

Updates from the RQI team
8th March 2024

Dear Colleagues,

We are beginning a new regular newsletter to share updates from the Research Quality and Impact Team with all the latest REF and related news, to give you all the key information on current activities in a single place. Welcome to the first edition of this newsletter.

Our intention is to send this newsletter to Heads of School, Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, UoA Leads, Impact Leads, Professional Services colleagues who support REF-related and impact activity in the Schools, and PS colleagues who support such activity in other central teams. If you do not wish to be included in our distribution list, or if you believe there are groups not in the latter list who should receive this newsletter, please let us know.

News

Welcoming new Research Quality & Impact Manager

[Jen Whitehead](#) joined the team in early January from her previous role in the Library, where she oversaw the SRO and Elements systems and supported Sussex researchers with Open Access publishing. As Research Quality and Impact Manager, Jen will support preparations for the REF, with a particular focus on the Contribution to Knowledge & Understanding and People, Culture & Environment areas of the exercise and the development of the Elements REF assessment module.

Jen will work closely with the rest of the RQI team, which sits within the wider [Research Information, Quality & Impact team](#). The RQI team members are:

[Dominic Dean](#) - *Senior Research Quality & Impact Manager* - Dom manages the University's strategic development, assurance and showcasing of the quality and impact of its research, especially by managing preparations for the REF.

[Rebecca Downing](#) - *Research Impact Manager* - Rebecca is the main contact for BSMS, Psychology, Life Sciences, MPS and Global Studies, supporting impact activities, and working to enhance the impact case study portfolio for the next REF.

[James Morland](#) - *Research Impact Manager* - James is the main contact for Business, ESW, EngInf, LPS and MAH, supporting impact activities, and working to enhance the impact case study portfolio for the next REF.

[Michelle Stonestreet](#) - *RIQI Administrator* - Michelle assists the RQI team with various activities, including REF related tasks, Researchfish and the organisation of the Sussex Impact Days and Research Impact Awards, as well as providing data and systems support to the wider RIQI team.

Updated RQI webpages

[Do take a look](#) at our recently updated webpages, which include a refreshed Impact Support section.

REF2029 website

There is now an external website for REF2029 at <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>. All announcements on REF2029 made so far by the REF Team at Research England are captured here, and future guidance will be published on this site.

Elements Impact Module & User Group

After collaborative work between RQI and the Library, the Elements Impact module is live as a place where academic and research colleagues can store their impact information and impact data. To date, the impact module has been used on an ad hoc basis and we are now looking to increase usage across the university. As well as a store for any impact-related information, the module will serve as a source of data for future research assessments (such as REF2029) and an effective way to manage impact data for other purposes such as internal reporting, promotions, external funder reporting, collaborations etc. As such, the goal is to have as much impact-related information on Elements as possible to allow more consistent reporting.

RQI and the Elements team are running a small user group featuring academic and PS colleagues from across the university to test the system. The first meeting has recently taken place, which successfully brought together colleagues from all Schools, and we will continue to lead meetings and gather feedback from the group to update and refine the current system and make sure it meets the needs of the community. We will share more on this in future emails.

Processes

External Research Advisors (ERAs) payments process

Many of you have asked about the payment process for External Research Advisors (ERAs). Payment for ERAs is from School budgets and is accordingly administered within the School that engages an individual to act as an ERA.

In the years before the REF2021 submission, payments were made through the casual staff payroll, but this has since been closed due to changes in regulations and process. As a result, the University now has two options for paying those engaged to do temporary or casual work: REED, and the IR35 process. We believe IR35 is in principle more suitable for ERA payments than REED, but there have been some concerns about the level of burden involved. Responding to this, Finance have established a 'Role-Based Assessment' (RBA) process for certain roles that are deemed to be, as standard, payable by invoice without completing the full IR35 process, and the ERA role has been added to those included within this RBA process. This provides a somewhat lower-burden option for paying ERAs, but **it can only be used by staff who have undertaken specific training provided by Finance**. Our understanding is that most Schools have at least one colleague in their Professional Services team who has been through this training; ERA payments should therefore be handled by those colleagues. If your School does not have any person who has already been trained, you/they can contact your Finance Business Partner to enquire about the next available opportunity to undertake this training. If you become aware that your School has no person currently trained in the RBA process, it is probably worth making this enquiry now even if you do not yet have any ERA payments to process, to avoid delay later.

