

REF FAQs

FAQs answered in relation to the development of revisions to the timetable and guidance for REF 2021 are outlined here. The final revisions to the guidance are detailed in: [Guidance on Revisions to REF 2021](#). The 'Guidance on revisions to REF 2021' supersedes the information provided in these FAQs.

Will the output and environment deadlines stay the same?

Yes. The funding bodies intend to keep the focus of the exercise on the existing assessment window. That is, for outputs, the publication period between 1 January 2014 and 31 December 2020. The assessment period for the research environment and data about research income and research doctoral degrees awarded runs from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020. Mitigations are proposed that aim to take account of the effects of COVID-19 on these elements of submissions.

When will the deadline be for submitting the corroborating evidence for impact, and redacted versions of case studies?

Some details about further revisions to the exercise are not yet finalised. This includes further changes necessary to REF deadlines in view of the four-month delay, such as the deadlines for submitting corroborating evidence for impact case studies and redacted versions of impact case studies. We intend to provide an additional period for submitting the corroborating evidence and redacted case studies that is comparable with the original timeframe, and will notify institutions of the confirmed deadlines by 31 July 2020.

What will be appropriate evidence of delayed outputs?

In the proposed mitigation allowing the submission of outputs delayed past 31 December, in the event of audit, we would expect to see evidence indicating when the output was originally intended to be made publicly available and verifying the reason for the delay. For example, this may be correspondence from a publisher, or partner organisation with whom output dissemination was planned (such as a museum, gallery or theatre).

The proposals outline that the statements need to be based on verifiable evidence. What does this mean?

All information provided by HEIs in submissions to REF 2021 must be capable of verification, to give assurance that the submitted data are accurate and reliable. This would also be the case for the proposed mitigations, where institutions would need to ensure they satisfy themselves on the accuracy of submitted information, and maintain accurate records that would enable them to verify it if requested through audit. We expect there would be differing types of evidence relating to the specific information provided in the proposed statements, but as an example it could include records such as correspondence relating to the unavailability of corroborating evidence for impact. We would consider evidence on a fair and reasonable basis, the aim being to obtain sufficient evidence to verify the data that are being audited.

Would we need to amend our code of practice to include COVID-19 related circumstances?

Broadly, we would expect institutions' existing processes for staff declaration to cover this proposed mitigation, with appropriate communication to staff on the additional applicable circumstance. Where this proposed mitigation is taken forward, the REF team would seek to provide further guidance to institutions on applying it.

When would we submit reductions to the minimum of one, due to COVID-19?

We are proposing that this mitigation builds on the existing process for removing the minimum of one requirement. Therefore, reductions would be applied in final submissions made by the revised submission deadline of midday, 31 March 2021. The applied reductions would be reviewed by EDAP during the assessment year.

For the proposal on removing the minimum of one, where a staff member has not otherwise been able to produce an eligible output in the assessment period – is this still up to 31 July 2020?

Yes. The existing guidance would still apply, that where the output is made publicly available after the 31 July 2020, an institution may *optionally* submit it.

For the proposal on open access, that the use of ‘other exception’ for 2020 outputs is not included in the risk identification process, does the date refer to publication or acceptance?

This refers to the calendar year in which the output became publicly available.

When should the 100-word statement for impact be provided? Is it mandatory for all affected case studies, and / or those reporting up to 31 December 2020?

The proposed statement would be *optional* to provide, for any case study where impact activity and / or the collection of evidence has been very significantly affected by COVID-19. This is irrespective of whether or not the case study reports impact up until the end of December 2020.

What detail about COVID-19 effects should be included in the case study template itself, and what should be included in the 100 words?

We are proposing that the statement includes information that would not typically fit within the existing narrative of the case study template. For example, details about corroborating evidence that could not be obtained, or about cancelled events or activities.

How will the panels use the 100-word statement for impact?

The proposed statement would enable submitting units to provide explanatory text to the panels, to support the assessment of the case study. While the assessment could not take account of potential impact that may have arisen had the case not been affected, the information provided would help the panels to understand particular effects – such as the absence of a central evidence source.

What should the institutional-level statement for the environment cover? How should COVID-19 effects at the unit-level be reported?

The proposed institutional-level additional statement is intended to allow institutions to describe specific effects to the environment for research and impact, which would provide context to the panel assessment of the unit-level statement(s). It is not intended to provide a general description of the effects of COVID-19 on the environment.

The assessment period for the environment runs up to 31 July 2020. Submitting units may include relevant evidence relating to this period in the unit-level template, including as appropriate information relating to the effects from, and / or response to, COVID-19.

Aren't the proposals for additional statements adding burden, rather than minimising it?

The current survey is seeking views on revisions to the exercise that can help to take account of possible effects on submissions from COVID-19. In developing these proposals, the funding bodies have sought to balance a fair approach, which can make some allowance for these effects, with minimising additional burden. It is proposed that the statements would only be used in submissions

where necessary; they are not intended to be a general additional requirement. Views via the online survey are welcome on these points.

How would the additional statements be submitted? Would this require changes to the submission system?

We are currently exploring what the best approach would be to collecting the proposed statements, and are mindful of minimising changes that would require further development of systems that interact with the REF submission system.

When will we know more about the revised timetable for REF 2021?

When we have greater clarity about the period of serious disruption to universities, we will consult on the adapted details of the framework. There will be at least eight months' notice given of the new submission deadline.

We are aware that the decision to put the REF on hold leaves open a number of questions about the details of the revised framework. While we are not yet in a position to answer many of these questions, we understand that the uncertainty is difficult. We have published further FAQs to provide as much information as possible at this stage.

What mitigations will there be for delayed outputs under the March deadline option?

We intend to discuss with the sector in the period ahead the most appropriate approach for taking account of the effects of Covid-19 on output publication. Decisions on the best approach to this have not yet been taken. Where this involves any extension for outputs (whether universal or case-by-case), it is likely that an extension would not go past the submission deadline. We advise that responses to the survey make clear where selected options are conditional upon other aspects of the exercise changing or remaining the same.

What mitigations will there be for impact where an extension to the submission deadline or impact assessment period won't help (such as cancelled events)?

We are in the early stages of considering options for mitigating the effects on impact case studies that will not be resolved through changes to the submission deadline and assessment period. We will need to engage further with institutions on these possible mitigations in the period ahead.

How will the different options for the submission deadline affect the panels' work during the assessment?

We are currently exploring with the expert panels the implications of the different options for the assessment year. The outcomes from these discussions will feed into the funding bodies decision-making process.

How will you balance views in the survey? Both from different groups, and across both questions (as the options are related)?

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 areas under discussion, or likelihood of being affected most by the proposals, are likely to carry more weight than those with little or none.

Do you have a deadline for input on matters other than those covered by the questions in the survey?

We are gathering evidence and views on an ongoing basis and at this stage have not set deadlines for providing views on matters not covered in the current survey.