

# REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria

## Introduction

Responses to this consultation are invited from any organisation, group or individual with an interest in the conduct, quality, funding or use of research.

If you would like to save a copy of your response, please choose 'print response' on the last page of the survey. We regret that we won't be able to accommodate requests to download and send individual responses submitted.

Following the deadline, the REF team will copy responses to the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Research England and the Scottish Funding Council. Responses will also be copied to the panel secretariat for the purposes of analysis. A summary of responses and, where requested, a copy of responses will be provided to the expert panels.

The funding bodies will be holding consultation events for HEIs during the consultation period. The events will outline the questions and proposals, and will provide an opportunity for institutions to raise any issues for clarification and discussion. HEIs across the UK may register up to two delegates each across all of the events. Details of these activities are available at [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk), under Events.

The responses to this consultation will be considered by the funding bodies and by the REF panels during late 2018. The final 'Guidance on submissions' and 'Panel criteria' will be announced in early 2019.

We will commit to read, record and analyse responses to this consultation in a consistent manner. For reasons of practicality, usually a fair and balanced summary of responses rather than the individual responses themselves will inform any decision made. In most cases the merit of the arguments made is likely to be given more weight than the number of times the same point is made. Responses from organisations or representative bodies with high interest in the area under consultation, or likelihood of being affected most by the proposals, are likely to carry more weight than those with little or none.

We will publish an analysis of the consultation responses. We may publish individual responses to the consultation in the summary. Where we have not been able to respond to a significant material issue, we will usually explain the reasons for this.

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Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the relevant Freedom of Information Acts across the UK. The Acts give a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case the four UK funding bodies. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means that responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. For further information about the Acts see the Information Commissioner's Office website, [www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk) or, in Scotland, the website of the Scottish Information Commissioner [www.itspublishknowledge.info/home/](http://www.itspublishknowledge.info/home/)

For further information relating to UK Research and Innovation's Privacy notice, please visit <https://www.ukri.org/privacy-notice/>

## Respondent details

**Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of: \***

- As an individual
- Business
- Charity**
- Department or research group
- Higher Education Institution
- Public sector organisation
- Representative body
- Subject association or learned society
- Other (please specify):

**Please provide the name of your organisation. \***

**If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.**

**If your response is in relation to specific main panels, please indicate which one(s): \***

- Main Panel A: Medicine, Health and Life Sciences (Sub-Panels 1-6)
- Main Panel B: Physical sciences, Engineering and Mathematics (Sub-Panels 7-12)
- Main Panel C: Social Sciences (Sub-Panels 13-24)
- Main Panel D: Arts and Humanities (Sub-Panels 25-34)

Relevant to all

We are seeking views during the consultation on both the draft guidance on submissions and the draft panel criteria and working methods. Please select the documents for which you would like to provide a response:

Both documents

Guidance on Submissions only

Panel Criteria and Working Methods only

## Guidance on submissions: Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework

1a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework':

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

1b. Please provide any comments on Part 1. (300 word limit)

Advance HE recommends that the HE funding bodies outline the rationale for providing a breakdown of outputs by staff characteristics (paragraph 44). This is because the equality analyses proposed relates to the individual characteristics of staff and while Advance HE strongly supports the analyses in line with the requirements of equality law, others within the sector may feel it is not in line with the recommendations of the Stern Review.

## Guidance on submissions: Part 2: Submissions

2a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 2: Submissions':

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

2b. Please provide any comments on Part 2. (300 word limit)

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Advance HE cannot comment on this area.

## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff details (REF1a/b)

3a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 1. (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this area.

4. Possible indicators of research independence are set out at paragraph 130, including a reference to a list of independent fellowships. This list is intended to guide institutions on determining independence for staff holding fellowships from major research funders. The list is not intended to be comprehensive. Do you have any comments on the clarity, usefulness, or coverage of this list? (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this area.

5a. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify):**

Advance HE cannot comment on this area.

5b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (300 word limit)

6a. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

- Yes

No

**Other (please specify):**

Advance HE cannot comment on this area.

6b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (300 word limit)

## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff circumstances (paragraphs 149 to 193)

**7a. The proposed approach for taking account of circumstances will achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021:**

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

**Disagree**

Strongly disagree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (300 word limit)

Advance HE strongly supports the consideration of staff circumstances to promote equality and diversity.

As the reduction in outputs is given to the unit but related to an individual's circumstance careful management at the institutional level will be required to ensure that individual's do not feel compelled to declare circumstances and where reductions are given, that in some circumstances e.g. part-time working, the individual concerned is the sole beneficiary.

