paragraph 100.

UOA, with a specific role to ensure its equitable assessment. This role will include liaison with corresponding members on other sub-panels.

b. To enable better identification of interdisciplinary research that falls within the oversight of the appointed members described above, an **'interdisciplinary identifier' for outputs** will be retained in the submission system. This will not be a mandatory field. A definition for, and clearer guidance on its use, will be developed with advice from IDAP.

c. There will be a **discrete section in the environment template** on the submitting unit's structures in support of **interdisciplinary research**. As with the wider decisions on the environment, appropriate indicators will be required as evidence of narrative content. Where units do not have such structures, they should provide a clear rationale as to why structures supporting interdisciplinary research are not appropriate for that unit.

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

16. A **reserve output may be submitted** in cases where the publication of the preferred output will postdate the submission deadline. This addresses the risk of an unclassified score in the event of the output not being published in time. Where a reserve output is included, its use must still ensure that wider requirements are met for the submission, in terms of any minimum and maximum output requirements per staff member.

#### Assessment metrics

17. **Quantitative data** may be used to inform the assessment of outputs, where **panels consider this appropriate** for the discipline. This will be included according to the following process:

a. A framework of central guidance will be developed to ensure appropriate use of metrics. Panels will set out in their criteria statements whether or not they will use such data, and if so, how they will make use of it.

b. For those sub-panels that will be using it, we will provide citation data, in a standardised and simplified format, in respect of those outputs that can be matched to the relevant citation database (except for those published too recently to accumulate significant numbers of citations).

c. We will aim to procure the data and make it available to panels in a consistent and transparent way. As in the 2014 exercise, we will aim to make output-level data available in an appropriate form to institutions during the submission process, as well as any contextual data provided to the panels following the submission deadline, for information.

#### **Collaboration**

18. There was broad support in the consultation for better recognising collaborative activity in the REF. We will therefore include in the revised environment template (see paragraphs 27-29) an **explicit focus** on the submitting unit's approach to **supporting collaboration** with organisations beyond higher education.

## Harmonised definitions of impact

19. It is our view that aligning definitions of impact with the Research Councils will enhance the complementarity of impact policies across the dual support system, and underpin our work towards developing a whole-system approach to impact. The proposal to align definitions was supported by the vast majority of consultation respondents.

20. The UK funding bodies will **work with the Research Councils to align their definitions** of 'academic impact' and 'wider impact' for the purposes of REF. The definition of 'academic impact' will apply in the assessment of outputs in the REF, and will be understood in relation to the output assessment criterion of 'significance'. The definition of 'wider impact' will apply to the assessment of the impact element in REF, maintaining consistency with 2014.

## Impact

21. A key recommendation of the Stern review was to ensure the REF could better capture the multiple and diverse pathways and mechanisms through which impact arises from a body of work, and through which real benefits to the UK and wider world are delivered. This aim was widely supported by respondents to the consultation, and the funding bodies will seek to implement this in the exercise, as follows:

- We will work with the panels to **provide additional guidance** on:
  - The criteria for impact of 'reach and significance'.
  - Impact arising from public engagement.
- The guidance on **submitting impacts on teaching will be widened** to include impacts within, as well as beyond, the submitting institution. We will also work with the panels to develop appropriate guidance on demonstrating evidence against the criteria for this type of impact.

22. Informed by the overwhelming support for continuity where possible with the REF 2014 assessment process for impact, as well as responses on each issue individually, we will **maintain consistency** with the previous exercise in the following key areas:

- a. Impacts will remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the associated research has been conducted.
- b. Impacts should be underpinned by excellent research, with 'excellent' research continuing to mean the quality of the research is at least equivalent to two star.
- c. The excellent research underpinning impact case studies must have been produced during the period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020 across all UOAs. This will apply to all case studies, including examples continued or developed from REF 2014 (see paragraph 26b). The impacts described in case studies must have occurred within the period from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020.

23. Further detailed guidance will be developed on how these decisions are understood in relation to the broadening of the link between the research and impact (see paragraph 26c).

