

REF FAQs

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) relate to submissions to the REF 2021 and policy matters. They have been grouped by category.

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New FAQs (06 October 2020)

Which taxonomy should be referred to for the output allocation field in UOA 10: Mathematical Sciences?

For the purposes of allocation, the sub-panel requests up to two keywords which will categorise the topic(s) covered by the output. These keywords may be provided by the submitting unit, and the sub-panel strongly encourages use of the list it provided for the 2019 survey of submission intentions <https://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/institutions-invited-to-complete-the-ref-survey-of-submission-intentions/>. Where more appropriate to the research, the keywords may be taken from the updated Mathematics Subject Classification (MSC). A searchable version of the MSC2020 is now available at <https://zbmath.org/classification/>.

For the HESA staff return, what should we return in the 'SIGRES' field where we are required to complete it for a staff member who is not eligible for return in REF 2021?

Where SIGRES is required in the HESA record but the member of staff is not eligible for submission (for example, where the contracted FTE is lower than 0.2), SIGRES should be returned as 2=No.

In a unit where we have had a REF6a request recommended, but do not have a REF6b Unit reduction request recommended, can we still reduce the total output pool by 1?

Yes, where a REF6a request has been recommended the relevant individual may be returned with no outputs attributed to them in the submission system, and the total outputs required by the unit will be reduced by 1.

Do we apply staff circumstances reductions to the number of outputs required for the unit before or after rounding?

The total output requirement for a unit will be calculated by subtracting the rounded total of staff circumstances reductions from the initial rounded output requirement (equal to 2.5 times the combined FTE of Category A submitted staff included in the submission).

For example, in a unit of 9 FTE the initial output requirement would be 22.5 outputs, which is rounded to 23 outputs. If the unit applies staff circumstances reductions of 4.5, this is rounded to 5 outputs. The total output requirement for the unit would therefore be $23 - 5 = 18$ outputs.

Can we apply new staff circumstances reductions at the submission deadline?

Yes. New staff circumstances can be applied at the submission deadline in March 2021. These circumstances will be reviewed by EDAP during the assessment phase. The outcomes of EDAP's review will feed directly into the assessment process, so feedback will not be provided back to HEIs.

When submitting individual circumstances for a staff member as part of a unit reduction (REF6b), how should we combine defined circumstances with circumstances requiring a judgement?

All circumstances for that staff member should be included collectively as 'requiring judgement'. The HEI will need to determine the total reduction to be applied on the basis of all applicable circumstances. Circumstance(s) with a defined reduction in outputs should be included in this calculation according to the tariffs set out in Annex L of the 'Guidance on submissions'. For circumstances requiring a judgement, the institution will need to make a judgement about the effect in terms of the equivalent period of time absent, and include these in the calculation in accordance with Table L2 in Annex L of the 'Guidance on submissions'.

For example, where a staff member has had one period of qualifying family-related leave, and a subsequent period of ill health equivalent to a 28-month period of absence, a reduction of 1.5 outputs should be applied (0.5 reduction for the family-related leave; 1 reduction for the 28-month period equivalent to absence).

When combining circumstances, only one circumstance should be taken into account for any period of time during which they took place simultaneously.

When returning REF4c data, what do we do if we can't identify where access to a facility was awarded as part of a partnership or collaboration, or which other institutions were involved?

Where an HEI has been unable to establish whether income-in-kind was awarded as part of a partnership or collaboration, and has taken reasonable steps to ascertain this (for example, through discussion with the awarding research council or health funding body, and the HEI's own researchers), the institution may return the full amount assigned to their HEI.

Where a lead HEI knows income-in-kind was awarded as part of a partnership or collaboration, has been unable to identify which other institutions were involved and has taken reasonable steps to identify these (such as described above), the institution should return the amount it knows is apportioned to their HEI.

Changes to the REF due to COVID-19

FAQs answered in relation to the development of revisions to the timetable and guidance for REF 2021 can be accessed [here](#). The final revisions to the guidance are detailed in: [Guidance on Revisions to REF 2021](#).