Advance HE recommends that consideration is also required as to whether an individual or a unit or both can seek a reduction. In some circumstances an individual may not wish to seek a reduction but the unit may, either due to the unit having experienced multiple staff circumstances, or where an individual staff member's circumstances have impacted on a research team or the unit of research as a whole. If there is not agreement between the individual and the unit how are such circumstances managed?

Paragraph 170, Advance HE recommends more positive wording is used to explain the rationale for reductions related to family leave.

While Advance HE supports a reduction of 0.5 outputs in relation to family related leave it does not support the proposals overall as a further reduction of outputs could be applied for the same birth to a woman who takes shared parental leave following her maternity leave. By law women are required to take maternity leave following a birth (live or still) after 24 weeks of pregnancy. Similarly, to maternity leave, shared parental leave is taken in the first year following birth. More families are now opting for shared parental leave especially as some employers including HEIs are offering employees contractual shared parental leave pay at the same rate as contractual maternity leave pay.

In addition Advance HE does not support the provision to enable staff taking two or more periods of family related leave to be removed from the minimum requirement of one output. The provision

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implies that staff taking periods two periods of family related leave, in a 6 ½ year period are unable to produce the minimum of one output. In addition, it does not encourage HEIs to consider the support provided to staff before, during and on return from family related leave to enable them to return to research. Two periods of maternity and adoption leave at a maximum of 52 weeks or two periods of shared parental leave at a maximum of 50 weeks, equates to less than 24 months. The threshold to remove the minimum requirement of one output for all circumstances apart from family related leave is 46 weeks of absence from research. While justification is given for this, it is likely that other factors, not just having taken two periods of family related leave will be at play e.g. the nature of their research, disability and health of the staff member or their child, part-time working and the support that they have received on their return to research. To conflate such issues with family related leave alone does not send out a positive message about the research productivity of new parents. As women are more likely to take family related leave than men, Advance HE recommends that the equality impact of this proposal is given further consideration. Consideration also needs to be given as to whether the threshold for research staff taking family related leave can be lower than the threshold for research staff with other circumstances.

### **7b. The potential advantages of the proposed approach outweigh the potential drawbacks identified:**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (300 word limit)

Advance HE understands that some staff felt pressurised to declare circumstances in REF 2014 and the current proposals may increase this. However, given the requirements of equality law Advance HE recognises that individual circumstances need to be considered.

Proposals covering family related leave need to be right to ensure support and cultural change in the sector. While the proposal as it stands for family related leave may promote the uptake of shared parental leave, some women and units of assessment will be placed at an advantage over others in terms of the number of outputs required but potentially at a disadvantage if the existing culture of having outputs returned to REF persists. The proposals also imply that staff taking family related leave are less productive than staff who are absent from research for other reasons.

### **7c. Please provide any further comments on these proposals, including any suggestions for clarifying or refining the guidance. (300 word limit)**

To reduce the likelihood of individuals being placed under pressure to declare circumstances to their units of assessment, in addition to exploring a whistleblowing scheme the UK funding bodies will need to consider how individual and unit requests for reductions are considered within an institution and how to limit the sharing of personal sensitive information.

Suggested wording for paragraph 170: the reduction was justified as even where women in REF 2014 did not use their full 52 week maternity leave entitlement, it is recognised that many women choose to phase their return to work and while on maternity leave will have had less time than their peers to keep abreast of their field of research.

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Advance HE recommends that reductions are given per birth where maternity, shared parental or additional paternity leave have been taken. The latter two lasting 4 months or more. If appropriate, this could enable multiple births to be considered. The same formula could also be used for adoptions. Alternatively a distinction can be made between the type of family leave taken by new mothers, partners of new mothers and adopters e.g. if you are a new mother and take maternity or a combination of maternity and shared parental leave you are entitled to x reduction. Advance HE supports the reduction being 0.5 FTE in recognition that the reduction is based on the overall output requirement for the unit of assessment and that it is in line with the reductions for other circumstances. Advance HE does recognise that in exceptional circumstances where there is a combination of one or more periods of family related leave with other circumstances a removal of the requirement for a minimum of one output will be appropriate.

## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs (REF2)

8a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs' is clear:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

8b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 2. (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

9. A glossary of output types and collection formats is set out at Annex K, to provide increased clarity to institutions on categorising types of output for submission. Do you have any comments on the clarity and usefulness of this annex?