24. There is evidently scope to add some refinements to the assessment process, as set out in the Stern review, indicated in our evaluation evidence and supported in the consultation. We will therefore refine the process as follows:

- a. The **impact template** ('REF3a' in 2014) will be included as an **explicit section in the environment element** of the assessment. The detailed guidance and criteria for this section will be developed as part of the wider development of the environment.
- b. The **impact case study template** ('REF3b' in 2014) will be revised to include a set of **mandatory fields**, the better to support the assessment and audit process. These will include prefatory material, including the case study title, as well as information relating to the time period and employment of staff involved in the associated research.
- c. The revised impact case study template will also include a section for **additional contextual data** to be provided in a **standardised way** (for example, the research funder, where applicable). This section will be mandatory, to enhance the quality and consistency of data provided, but the data will **not** be routinely provided to the panels. This recognises concerns raised in the consultation about the potential for this data to influence the assessment. We will develop detailed guidance on the requested data.
- d. We will require the **routine provision of audit evidence** (corroborating information underpinning the truth of the claim made in the case study) on submission. This will **not** be routinely provided to the sub-panels, but will be made available on panel request as part of the audit procedures. This follows feedback from panel members in 2014 regarding the limited access they had to corroborating evidence during the assessment process.

25. We will develop guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact, with a working group of the Forum for Responsible Research Metrics. We will ensure this work takes due account of concerns raised about the uneven applicability of such guidelines across types of impact and discipline areas, and the potential to create hierarchies of evidence inadvertently.

26. We consulted on three aspects relating to impact that require further exploration before decisions can be finalised. The direction of travel in each case, and the indicative timetable for decisions, are as follows:

- a. **The number of case studies required.** Our starting point remains that the total number of case studies submitted in the exercise overall should not significantly exceed the number submitted in 2014. We intend that the number of case studies required by submitting units will be determined in relation to the volume of activity in the unit. We are exploring the value of linking this to the number of outputs required. This will be developed as part of the further work on the arrangements for submitting staff, which will also inform decisions on the appropriate minimum number of case studies required per submitting unit.
- b. **Case studies continued** from examples submitted in 2014 will be eligible for submission in REF 2021. All impact case studies submitted in REF 2021 will need



to meet the same eligibility criteria, including the length of the window for underpinning research and the assessment period for the impact described (see paragraph 22c). Further to this:

- i. To inform our understanding of the balance between submitted case studies that are continued from 2014 case studies, and those that are new, submitting units will need to identify continued case studies in the case study template.
  - ii. In view of the support in the consultation on this point, continued or developed case studies will need to provide evidence of additionality to the example submitted in 2014. We will work in further dialogue with the sector to establish some general principles on this, which can be appropriately tailored by discipline area by the panels. This work will include consideration of where the continuation of impact within the new assessment period may itself represent additionality.
- c. **Research activity and bodies of work.** In line with Stern's recommendation, and in view of the support given to the proposal in the responses to the consultation, we intend to broaden out the relationship between the underpinning research and impact from individual outputs, to include a wider body of work or research activity. There are several issues to consider, in dialogue with the sector, in developing detailed guidelines on this, including those of non-portability of impact and establishing the quality threshold. We intend to develop this further over the autumn, to feed into the detailed guidance on submissions.

### **UOA-level environment**

27. The UOA-level environment element will be assessed on the basis of a **more structured template**, including the use of **more quantitative data** to evidence narrative content. We will work with a working group of the Forum for Responsible Research Metrics in developing the overarching structure of the template and guidance on including more of the quantitative data that is already collected and held by institutions. Data on research income, income in kind and research degrees awarded will continue to be included in this element.

28. The revised template will build on the information required in 2014 as a starting point, including on the unit's approach to supporting equality and diversity. As noted above, it will include information on the unit's approach to enabling impact in the period (see paragraph 24a), supporting collaboration (paragraph 18) and structures to support interdisciplinary research (see paragraph 15c).

29. The revised template will also include a **section on 'open research'**, detailing the submitting unit's open access strategy, including where this goes above and beyond the REF open access policy requirements, and wider activity to encourage the effective sharing and management of research data. The panels will set out further guidance on this in the panel criteria.