How will revisions to REF 2021 due to COVID-19 affect the next exercise?

We recognise that the development of future research assessment exercises will need to consider the effects of revisions to REF 2021 put in place to take account of the effects of COVID-19, including the revisions to allow the submission of delayed research outputs and the extension to the impact assessment period. Decisions on future exercises will be made in consultation with the sector in due course and will take full consideration of these issues.

Why have the funding bodies put the REF on hold?

In pausing the REF, it is the funding bodies' intention to support institutions in prioritising immediate work relating to COVID-19, and its effects on institutional activity, without concern for the effect on REF preparations. Our expectation is that this will enable institutions to pause REF preparations at this point should they need to, with a view to recommencing when the new submission deadline is confirmed.

Why is the census date for staff staying the same? We won't be able to run our processes on staff eligibility as planned.

We currently intend that the staff census date of 31 July 2020 remains unchanged. This is to recognise the significant effort that has been invested so far by institutions in preparations for the current REF cycle, and follows the advice from the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation to universities on supporting their staff. It is not intended, however, that institutions commit staff resource to processes related to staff eligibility in this challenging period. There should be sufficient time for eligibility to be determined retrospectively, in advance of a revised submission deadline.

Can evidence collection take place after the end of the assessment period for impact?

Yes, where this is collected in time for the submission of the impact case study. It is the impact being described that must arise within the assessment period; the evidence should relate to this period, but may be collected at a different point, where applicable. We are currently seeking views on the benefits and challenges around extending the assessment period for impact beyond the current end date of 31 July 2020.

****UPDATED CONTENT** Will there be an extension to the deadline for submitting requests for major unforeseen events?**

Yes. Any planned requests do not need to be submitted by the original deadline of 1 July 2020. We will provide further information on a revised deadline in due course.

Updated 31/07/2020:

The deadline for submitting requests for major unforeseen events is 2 November 2020.

Are staff on furlough eligible for submission? What FTE should be returned?

Where staff meet the eligibility requirements set out in the 'Guidance on submissions' and on the census date are on furlough, they remain eligible for submission. The FTE of the staff member's qualifying contract should be returned.

Is the deadline the same for returning the 2019/20 staff record in HESA?

HESA have provided the following information in the data collection schedule for the 2019/20 staff record (https://www.hesa.ac.uk/collection/c19025/data_collection_schedule):

Please note it is anticipated that the collection will open on time and that HESA will quality-assure the data broadly in line with the existing timetable. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadlines are currently under review while the impact on providers' ability to make data returns is assessed.

Staff

Will HEIs be able to decide into which UOA staff are submitted?

Yes. Responsibility for mapping staff into UOAs will remain with institutions.

What happens if staff are eligible for submission but have no outputs?

All Category A submitted staff (Category A eligible staff with significant responsibility for research) must be returned with a minimum of one output attributed to them in the submission. Where an individual's circumstances have had an exceptional effect on their ability to work productively throughout the assessment period, so that the individual has not been able to produce an eligible output, a request may be made for the minimum of one requirement to be removed. Where a unit has not submitted a reduction request and is returned with fewer than 2.5 outputs per FTE, and/or has not attributed a minimum of one output to each Category A submitted staff member, any 'missing' outputs will be graded as 'unclassified'.

Will the FTE of staff whose outputs are submitted after they leave the institution be included in the volume measure and count towards the total FTE used to calculate the number of required outputs for the unit?

No. The number of outputs for each submission will be calculated by multiplying the total FTE of 'Category A submitted' staff by 2.5.

Can staff employed after the census date be submitted?

Staff employed after the census date will not be eligible for submission.

Are institutions required to submit staff who have left the institution?

No. The outputs of former staff optionally may be included in submissions, where the staff member was previously employed as Category A eligible when the output was demonstrably generated.

Can research outputs sole-authored by Category C members of staff be submitted for assessment?

