

Submission to the Funding Bodies' consultation on the draft guidance and criteria for the 2021 Research Excellence Framework

15 October 2018

Guidance on submissions

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

The guidance in paragraph 98 states that when an institution is unable to provide justification for any piece of information in its submission, that information will be excluded from the assessment. It is not clear who is making this decision and at what point in the process.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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)

We recognise that the list is an indicator rather than a definitive list, but we would welcome further clarity over the definition of independent researchers, in particular the inclusion of the 2 year postdoctoral research fellowship.

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

Yes.

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

Additional clarity could be added to paragraph 121 part c. to include staff posted at overseas facilities and to clarify the eligibility of staff at overseas spin-offs of UK institutions.

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

Yes.

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

The guidance could be more explicit that staff who are employed by their HEI but at an overseas facility are still eligible to be returned.

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

Agree.

The new measures to ensure equality and diversity in research careers, including the formation of an equality and diversity action panel, the guidance for sub-panel members and provision of equality and diversity monitoring data to panel-members are welcome.

The efforts to increase representativeness of the sub-panels themselves, including the requirements for nominating bodies to submit information about how they considered equality and diversity, are also welcome.

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

Agree.

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

We welcome the measures to promote equality and diversity in the REF 2021.

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

Paragraph 160 states that where a unit is returned with fewer than 2.5 outputs per FTE and/or doesn't have a minimum of one output to each Category A submitted staff member, any 'missing' outputs will be graded as unclassified. We seek clarity on how this mechanism will work, as it will require sub-panel members to know which outputs are associated with which researcher.

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

Agree.

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

Regarding the open access requirements, we seek clarification on how the use of a 'date of acceptance' will work in practice. We are concerned that an email from the publisher to an author may be difficult and/or burdensome for authors to locate.

We also seek clarification on how the five percent tolerance for in-scope outputs that are non-compliant with the open access policy will be applied and the outputs removed. There also needs to be clarity on the versions of outputs submitted. We are concerned that sub-panels may receive different versions of the same output submitted by different institutions, which would add unnecessary burden for sub-panels when allocating outputs. The definition of a 'near final version' of an output should be made more explicit.

Paragraph 249 states that where there is significant material in common with an output published prior to 1 January 2014, the output is only eligible if it incorporates significant new material. There needs to be clarity on how the sub-panel members will know that there is significant material in common with an earlier output: how will sub-panel members know this?

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?

No comment.

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.

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

No comment.

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

Yes

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

There will be some cases where this proposal disadvantages large collaborations where multiple authors from one institution are co-authors. However, we largely accept the proposal.

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)

No comment.

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

No comment.

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

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

We seek further clarity around how resubmitted case studies will be considered. In particular, the Impact case study template and guidance (Annex G) has a tick box to indicate a resubmitted case study from REF 2014. The function of this box is not completely clear as its presence suggests resubmitted case studies will be treated differently.

Whilst the new flexibility in numbers of outputs and the rules for staff transferring between institutions have improved the fairness for departments at different stages of their development, the rigid number of impact cases greatly disadvantages a growing department. The length of time it takes to develop an impact case is acknowledged in the 20 year rule, yet no account is taken of this fact in the number of impact cases required of a rapidly growing department. We would like to see some acknowledgement of this either in the transfer rules or an adjustment to the number of cases.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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

No comment.

Panel criteria and working methods

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.

UOA 9: Physics.

The description of UOA 9 is clear. We have heard concerns about the specific mention of pedagogic research in paragraph 88. If the aim is for pedagogic research to be treated in the same way across main panel B as stated in paragraphs 180 and 181, then the inclusion of paragraph 88 is not required and at present suggests that UOA 10 will treat pedagogic research differently from the other sub-panels within main panel B.

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

Agree.

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

Disagree.

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

We would welcome further guidance and clarification on how interdisciplinary advisors on sub-panels and main panels will work to assess interdisciplinary outputs in practice.

We seek clarity on whether outputs are eligible to be referred completely to another sub-panel, when deemed appropriate by the sub-panel to which the the paper was originally submitted. We think this would be helpful in the cases where an individual researcher spans more than one discipline.

We also seek clarification on papers which are submitted to more than one panel (tagged to different authors in different institutions for example) and whether it will be ensured that the paper will receive the same score wherever it is submitted.

We would like more clarity on how sub-panel 9 will used citation data alongside peer review. In particular, on which tool will be used for citation data.

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

Agree.

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

Disagree.

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

Paragraphs 214 and 215 should provide further clarity on how the sub-panel will identify outputs which have significant material in common.

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

Agree.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

Agree.

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)

No comment.

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

Agree.

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

Agree.

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)

We are concerned that the current sub-panel membership for UOA 9 does not adequately cover all areas of the discipline of physics, and we await instruction on the second round of nominations in early 2020.

A fuller sub-panel allows for a greater diversity of views, experience and coverage of the subject areas in physics. It is essential that there is appropriate expertise on the sub-panel to assess the subject area and manage the workload, and that the community has confidence in the panel. There should be appropriate time for a robust review mechanism of panels' representativeness, so the next round of panel member applications should take place as soon as possible.

We would also like to receive further clarification on how the calibration exercises will work, in particular at the main panel level.

We seek clarification of whether the same output would receive the same score regardless of which Unit of Assessment it is submitted to.

Regarding the assessments of interdisciplinary work, we would like clarity on whether a sub-panel is able to flag a paper for complete referral to another panel where they believe it to be appropriate, rather than just marking it as interdisciplinary.

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

Agree.

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

No comment.

For more information, contact
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