## **Institutional-level assessment**

### Environment

30. The Stern review identified that, in previous exercises, some aspects of environment statements reflected the institution's strategy and investment. In seeking to recognise this, and reduce duplication in the submission for institutions, the review proposed the introduction of an institutional-level environment statement. Cautious support was given to this proposal in consultation responses, underlining the need for careful testing of this aspect, as indicated in the Stern review.

31. **Institutional-level information** will be included in the **UOA-level environment template** and will be assessed by the relevant sub-panel in REF 2021. This will formalise the submission of information at the institutional level in the UOA-level environment template returned in previous exercises. The information requirements will be developed during the autumn, along with the wider development of the UOA environment template.

32. We will **pilot the standalone assessment** of the institutional-level environment, drawing on this submitted information. Outcomes from the separate pilot exercise will **not** be included in REF 2021. We will establish a cross-disciplinary panel at the institutional level to undertake the pilot assessment. The outcomes from this pilot assessment will inform the inclusion of a discrete institutional-level environment element in future exercises.

### Institutional-level impact case studies

33. We will **pilot** an assessment of **institutional-level impact case studies**. In view of the timescale for this activity, this aspect will **not** be included in REF 2021. The pilot exercise will instead inform decisions about the most appropriate way to give recognition and reward to institutions for this activity in future exercises.

34. The Stern review recommendation to introduce an institutional-level assessment was intended to give increased flexibility to institutions to showcase examples of impact arising from interdisciplinary or collaborative activity. Consultation feedback identified a lack of clarity around the purpose of the assessment (including concern that 'interdisciplinary' and 'institutional' were unhelpfully conflated), and raised concerns around the relationship with UOA-level case studies, for small and specialist institutions in particular.

35. The funding bodies recognise the opportunities indicated in the Stern review proposal, and identified by a number of respondents to the consultation, for institutions to demonstrate the range of contributions they make beyond academia. Further development work is required to ensure full clarity and value is achieved through an assessment process. The funding bodies consider that a pilot will offer the opportunity to explore the wider contributions made by institutions across the breadth of their activity, including research, teaching and knowledge exchange.

36. We will start development activity over the autumn to gather further evidence and views to inform the design of the pilot exercise. We expect that this will enable pilot activity to start in early 2018. We expect to work on the pilot with a range of institutions that reflect the diversity of the UK higher education sector, and will invite institutions to

express an interest in participating in this pilot activity following the completion of the development work.

### **UOA structure**

37. The UOA structure is set out at Annex A. We have sought to maintain consistency where possible with the 2014 UOA structure, in view of the considerable support this proposal received in responses to the consultation. We explored revisions in a small number of areas, informed by issues raised in consultation responses and further dialogue with the relevant subject communities. As well as taking account of the clear support for continuity, we considered the particular set of issues in each area alongside our aim to:

- Support consistency in the assessment across the sub-panels.
- Encourage the submission of interdisciplinary research.
- Minimise the fluidity between the UOA boundaries.
- Give regard to the distribution of the workload across the sub-panels.

38. We have made a small number of revisions, as follows:

a. There will be a **single UOA for Engineering** in REF 2021. This is on the basis that there will be an option to make multiple submissions (across all elements, or for outputs alone, following discussion with the sub-panel). The sub-panel will set out in its criteria, and consult on, the discrete discipline areas in which multiple submissions could be made. A single UOA will further underpin consistency in the assessment and will continue to enable the submission of general engineering approaches, to a sub-panel which will necessarily be constituted with a breadth of expertise. To address concerns raised about the size of this UOA, the sub-panel will set out and consult on its approach to assessing submissions, which may include a formalised sub-group structure.

b. A number of concerns were raised in the consultation in relation to the REF 2014 UOA 17: Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology. Following further consultation with the subject communities, this UOA will be **restructured** to form **UOA 14: Geography and Environmental Studies** and **UOA 15: Archaeology**.

c. **'Film and Screen Studies'** will be located and included in the name of UOA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies. This reflects a recommendation made in the 2014 panel feedback reports, and takes account of consultation feedback and further discussion with the key subject associations in this area.

