

REF2021 Briefing November 2017

HEFCE have now (as of 21st November 2017) made their final set of announcements confirming the principles of REF2021. These follow the initial decisions released on 1 September 2017, and will be followed later by publication of full Guidance on Submissions (expected in January 2019). These new decisions have been informed by consultation with the sector and a survey of likely submission numbers.

HEFCE announcements

The key elements to note are:

1. **Staff:** All staff with a significant responsibility for research, and who have contracts of 0.2FTE or greater on the census date, must be submitted. All T&R staff are assumed to have significant responsibility for research, undertaken independently; R-only staff must be demonstrably independent researchers.

Staff eligibility will be defined by contract as the default; where HEIs wish not to submit staff whose contracts suggest significant responsibility for research, they must show an auditable process as evidence that the individual does not have such responsibility.

The census date for staff will be 31 July 2020 (a change from the November census date in REF2014).

There will be a process to recognise individual staff circumstances where necessary, but given that any individual must have a minimum of one output between 2014 and 2020 (see below), only truly exceptional circumstances will allow a reduction of this requirement to zero. There will also be a new option to seek recognition of 'unit circumstances' that have cumulatively constrained a unit's ability to produce the required number of outputs. Details of both mechanisms are still under development.

2. **Outputs:** The number of outputs required will be determined by the FTE of submitted staff on the census date, with flexibility to return outputs from across a unit's staff body within minimum and maximum limits for each individual:

The average number of outputs required per FTE will be 2.5. The number of outputs for each unit submission will be calculated by multiplying the total FTE of submitted staff by 2.5.

A minimum of one output will be required for each staff member employed on the census date, and a maximum of five outputs may be attributed to individual staff members (including those who have left). Attributing five outputs to one staff member does not preclude the submission of further co-authored outputs where attributed to another member of staff.

Output portability: Outputs may be submitted by both the institution employing the staff member on the census date and the originating institution where the staff member was previously employed when the output was demonstrably generated. Outputs by staff who have moved into a different sector, died or retired will be eligible for submission.

Open access: The REF Open Access policy will require outputs within the scope of the policy (journal articles and some conference proceedings) to be deposited as soon after the point of acceptance as possible, and no later than three months after this date from 1 April 2018. However, deposit up to three months from publication will be allowable as a 'deposit exception'.

3. **Impact:** Submissions will include a total of one case study, plus one further case study per up to 15 FTE staff submitted, for the first 105 returned (with a reduced requirement above this). Submissions will therefore include a minimum of two case studies, as in REF2014. The approach to impact increases the requirement to produce case studies somewhat beyond what was recently expected. This is combined with the prior announcement that the value of case studies to the overall submission outcome is rising from 16% in REF2014 to 25%. We now expect to need to produce slightly over 100 case studies, up from 73 in 2014.
4. **Small submissions:** Institutions will be able to request the exclusion of very small units (fewer than 5 FTE) from submission in exceptional circumstances.
5. **Code of Practice:** All institutions are required to provide a REF Code of Practice covering the following: the institution's processes for ensuring a fair approach to selecting outputs; and, where applicable, the institution's processes for identifying staff with a significant responsibility for research. The University will be required submit its Code of Practice to HEFCE for review and approval, provisionally in Spring 2019.
6. **Staff identifier:** Institutions are strongly encouraged to submit an ORCID for all submitted staff. ORCID is likely to be mandated in future exercises.

Actions

The necessary actions arising from these announcements are an evolution of those already agreed by Senate during its discussion of REF planning on 25th October 2017. They include:

- On-going, regular reviews of outputs and impact quality, following those completed during 2017 and with the next outputs review due to report by the end of March 2018. These are to be based on multiple internal assessment and the use of External Research Advisors (ERAs).
- Introduction of an internal Code of Practice for Research Assessment, to provide an over-arching framework for a REF Code of Practice to be submitted to HEFCE, and to govern internal research assessment in the interim.
- Discussions between the PVC Research, Director of Human Resources and the Heads of School regarding any contractual issues arising, to be addressed as a priority. The aim will be to ensure that individuals are appropriately contracted for the expectations of their role in relation to research.
- If there are any units where we might seek to show that individuals contracted to undertake research do not have significant responsibility for research, the approach to addressing this will need to be included in the Code of Practice, and will also require (as specified by HEFCE) consultation with academic staff. Such a process would need to produce auditable evidence that the relevant staff were not expected to have significant responsibility for research.
- Schools to allocate time for REF preparations and, in particular, for the development of impact case studies, with full integration of these activities into workload planning. Recent review of the pool of emerging impact case studies indicates that substantial

further work will be required to generate the necessary volume of case studies whilst maximising the number likely to be 4*.

- Enhancement of technical systems to facilitate capture, analysis and reporting of relevant information.

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