No. To be eligible for return, outputs must be authored by 'Category A submitted' staff or staff previously employed as 'Category A eligible' when the output was first made publicly available. Outputs co-authored by Category C staff may be submitted within the min. 1 and max. 5 limits of the Category A staff co-author.

How do the funding bodies define ‘significant responsibility for research’?

Staff with significant responsibility for research are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of their job role. The Guidance on submissions provides a menu of suggested indicators of significant responsibility for research that institutions might use when developing their processes. This guidance does not prescribe a fixed set of criteria that all staff would be required to meet.

Will staff on ‘teaching and research’ contracts be required to demonstrate research independence?

No. Evidence of research independence will only be required for staff on ‘research only’ contracts. However, staff on teaching and research contracts who are not independent researchers should be identified through the processes that the HEI has put in place to identify staff with significant responsibility for research.

For a joint submission, does the required total of 2.5 outputs per FTE apply to each submitting partner’s total FTE or separately? Or will this be applied at UoA level across the FTE for the whole joint unit submission?

The required total number of outputs will be applied at UOA level. The units involved in a joint submission are free to select their outputs from the total pool across the participating HEIs, regardless of the proportion of staff that each HEI is contributing (within the minimum and maximum limits per individual). HEIs will be allowed to specify how they would like the funding to be split – either by FTE or by a proportion they agree between themselves.

Do Marie-Curie fellowships demonstrate research independence?

The Marie-Curie fellowships aren’t included in the list of independent fellowships because whether or not they have independence varies across the fellowships and the disciplines covered. HEIs should use the indicators in the guidance to establish whether individuals on these fellowships have independence.

Should HESA cost centres and UOA data be the same?

While often related, HESA cost centres and UOAs are not the same. Responsibility for mapping staff into UOAs rests with the institution – using HESA data may be a logical way to do this, but this may vary across departments or institutions. As long as the mapping is logical, and rationale can be provided for the decisions to map staff into certain UOAs, it would be acceptable for HESA and UOAs to not align exactly. The REF team may choose to audit in certain cases (for example, where large numbers of staff have been submitted into UOAs which are unrelated to their HESA cost centre).

What initials and surname should be provided for REF1a where the individual uses a different name (e.g. pen name or maiden name) for publication of their research outputs?

Staff who use a different name on published research outputs should be returned to the REF with this name on REF1a. If staff data verification is required from the institution, we will require additional evidence to verify the individual's identity.

In what cases should we submit junior clinical academics? Should they be included where they aren't independent researchers?

Staff employed as junior clinical academics, typically referred to as clinical lecturers, must be included in submissions on the same basis as all academic staff. That is, where these staff members meet the eligibility criteria (including meeting the definition of an independent researcher for staff on research-only contracts) outlined in paragraph 117 of the 'Guidance on submissions' and, where the institution is not returning 100% of eligible staff, they are identified as having significant responsibility for research. It is recognised that the terminology for clinical academic training posts varies between institutions and nations, and can cover staff at different career stages. As a guide, independence for clinical academics would normally only be considered, as a minimum, at the point from which they are postdoctoral. Decisions in relation to research independence and significant responsibility for research should be made in accordance with the institution's code of practice. In recognition that clinical staff are normally significantly constrained in the time they have available to undertake research, where the unit is submitting a reduction request the number of outputs may be reduced by up to one, without penalty in the assessment, for Category A submitted staff who are junior clinical academics (as defined in the 'Guidance on submissions', paragraph 162). Even where a reduction request is not submitted, institutions should recognise the effect on productivity where staff declare circumstances, including for staff meeting the definition of a junior clinical academic, and adjust accordingly their expectations of these staff members' contribution to the output pool.

Why does REFUOA2021 need to be recorded in the HESA return for staff that don't have significant responsibility for research?

The framework for assessment in REF is based upon submissions made by HEIs at the unit of assessment level. Data are required on the total eligible staff within each submission, as well as those with significant responsibility for research (where this differs).