39. We will continue dialogue with the subject communities for forensic science and criminology to consider concerns raised about visibility in the assessment. These fields of research were submitted across multiple UOAs in the previous exercise. We will include the decisions on these areas in the final decisions due for announcement in the autumn.

40. Consultation responses also raised a number of further points on the UOA structure and composition of the expert panels, including: increasing visibility for

disciplines within the broader UOAs; ensuring appropriate breadth and depth of expertise in panel appointments; and the processes for cross-referral and assessing interdisciplinary research. We will take account of these issues, as follows:

- We will explore introducing discrete sub-profiles for outputs to provide increased visibility in the broader UOAs with the panels, and will consider implementation following further consultation on the panel criteria.
- There will be a two-stage approach to appointing panel members, set out in more detail in paragraph 42. As part of this, sub-panels will identify where additional expertise may be required to contribute to the assessment, to ensure that submitted research is assessed by panels with the appropriate breadth and depth of expertise.
- We will work with IDAP to develop additional measures to support the assessment of interdisciplinary research. These measures are set out at paragraph 15.

### **Recruitment of the expert panels**

41. The sub-panel chairs will be appointed through an application process. Applications for these positions are now being invited. Further information about these roles and how to apply is available at Annex B. The deadline for applications is noon on 11 October 2017.

### Timing of panel appointments

42. Consultation responses set out strong and clear arguments for appointing more than only the main panels at the criteria-setting stage. In view of this feedback, we will:

- Appoint sub-panels at the criteria-setting stage that comprise **sufficient members** to ensure the sub-panel has **appropriate expertise** for this task (including of interdisciplinary research – see paragraph 15a – and the wider use of research), rather than the volume required to undertake the assessment.
- Appoint additional main panel members, including users of research and international members, for the criteria-setting.
- Make further appointments to the panels at a second stage in the exercise, to ensure an appropriate number of panel members to assess the volume of expected submissions. Assessors (who will assess either outputs or impact only) will also be appointed at this stage.

43. Further details about the roles of the panels and the detailed recruitment process for the panel members and assessors will be published in the autumn.

### Increasing representativeness of the expert panels

44. The measures set out in the consultation for improving the representativeness of the panel membership were widely supported in responses. Informed by advice from EDAP we set out the following details on the measures we will implement in this area:

- a. There will be mandatory, bespoke **equality and diversity briefings** and mandatory **unconscious bias training** provided for panellists involved in selection decisions (the main and sub-panel chairs).
- b. Equality and diversity **monitoring data** will be collected for **all applicants and nominees** for panel membership through an online form. This will be collected anonymously and used to compare the representativeness of the pool of applicants and nominees with the appointed panels.
- c. Taking account of responses to the consultation, advice from our Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) and our intention to minimise burden on institutions, **nominations** for panel members (including research users and international members) will be invited from all bodies with an interest in research, **excluding** mission groups, individual HEIs (and groups within HEIs), and self-nominations.
- d. **Data** will be made **available to nominating bodies** on the current representation of protected groups among UK academic research staff, and guidance provided on how to approach sensitively increasing representativeness in nominations.
- e. **Nominating bodies** will be required to submit information about how **equality and diversity issues** were taken into account in putting forward nominations.
- f. The **main and sub-panel chairs** will also be **provided with data** on the current representation of protected groups among UK academic research staff, as well as anonymous data on the representation of these groups among nominees to the panel. This data, along with data on the representation of protected groups on the appointed panels, will be published at main panel-level.

### **Outcomes and weightings**

- 45. Maintaining consistency with REF 2014, we will produce outcomes in the form of an **overall excellence profile**, as well as publishing the **three sub-profiles** (outputs, impact and environment) for each submission. Each sub-profile and the overall profile will be on a five-point scale (1\*-4\* and Unclassified). Following findings from our evaluation activity, we will work with the panels to ensure clarity of distinction in particular between 3\* and 4\* for impact.
- 46. As set out in HEFCE Circular letter 33/2017, we have determined the overall weightings for the exercise taking account of Lord Stern's suggestion that impact be 'deepened and broadened', and of the previous intention to increase the impact weighting back to 25 per cent as originally proposed for REF 2014. We have also taken account of discussions with the UK Government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy on how the impact element of the REF could support the industrial strategy. We have considered these factors alongside the case for maintaining consistency, which was set out in the consultation.
- 47. When we introduced impact in REF 2014, a weighting of 20 per cent was appropriate for that exercise in view of the developmental nature of the impact

assessment process. The success of impact in 2014 was evidenced in the subsequent evaluation activity, and this success was also highlighted in Lord Stern’s review. Recognising the importance of REF-driven funding in supporting the industrial strategy, we therefore intend to implement our original intention to increase the **weighting of impact to 25 per cent** in this exercise.