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

10a. Paragraph 206.b sets out the funding bodies' intention to make ineligible the outputs of former staff who have been made redundant (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy). Do you agree with this proposal?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify):

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

10b. Please provide any further comments on this proposal. (300 word limit)

11a. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of co-authored outputs only once within the same submission?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify):

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

11b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (300 word limit)

## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research activity cost for UOA 4

12a. How feasible do you consider to be the approach set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing information on the balance of research activity of different costs within submitting units in UOA 4? (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

12b. Are the examples of high cost and other research activity sufficiently clear to guide classification? (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

12c. Please provide feedback on any specific points in the guidance text as well as the overall clarity of the guidance. (300 word limit)

Advance HE cannot comment on this section

## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 3: Impact (REF3)

13a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact' is clear:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

13b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 3. (300 word limit)

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## Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Sections 4-5: Environment data and environment (REF4a/b/c- REF5a/b)

14a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data' is clear:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

14b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 4. (300 word limit)

Advance HE supports the requirement for HEIs to provide information at both the institutional and unit of assessment level on the research environment.

It would assist institutions and units of assessment if further information could be included on what is meant by equality and diversity to ensure that information on a range of protected characteristics is considered. Research commissioned by HEFCE and undertaken by CRAC has highlighted that in REF 2014, the equality information provided by HEIs in the environment template dominantly focussed on gender and to a lesser extent pregnancy and maternity more than other aspects of diversity (see <https://www.crac.org.uk/portfolio/research/evaluation-work/exploring-equality-and-diversity-using-ref2014-environment-statements>).

15a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment' is clear:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

15b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 5. (300 word limit)

## Guidance on Submissions: further comments

16. Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A-M. (500 word limit)

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## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 2: Unit of assessment descriptors

1. Do the UOA descriptors provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

- All
- UOA 1: Clinical Medicine
- UOA 2: Public Health, Health Services and Primary Care
- UOA 3: Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy
- UOA 4: Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience
- UOA 5: Biological Sciences
- UOA 6: Agriculture, Food and Veterinary Sciences
- UOA 7: Earth Systems and Environmental Sciences
- UOA 8: Chemistry
- UOA 9: Physics
- UOA 10: Mathematical Sciences
- UOA 11: Computer Science and Informatics
- UOA 12: Engineering
- UOA 13: Architecture, Built Environment and Planning
- UOA 14: Geography and Environmental Studies
- UOA 15: Archaeology
- UOA 16: Economics and Econometrics
- UOA 17: Business and Management Studies
- UOA 18: Law
- UOA 19: Politics and International Studies
- UOA 20: Social Work and Social Policy
- UOA 21: Sociology
- UOA 22: Anthropology and Development Studies
- UOA 23: Education
- UOA 24: Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism
- UOA 25: Area Studies
- UOA 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics
- UOA 27: English Language and Literature
- UOA 28: History

- UOA 29: Classics
- UOA 30: Philosophy
- UOA 31: Theology and Religious Studies
- UOA 32: Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory
- UOA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies
- UOA 34: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management

Where relevant, please state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 1: Submissions

**2a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**2b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**2c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions', in particular on:**

- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria.

**Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (300 word limit)**

Advance HE welcomes the clear inclusion of equality and diversity in the panel criteria and working methods. Where equality and diversity is mentioned or reference is made to protected characteristics, Advance HE recommends that information on what is meant by the terms is included and that readers are referred to the summary of equality legislation as outlined in the Draft guidance on codes of practice.

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## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 2: Outputs

3a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

3c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs', in particular on:

- the proposed criteria for double-weighting outputs in Main Panels C and D, and on whether requests to double-weight books should automatically be accepted
- whether Annex C 'Main Panel D – outputs types and submission guidance' is helpful and clear
- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria.

Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (300 word limit)

## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 3: Impact

4a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree

Strongly disagree

**4b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':**

Strongly agree

Agree

**Neither agree nor disagree**

Disagree

Strongly disagree

**4c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact', in particular on:**

- where further clarification is required

- where refinements could be made

- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved

- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria.

Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (300 word limit)

## **Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 4: Environment**

**5a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment':**

Strongly agree

Agree

**Neither agree nor disagree**

Disagree

Strongly disagree

**5b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment':**

Strongly agree

Agree

**Neither agree nor disagree**

Disagree

Strongly disagree

5c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment', in particular on:

- whether the difference in section weightings across main panels is sufficiently justified by disciplinary difference (paragraphs 322 and 323)
- whether the list of quantitative indicators provided at [www.ref.ac.uk](http://www.ref.ac.uk) is clear and helpful
- where further clarification is required
- where refinements could be made
- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved
- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria.

Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (300 word limit)

## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 4: Panel procedures

6a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 4: Panel procedures', in particular on:- where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (300 word limit)

## Panel criteria and working methods: Part 5: Panel working methods

7a. a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**7b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**7c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 5: Panel working methods', in particular on: - where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (300 word limit)**

## Overall panel criteria and working methods

**8a. Overall, the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels.**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree**
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

**8b. Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the main panels. (300 word limit)**