Why are the HESA staff fields SIGRES and REFUOA2021 optional for the 18/19 HESA return?

The SIGRES and REFUOA2021 fields are optional for the 2018/19 staff record to avoid HEIs encountering any errors preventing them from submitting the return on the basis of these trial data items. However, we encourage HEIs to complete these fields where the information is available as we are intending to analyse the data following the survey of submission intentions. Please see further FAQ in relation to identifying staff with significant responsibility for research for the 2018/19 HESA return. Additionally, completion of these two fields in this trial year will help to ensure the robustness of the data items can be reviewed for the 2019/20 record.

How does RESAST relate to research independence in the HESA staff return?

We intend to use the RESAST field as part of our identification of the REF Category A eligible pool among the HESA staff population. Therefore, staff who are carrying out another individual's research programme, and therefore do not meet the definition of an independent researcher in accordance with the HEI's code of practice, should be identified as a research assistant (RESAST=1) in the HESA return.

Are the outputs of a member of staff who no longer meets the definition of an independent researcher eligible as 'former staff' outputs?

Yes, outputs attributable to staff who remain employed at the institution, but are no longer employed as Category A eligible staff on the census date, are eligible where the output was first made publicly available at the point the staff member was employed as Category A eligible. This includes staff on research-only contracts who no longer meet the definition of an independent researcher, as determined in accordance with the institution's code of practice.

Institutions must ensure that their code of practice processes will ensure submissions are made in full adherence with the guidance. For research independence, this means the processes determine independence in accordance with the definition that 'an independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual's research programme'.

Are institutions allowed to change the contract type of their staff in order to ensure that they do, or do not, meet eligibility criteria for REF 2021?

The four UK HE funding bodies have provided the following statement on contract change in institutions:

The funding bodies are of the view that academic contracts should reflect employees' duties. However, it is not the funding bodies' place to review or attempt to shape the employment relationship between an HEI and its staff. As part of the wider evaluation of REF 2021, the funding bodies will look at data on contractual changes made in the 2021 assessment period in order to understand any relationship between the REF and academic contract type in this assessment period, and to inform the development of future research assessment policy.

If a member of staff goes on maternity leave, and is replaced for the period that they are away, could the outputs of the member of staff covering this maternity leave be submitted to REF 2021?

Staff employed to cover family-related leave (and any other equality-related leave) should be treated the same as any other staff member. That means that:

- If they are employed by the HEI on the census date they are returned as a current member of staff (if they are eligible)
- If they are no longer employed, the HEI can submit their outputs from that period, the same as they would with any former member of staff.

Please note, this is different from arrangements for secondments. More information on secondments can be found at 120c of the [Guidance on Submissions](#).

Additional clarification added 28/02/2020:

An eligible member of staff on family leave on the census date should be returned to REF 2021 at their contracted FTE. If the staff member employed to cover the family leave is also employed by the HEI on the census date on an eligible contract, they should also be submitted at their contracted FTE.

If a staff member is on unpaid leave/secondment beyond a UK HEI on the census date and is NOT going to return to their normal duties up to two years from the start of the unpaid leave/secondment, can their outputs be included in our submission?

Staff on unpaid leave or secondment to an organisation other than a UK HEI for a period of more than two years are not considered Category A eligible staff. Where they were previously employed as Category A eligible, their outputs may be included as per the arrangements at paragraph 211 of the 'Guidance on submissions'. Please note that outputs attributable to these staff are eligible for inclusion where the output was first made publicly available while the staff member was employed by the institution as a Category A eligible member of staff. This would not, therefore, include the unpaid leave / secondment period.

Staff circumstances and codes of practice

****UPDATED CONTENT** Will HEIs be required to submit EIAs as part of the COP submission?**

The funding bodies require HEIs to conduct equality impact assessments (EIAs) on the policies outlined in their COP. HEIs are encouraged to refer to these EIAs throughout the COP and may wish to include them as appendices. The funding bodies will require HEIs to submit the final version of their EIA, after the submission deadline.