48. In reviewing the weighting of the remaining elements, we have considered the overall volume of information that will be required in the environment, as set out in paragraphs 27-29. In view of this, we consider that the weighting of this element should not be reduced. The weightings are therefore as follows:

- Outputs – 60 per cent.
- Impact – 25 per cent.
- Environment – 15 per cent.

### Timetable

49. The development timetable for the REF is set out in Table 1. We will develop the overarching guidance on submissions to be published in draft form along with the consultation on the panel criteria. Both documents will be published simultaneously in final form following the outcomes of the consultation.

50. The assessment period for research income and impacts will roll over from the end of the period in the last exercise, running from 1 August 2013 until 31 July 2020. The assessment period for outputs will also continue, running from 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020.

51. Further details relating to the assessment timetable, including the census date for staff, are being considered alongside the wider arrangements for the submission of staff and portability of outputs. Detailed guidance on the data requirements for all aspects of the exercise will be set out in the guidance on submissions next year.

**Table 1: Proposed development timetable for REF 2021**

Autumn 2017	Invite nominations for panel members Further decisions on the arrangements for submitting staff and outputs
Winter 2017-18	Appoint panels
Spring 2018	Panels meet to develop criteria
Summer to Autumn 2018	Publish draft guidance, and consultation on panel criteria
Winter 2018-19	Publish final guidance and criteria
2019	Complete preparation of submission systems
2020	Submission phase
2021	Assessment phase

## List of abbreviations

DfE	Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland)
EDAP	Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEFCW	Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
HEI	Higher education institution
IDAP	Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
UKRI	UK Research and Innovation
UOA	Unit of assessment

## Annex A: Unit of Assessment structure for REF 2021

Main Panel	Unit of assessment	
A	1	Clinical Medicine
	2	Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care
	3	Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
	4	Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
	5	Biological Sciences
	6	Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science
B	7	Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences
	8	Chemistry
	9	Physics
	10	Mathematical Sciences
	11	Computer Science and Informatics
	12	Engineering
C	13	Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
	14	Geography and Environmental Studies
	15	Archaeology
	16	Economics and Econometrics
	17	Business and Management Studies
	18	Law
	19	Politics and International Studies
	20	Social Work and Social Policy
	21	Sociology
	22	Anthropology and Development Studies
	23	Education
	24	Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
D	25	Area Studies
	26	Modern Languages and Linguistics
	27	English Language and Literature
	28	History
	29	Classics
	30	Philosophy
	31	Theology and Religious Studies
	32	Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
	33	Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies
	34	Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management



## **Annex B: Sub-panel chairs – further particulars for applicants**

### **Research Excellence Framework 2021**

This annex sets out the further particulars for applicants for the role of sub-panel chair. It includes information on panel roles, the terms of appointment, the person specification, the application procedure, who can apply, and the deadline for applications.

#### **Background**

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the system for assessing research in UK higher education institutions. The REF is undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies. It was first conducted in 2014, and replaced the previous Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

An independent review of the REF was undertaken in 2016, led by Lord Nicholas Stern. Following this, and informed by our evaluation of REF 2014, the funding bodies consulted with the sector on the recommendations of this review. We have now published our initial decisions on many aspects of the framework, as set out in the main document (REF2017/01). We will announce initial decisions on the remaining aspects in autumn 2017, following further consultation on key issues.

The REF is a process of expert review, and will include the assessment of research outputs, impact and environment. Institutions will make submissions in units of assessment (UOAs), to be assessed by 34 sub-panels. The sub-panels will work under the guidance of four main panels.

For main panel and sub-panel configuration, please see REF2017/01, Annex A. Further background information on the changes to the structure from REF 2014 is set out in the main document at paragraphs 37-40.