Reminders

RQI email inbox - the address for all questions on impact, research quality, and REF

A reminder to please send any REF and/or impact-related queries for the RQI team to our shared inbox rqi@sussex.ac.uk. This will ensure you receive a faster response, as all team members can

view these emails. With a small increase in capacity within the team, we aim to improve the turnaround time on queries, which will be most effectively achieved if they are channelled through this inbox.

Teams channels

We also encourage you to raise queries in the REF Discussion Teams channel so that all colleagues may help and benefit from the information. If you or a colleague do not yet have access to this channel and need to be added, let us know by reply to this email.

Sussex Impact Support Network

RQI runs regular meetings of the [Sussex Impact Support Network](#) which brings together colleagues from across the university who support impact within any capacity at Sussex. If you'd like to be a member of the network, please do get in contact with us at rqi@sussex.ac.uk.

We will be sharing further news soon...

Future REF preparation plans

We are currently working on plans for the internal timescales towards REF2029 and will share further information on this in the next few weeks. The aim is to provide a detailed plan for activity during the rest of 2024 and into early 2025, and a higher-level plan for the years up to 2029, giving colleagues greater confidence to plan activity in the Schools and departments around a central timetable. This will include further internal reviews of activity and preparedness across the three elements of REF (Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding; Engagement and Impact; and People, Culture and Environment). All internal timetables will be subject to consultation before being finalised.

Actions post Summer Review of REF Progress 2029

We intend to share material from the review (such as the documents UoA Leads completed, and the notes of the meetings) with a carefully selected set of other teams (such as Innovation and Business Partnerships) that may find this information useful for their own knowledge base, ultimately allowing a greater range of support services to be provided where they are needed. If there is anything from the Summer Review documentation that you do **not** wish to be shared with this set of other teams, **please let us know by reply to this email within two weeks.**

There are also two particular actions that UoA Leads and their colleagues should take following the Summer Review, where this has not been already done:

- Action Plans: Each UoA has an Action Plan template in the Box folder titled UoA^{XX} – Meeting Notes and Actions. These were provided to capture actions arising from the Summer Review discussions (notes from which are also available in the same Box folder). Please complete your Action Plan if you are a UoA Lead and haven't done this already – we would be grateful if these could be completed by the **end of March**.
- 'Realistic' and 'aspirational' targets for UoA performance in the next REF were first produced for a series of meetings in summer of 2022. These were often revisited verbally during the 2023 Summer Review meetings, since often relevant factors had changed, and more information about the next REF has been released. We will soon be seeking to systematically capture updated targets for every UoA for REF2029, and will be asking UoA Leads to provide any updates to their targets by the end of April. A further communication specifically on this matter will be coming out within the next two weeks.

Thank you for your attention to the Action Plans and Targets - these will form information to be taken into the next review process (timescales TBC as per the section above).

UoA Leads meetings

We are intending to set up a new series of regular meetings for UoA Leads and those who work closely with them. This will provide a regular opportunity for sharing news, consulting on plans, and discussing good practice. We will be in touch with UoA Leads again soon regarding scheduling of the first meeting, where the frequency of subsequent meetings will be one of the topics for discussion.

Elements Assessment Module

Configuration and testing of the assessment module is underway, with the aim to use this area of Elements to review and manage outputs for potential inclusion in the REF2029 submission.

We anticipate the module will be ready to go live in the next few months, and we will provide comprehensive guidance documentation and schedule training sessions for relevant staff at this point.

We also hope to share further news and information on the following soon:

- Improving the structure of RQI-related Box folders to make them easier for Schools/UoAs to use;
- Sussex Impact Days 2024 - taking place on the 18th and 19th June;
- Sussex Research Impact Awards - opening soon;
- Upcoming training and workshops.

Thank you for your time. If you have any queries on anything mentioned above, please do get in touch, and we will welcome any feedback on the level of detail or nature of the information included for consideration for future newsletters.

The RQI Team