Where a staff member has circumstances which meet the criteria for a reduction but has been able to produce an eligible output during the REF period, can a reduction to zero outputs still be applied for?

No. The removal of the requirement to submit a minimum of one can only be applied where the staff member has not been able to produce an eligible output in the REF period. However, the unit may still be able to apply for a reduction in the total number of outputs required for the unit based on the circumstances of this staff member.

Can a reduction request be made for those appointed between March 2020 and the census date?

Yes. Where there are changes to the Category A submitted staff employed in the unit after the request has been submitted, institutions will be able to make requests for further reductions at the point of submission by amending their REF 6a/b forms. Decisions in these instances will be taken during the assessment year – with respect to the new details only.

Since we are required to report all our ECRs in the 19/20 HESA return, do ECRs need to voluntarily declare their ECR status for the purposes of staff circumstances, or can we just use the ECR HESA data for the purposes of staff circumstances?

The identification of ECRs for the HESA return will require a different process to reporting ECRs with regard to requesting staff circumstances for REF 2021. The funding bodies and EDAP were keen to avoid a two-tier approach to staff circumstances, whereby some were identified automatically, while others would have to be declared. HEIs must therefore provide ECRs with the opportunity to come forward voluntarily to request that they wish the institution to adjust expectations because of their ECR status, or request the removal of the requirement of the minimum of 1.

Do junior clinical academics have to voluntarily declare their junior clinical status for the purposes of staff circumstances, or can we use contract data on junior clinical academics for the purposes of staff circumstances?

Junior clinical academics will need to come forward voluntarily to request that they wish the institution to adjust expectations because of their status, or request the removal of the requirement of the minimum of 1. The template disclosure form contains a tick-box option where an individual can declare their status as a junior clinical academic.

Who will be able to access data on staff circumstances, and what information will they be able to see? How and when will this information be destroyed?

Submitted data will be kept confidential to the REF team, the REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel, and main panel chairs. All these bodies are subject to confidentiality arrangements. The REF team will destroy the submitted data about individuals' circumstances on completion of the assessment phase.

In a joint submission, where one HEI is only submitting into that UOA, is it sufficient for them to use the COP submitted by the lead institution rather than submitting their own?

Yes, institutions within a joint submission, where one institution is submitting only to that UOA, may agree to use the code of practice of the lead institution. Explicit agreement will be required from all involved HEIs to acknowledge the submission of a single code of practice to cover all institutions.

The code of practice must detail the relevant governance and consultation structures within all HEIs for identification of significant responsibility for research (SRR) (if institutions are not submitting 100 per cent of Category A eligible staff), identification of research independence, and the selection of outputs.

The processes applied to identify SRR and research independence, and to select outputs for submission should be consistent across all institutions, though we acknowledge that structures may differ slightly between institutions. Joint processes must be articulated clearly and must not compromise adherence with other areas of the code of practice that apply to either institution's submission in other UOAs and overall.

If this applies to your institution please contact info@ref.ac.uk for more information.

Do we have to use the staff circumstances template provided by the REF team?

There is no obligation to use the staff circumstances template provided by the REF team, but we strongly suggest using this as the basis for collecting voluntary declarations of circumstances from your staff.

If a staff member has had a reduction of the minimum of one output applied, but subsequently produces an eligible output after the census date, can we include their output within our submission?

Yes, these outputs may be submitted. Where this is the case, institutions should amend their circumstances requests (REF 6a/6b) at the point of submission to adjust the overall number of outputs.

How can an HEI verify that an ECR did not meet the definition of independence at a previous institution?

During audit an HEI will need to state how it assured itself of a staff member's ECR status where this is cited in REF6a/b forms, and what evidence it consulted. This may include, for example, evidence of the staff member's career history (such as a CV) that was submitted by the member of staff when applying for the post at the submitting HEI. In line with the general principles set out in the audit guidance we recognise that HEIs may hold other evidence that is different from the example provided. We will consider all evidence on a fair and reasonable basis, the aim being to obtain sufficient evidence to verify the data that are being audited.