#### **Appointment of Sub-panel chairs**

The funding bodies now wish to appoint a sub-panel chair for each of the 34 REF sub-panels listed in Annex A.

The funding bodies have appointed main panel chairs. Further information about these appointments is available at [www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/ref2021/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrch/ref2021/). We will start the nominations process to establish the wider main and sub-panel membership this autumn. Sub-panel chairs will be appointed through an open, written applications process, and assessed against criteria set out in the person specification (below). The appointments will be made by the chief executives (or equivalent) of the four UK HE funding bodies, after taking advice from the main panel chairs.

The chief executives (or equivalent) of the four UK HE funding bodies retain responsibility for appointing all panel chairs and members, and reserve the right to amend the membership of REF panels to ensure the effective conduct of the exercise.

All sub-panel chairs will also become members of the appropriate main panel.

## Role of a main panel

Each main panel will provide leadership and guidance to a group of sub-panels. In particular, the role of a main panel is:

- To produce a document setting out the criteria and working methods for the group of sub-panels under its remit. In doing so, the main panel will ensure that:
  - The criteria and working methods adhere to the overall assessment framework.
  - The criteria and working methods are as consistent as possible across the sub-panels within each main panel's remit, and vary between the sub-panels only where justified to the REF Steering Group.
  - The academic community has been consulted effectively when developing the criteria and working methods.
  - Other appropriate stakeholders have been consulted, particularly when developing the criteria for assessing impact. This includes stakeholders from the private, public and third sectors who are informed by, make use of, or benefit from academic research in the disciplines covered by the panel.
- To work with the sub-panels during the assessment period to ensure adherence to the criteria, working methods and equality and diversity guidance.
- To work with the sub-panels during the assessment period to calibrate the assessment standards between sub-panels and ensure the consistent application across the framework of the overall assessment standards.
- To sign off the assessment outcomes for all submissions made to the sub-panels, based on the work and advice of the sub-panels.
- To work with the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel and the Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel as required on the criteria and assessment process.
- To give advice as requested by the REF team and funding bodies on aspects of the assessment process.
- To produce a final report on the state of research in the disciplines covered by the sub-panels, and its wider benefits.

In signing off the assessment outcomes, the main panel will confirm that it has worked with the relevant sub-panels to ensure the adoption of a reasonable and consistent approach to the assessment of all forms of research, including basic, applied, practice-based and interdisciplinary research; and that each sub-panel has applied the quality thresholds for the exercise to a consistent standard.

Final responsibility for the effective conduct of the assessment process for the REF lies with the funding bodies' chief executives (or equivalent). Decisions about academic

judgements in the assessment will remain the responsibility of the panels. The main panels will report their progress in reaching assessment outcomes to the four UK higher education funding bodies and will report the final outcomes to the funding bodies at the conclusion of their assessment. In the event of any dispute about the assessment process that cannot be resolved within the main panel, the decision of the UK funding bodies will be final.

### **Role of a sub-panel**

The role of a sub-panel is:

- a. To consult on and contribute to the criteria and working methods of the group of sub-panels within a main panel, and develop any necessary criteria and working methods specific to the individual sub-panel, for approval by the main panel.
- b. To work within the agreed criteria and methods, and under the guidance of the main panel, to assess submissions.
- c. To advise the main panel and REF team on cross-referrals of submitted material to other sub-panels and any need for additional expertise required to assess submissions.
- d. To produce draft assessment outcomes for each submission to be recommended for sign-off by the main panel, and associated concise feedback for submissions.

### **Equality and diversity**

The UK funding bodies are committed to supporting and promoting equality and diversity in research careers, and will put in place a number of measures to support equality and diversity in REF 2021.

The measures we will implement to improve the representativeness of the expert panels are set out in the main document at paragraph 44. With respect to the appointment of the sub-panel chairs, they includes the following:

- There will be mandatory, bespoke equality and diversity briefings and mandatory unconscious bias training provided for panellists involved in selection decisions (the main and sub-panel chairs).
- Equality and diversity monitoring data will be collected for all applicants and nominees for panel membership through an online form. This will be collected anonymously and used to compare the representativeness of the pool of applicants and nominees with the appointed panels.
- The main and sub-panel chairs will be provided with data on the current representation of protected groups among UK academic research staff, as well as anonymous data on the representation of these groups among nominees to the panel. This data, along with data on the representation of protected groups on the appointed panels, will be published at main panel level.

We have set out further measures aimed at improving the representativeness of the expert panels through the nominations process. In recognition of the wider equality

challenges in the sector, the sub-panel chairs will be expected to contribute to these measures to improve the representation on the panels of those from diverse backgrounds.

## **Terms of appointment**

Main and sub-panels will meet as follows:

- a. During 2018 (the criteria setting phase) each main and sub-panel will meet approximately three or four times to develop and finalise the criteria and working methods. Panellists will also be involved in consulting stakeholders about these through their routine contacts and attending meetings of subject associations and other stakeholder groups, ensuring appropriate input from research users, beneficiaries and diverse audiences.
- b. During 2020 we anticipate each main and sub-panel will meet approximately two or three times to consider institutions' submission intentions and the need for additional members and assessors, to prepare for the assessment, and to undertake initial calibration exercises.
- c. During 2021 (the assessment phase) we anticipate that each main and sub-panel will meet approximately six or seven times to assess submissions. Some of the sub-panel meetings during this phase may be held over several days each, and may involve staying away. In preparation for meetings during this phase, sub-panel members will be expected to review a range of submitted material. This will involve a substantial workload for individual members, especially in reviewing outputs.

Sub-panel chairs will be expected to attend meetings of both the sub- and main panel, and to take part in some other meetings as representatives of their sub-panel. In total we anticipate sub-panel chairs to be involved in approximately 30 to 40 days of meetings throughout the exercise.

Sub-panel chairs will receive fees covering the criteria-setting and assessment phases to be paid at regular intervals. The fees for the criteria-setting stage have been set at £5,000. Sub-panel chairs will be provided with a full schedule of fee payments on appointment. Travelling and subsistence expenses will be reimbursed according to an agreed scheme.

## **Application procedure**

To be considered for appointment, please complete an application statement of no more than three sides of A4 (excluding statements of endorsement), addressing **each criterion** in the attached person specification, and indicating the sub-panel to which appointment is sought.

In addition to the application statements, applicants are asked to include letters of endorsement from subject associations or other organisations that demonstrate the individual's standing in the community. Ideally these should indicate support from across the full breadth of disciplines covered by the UOA. These letters should form part of the application, and should not be sent directly from endorsing bodies to the REF team. Subject associations and other organisations may endorse more than one candidate.

HEFCE is conducting this recruitment on behalf of the UK funding bodies, and is working towards equal opportunities in employment. If you have any particular requirements in relation to the selection process, please let us know immediately so we can discuss any reasonable adjustments with you. We are requesting this information to make the process as equitable as possible for each candidate.

Applicants will be asked to fill in an equal opportunities monitoring form after submitting their application. This data will be used to monitor representation on REF panels, compared with the pool of candidates, according to key protected characteristics. Data collected through this form will not be used in the selection process.

Applications should be emailed to [admin@ref.ac.uk](mailto:admin@ref.ac.uk) **by 12 noon on Wednesday 11 October 2017.**

Queries can be addressed to Gina Reid, email [admin@ref.ac.uk](mailto:admin@ref.ac.uk).

Successful candidates will be informed by early December 2017.

### **Who can apply?**

Applications are open to all individuals who meet the criteria set out in the person specification below, from within and outside the higher education sector, including those who have previously served on REF or RAE panels. Heads of UK higher education institutions may not apply.

The funding bodies recognise that diversity of thought and experience contributes fundamental insight and value to the work of the REF panels, and that this insight and value comes not only from academic achievement but also from other aspects of panel members' lives. We would therefore like to encourage applications from diverse candidates, in particular from women, individuals from black and minority ethnic backgrounds, and people with disabilities, as well as international applicants.