Can you advise on the use of positive action in preparing REF submissions?

We are not able to provide advice on individual cases. However, we have provided a copy of a guidance note by AdvanceHE on 'REF 2021 and positive action' to all REF contacts for information. It remains the responsibility of HEIs to ensure that the manner in which they participate in the REF is lawful.

****UPDATED CONTENT** Can an institution change its code of practice after the document has been approved by the funding body?**

If an HEI identifies an exceptional need to make significant changes to the content of its code of practice (COP) after it has been approved by the funding body, the HEI must provide a revised COP to the REF team, along with a covering letter from the head of institution. This letter should:

- Outline how the COP has been amended and the reason for the amendment.
- Confirm that the changes have not reduced the extent to which the COP adheres to the published guidance.
- Provide details of how the institution will communicate the changes to all relevant staff with ample time before final submission decisions are made.

The letter and revised COP should be sent by email to info@ref.ac.uk.

Any changes made to procedures, the terms of reference of a committee, timetables and so on, will be considered significant changes to the content of a COP and will require the above procedure to be followed. For minor changes to a COP, for example a change in an individual's membership of a committee, we will not require the HEI to follow the above procedure but HEIs should still send by email to info@ref.ac.uk the revised COP with visibly tracked changes. Institutions should contact info@ref.ac.uk if they require any clarification on this point.

All submitted and approved codes of practice will be published before the REF submission deadline. The provisional publication date is January 2020. Final versions of codes of practice will be collected from all submitting institutions in early 2021, for publication along with the submissions in 2022.

Updated text 31/07/2020:

Further guidance on making changes to Codes of Practice is included in the [Guidance on Revisions to REF 2021](#). The final versions of Codes of Practice will be collected by 30 July 2021.

Would someone be eligible to apply for removal of the minimum of 1 output if they are a co-author on a paper?

Where a staff member (A) has made a substantial research contribution to an output as a co-author, a request to remove the minimum of one requirement on the basis of equality-related circumstances may be made only where the output is the sole eligible output for another co-author (B) in the same submission, and hence is staff member B's attributed minimum of one. If other eligible outputs may be attributed to staff member B, staff member A will not be eligible for the minimum of one reduction and the output should be attributed to staff member A to meet the minimum of one requirement.

Can we combine a period of family-related leave taken before a staff member became an ECR with an ECR reduction?

No. The permitted reductions for ECRs already account for the time absent from research prior to meeting the definition, so this cannot overlap with another circumstance in this period. In entering details of circumstances for a staff member, HEIs must ensure only one circumstance is taken into account for any period of time during which they took place simultaneously.

Further information on combining circumstances can be found in the [letter inviting output reduction requests](#), and the webinar and worked examples available on the REF website under 'Training and events materials'.

For family-related leave, what does 'substantially taken during the period 1 January 2014 to 31 July 2020' mean?

'Substantially' means that the majority or a substantial portion of the leave was taken in this period. For example, an individual who went on maternity leave in June 2013 and returned in January 2014, or an individual who goes on maternity leave in October 2020 due to return during 2021, would not be considered to have taken maternity leave substantially within the REF period. Given that periods of such leave vary, a more precise definition cannot be given, and institutions will need to exercise their judgement.

In reaching these judgements, institutions should also consider what an equitable approach would be towards staff whose leave was taken partially within the REF 2021 period, in comparison to staff whose leave was taken entirely within the period. For the latter group of staff, there is no minimum qualifying length for statutory maternity or statutory adoption leave. Therefore, where a unit reduction request is being made, we consider it would be fair for it to include a period of maternity leave that started prior to 1 January 2014 and continued for any length of time beyond that date, where the member of staff had been submitted to REF 2014 without any reduction in output due to that maternity leave.

The guidance on staff circumstances refers to tariff reductions per 'discrete' period of family-related leave. How is this intended to be interpreted?

The intention of the policy is to allow the reduction of 0.5 outputs per period of family-related leave taken in relation to one instance of the birth or adoption of a child/children, whether taken in blocks or as a whole.

****UPDATED CONTENT** Where we have a staff member in post prior to 6 March 2020 with declared circumstances that would be eligible to receive an output reduction but a reduction request is not made by 6 March deadline, or the staff member does not notify the HEI of those circumstances until after 6 March 2020, can we still include those circumstances in REF6a and/or REF6b at the point of submission in November 2020?**

Yes. The March deadline provides an opportunity for advance recommendations on output reductions. At the November 2020 submission deadline HEIs can amend or remove existing reductions, or apply new reductions for staff circumstances (including where they concern staff in post on 6 March 2020).

Any new or additional reductions applied at the submission deadline will be reviewed by EDAP during the assessment year.

Updated 31/07/2020:

The revised submission deadline is 31 March 2021, references to November 2020 in this FAQ should be read as March 2021.

Can we include staff who are not yet in post in the reduction requests for 6 March deadline?

Yes, the circumstances of staff joining the institution after the 6 March deadline, but before the census date, can be included in requests made at the 6 March deadline where they have voluntarily declared their circumstances in advance of joining the institution.

We would advise that all organisations processing personally identifiable information should ensure that information about its use is provided to the data subjects in accordance with the transparency requirements of data protection law. To assist institutions in ensuring that individuals included in their submissions are aware of these uses, we have provided a model data collection statement for REF 2021, which institutions can adapt to their own circumstances (available at <https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/data-management-guidance/>).

****UPDATED CONTENT** When will HEIs know the outcome of staff circumstances requests submitted by the 6 March 2020 deadline?**

Decisions will be provided to institutions by the 29 May 2020, through the REF2021 submission system.

Updated 31/07/2020:

Decisions will be provided to institutions by the week commencing 14 September 2020, through the REF2021 submission system.

Where a unit-level reduction is approved, should the resulting reductions be allocated only across the individuals with declared circumstances, or applied across all members of the unit?

There is no requirement to apply reductions to specific staff members. The REF6b reduction applies at the overall unit level.

How will EDAP assess reduction requests?

EDAP will review all information in submitted requests on a consistent basis. The request data will be provided to EDAP members for review without details of the submitting HEI or unit of assessment to minimise the risk of identifying individuals. EDAP may take advice from the main panel chairs on any discipline-related issues in connection with submitted requests. Where insufficient information is provided in submitted requests by HEIs, additional detail will be requested via the REF team. This may include information to confirm the correct application of tariffs. EDAP may also draw on information on intended unit size provided in the survey of submission intentions, to inform understanding of unit context where required.

If EDAP do not agree with our staff circumstances requests, will they recommend a zero output reduction or change it to the reduction they feel the circumstances equate to?

EDAP will make recommendations on the following:

- For REF6a (minimum of one), whether or not the request should be accepted.
- For REF6b (unit reductions):
 - Whether or not the overall request should be accepted.
 - The appropriate number of outputs that may be reduced without penalty in the case of circumstances requiring a judgement.
 - The appropriate number of outputs that may be reduced without penalty where the tariff reductions are correctly applied.

Where EDAP recommends a lower reduction than requested by the HEI, or recommends the request is not accepted, a written explanation will be provided.

****UPDATED CONTENT** How many outputs should we submit on the submission deadline where we are also applying staff circumstances reductions?**

The number of outputs submitted should equal the total required for the unit minus the reductions being applied on the basis of equality-related circumstances (including both those reviewed in the advance process, where these are being taken up, and any new / additional cases).

The advance reduction request process provides HEIs with the opportunity to receive decisions prior to making submissions in REF 2021. Where new or additional reductions are applied at the submission deadline, these will be reviewed as part of the full assessment process as in previous exercises.

Outputs

What will the 'rounding methodology' be, in determining the number of outputs for submission?