## **Job Description**

### **Responsibilities**

Sub-panel chairs will be responsible for:

- Advising the funding bodies on the sub-panel's membership to ensure that it has sufficient breadth of expertise and commands the respect of the community.
- Contributing to the implementation of equality and diversity measures to increase the representativeness of the expert panels.
- Leading and chairing meetings of a sub-panel and steering members to a consensus.
- Ensuring that the sub-panel contributes to the criteria and working methods document produced by the main panel, including consulting with the community and external stakeholders.
- Leading the sub-panel in assessing submissions to the UOA, ensuring adherence to the agreed criteria, working methods and equalities guidance, and consistent application of standards.
- Working jointly with the sub-panel members appointed with a specific role to oversee and participate in the assessment of interdisciplinary research, to ensure its equitable assessment.
- Recommending the draft assessment outcomes for each submission to the appropriate main panel based on the work of the sub-panel.
- Overseeing the planning of the sub-panel's work and ensuring the timely delivery of results and feedback to the main panel on completion of the assessment.
- Reporting the sub-panel's progress to the main panel, and seeking and providing advice from and to the main panel chair and REF team as required.
- Serving as a member of the appropriate main panel, assisting with governance of the assessment process at main panel level, and liaising as required with the chairs of other sub-panels.
- Representing the sub-panel externally as required.

### **Key tasks**

- Reviewing nominations for sub-panel membership and making recommendations about this to the funding bodies.
- Consulting stakeholders in providing advice on the development of the REF.
- Chairing meetings of the sub-panel.
- Planning, preparing for, and following up meetings as necessary, working with the panel secretariat.

- Mediating discussions between sub-panel members with a view to ensuring the consistent application of standards and procedures.
- Participating in meetings of the main panel.
- Reviewing submitted material to contribute to the sub-panel's assessments.

## Person specification

Please address each of the criteria below in your application.

Criteria (essential)	Examples of evidence which may be provided
<b>Experience</b>	
Successful senior-level experience of conducting or leading research in higher education (or leading the commissioning and application of research in industry or another sector) in fields relevant to the sub-panel applied for.	Key academic appointments and achievements; major grants or awards; key research outputs.
Experience and understanding of peer review and research quality standards.	Involvement in RAE, REF, Research Council or other peer review exercises (including any relevant international experience).
Experience of chairing and ability to lead groups to consensus.	Evidence of chairing committees, panels or groups. Specific examples of bringing diverse groups to a consensus would be helpful.
<b>Abilities</b>	
Appropriate standing in the community and ability to carry the confidence of key stakeholders.	Fellowships, prizes or awards provided in recognition of your contribution to the discipline. Endorsements <b>must</b> be included from academic or other relevant associations, representing as far as possible the full breadth of the sub-panel's remit.
Ability to contribute to wider main panel discussions beyond your research area or discipline.	Peer review or other activities outside own discipline; involvement in overarching associations; chairing at a senior level; interdisciplinary activities.
<b>Knowledge and understanding</b>	
Relevant knowledge, experience or ability to contribute to impact criteria and involve research users effectively in the assessment.	Details of any relevant experience or expertise which can be brought to this area. Endorsements may be included from non-academic organisations to support this.
A commitment to supporting or advancing equalities and diversity in research careers, and an understanding of the equality and diversity issues relevant to your research area, and the implications of this in the REF.	Participation in, or leadership of, institutional or sector-based equalities training, programmes or activities.
Knowledge or understanding of, or experience	Details of any relevant experience or



<p>in, the conduct or management of interdisciplinary research.</p>	<p>expertise which can be brought to this area.</p>
<p><b>Availability</b></p>	
<p>Ability to attend and participate in sub-panel, main panel and other meetings as indicated in the further particulars; sometimes work outside of office hours and stay away overnight; and engage in preparatory and follow up work as required.</p>	<p>Statement confirming that employer is supportive of time commitments the role will require and that you are personally willing to take this on.</p>



Cyngor Cyllido Addysg  
Uwch Cymru  
Higher Education Funding  
Council for Wales

hefcw



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Nicholson House  
Lime Kiln Close  
Stoke Gifford  
Bristol BS34 8SR

tel 0117 931 7392  
e-mail [info@ref.ac.uk](mailto:info@ref.ac.uk)  
[www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk)

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