Rounding will be to the nearest whole number. Values ending in .5 should be rounded up.

Can outputs published while at a non-UK institution, or as an independent scholar, be submitted to REF 2021?

Yes, where they are within the publication period and meet any other applicable eligibility criteria, these outputs may be included in submissions by the institution employing the staff member on the census date.

Will part-time staff have to meet the requirement for a minimum of one output?

Yes. The minimum and maximum limits on the number of outputs will apply to the person, not their FTE.

What will happen if a unit does not submit the required number of outputs or case studies?

Each missing output or case study will receive an 'unclassified' score.

Will there be the possibility of generating discrete output sub-profiles?

Sub-panel 3 (Allied Health Professions, Dentistry, Nursing and Pharmacy) and Sub-panel 12 (Engineering) will provide discrete output sub-profiles against specified areas to the head of institution where requested. Details on how to request output sub-profiles in these UOAs can be found in the 'Panel criteria', Part 3, Section 1.

Does the REF assessment process distinguish between research outputs on the basis of mode of publication, place of publication or publisher?

No. The REF is governed by a principle of equity and is committed to the fair and equal assessment of all types of research and forms of research output.

Will approaches to double-weighting monographs be determined at main panel level?

Yes. As was the case in REF 2014, each main panel has provided guidance on how outputs of extended scale and scope are characterised in their disciplines, and on the process for requesting an output to be double-weighted.

Where an institution employs a member of staff on the census date, which of their outputs can be submitted?

For Category A submitted staff, outputs that are within the publication period and meet any other applicable eligibility criteria (for example, open access requirements) are eligible.

Can the outputs from one staff member be submitted to different units within the same institution?

No. An individual and their outputs can only be submitted to one unit of assessment. Where an individual holds a joint appointment across two or more submitting units within the same institution, the HEI must decide on one submission in which to return the individual.

Does each output for which double-weighting is requested need to have its own individual reserve output? Or can one submit a list of 'reserve outputs' (in order of preference) to cover several double-weighting requests?

It is our view that a ranked list would add greater complexity to the submission process for HEIs, in ensuring that the minimum and maximum boundaries are adhered to in the final set of assessed outputs. Institutions should therefore include a 'reserve' output for each output requested for double-weighting.

Will double-weighting outputs be optional?

Yes. The decision whether to request double-weighting lies with the submitting unit.

Will a double weighted item from a single individual count as two items of their five or one?

Where the double-weighting request is accepted, the output will count as two items against the individual to whom it is attributed. (If it is a co-authored output, institutions may attribute the output to a maximum of two members of staff returned within the same submission, in which case it will count as one output for each of them). If the panel does not accept the request, and the output remains single-weighted, it will count as one item.

Double-weighting requests should be made in accordance with the minima and maxima requirements for attributing outputs to staff, so that in the event the request is accepted, or in the event that it is not and the reserve output is instead assessed, the minimum of one requirement is met for each Category A submitted staff member (unless individual circumstances apply), and no more than five outputs are attributed to any one member of current or former staff.

In what cases can I submit an output that was pre-published during the previous REF exercise?

An output first published in its final form during the REF 2021 publication period that was 'pre-published' in the previous publication period – whether in full in a different form or as a preliminary version or working paper – is eligible for submission to the REF, provided that the 'pre-published' output was not submitted to REF 2014 by any institution.

When would the research produced by a research student be eligible for submission to REF 2021?

Outputs made publicly available while a Category A submitted staff member was a research student are eligible for submission with the exception of a thesis or dissertation. For impact, the research underpinning an impact case study must have been undertaken while the person was working in the submitting HEI; any research undertaken while the individual was a research student could not be submitted as underpinning research for impact case studies.

Are outputs produced for a PhD by publication eligible for submission to REF 2021?

The outputs from a PhD by publication can be submitted to REF 2021 by the HEI employing the staff member as Category A eligible on the census date. However, PhD theses and dissertations are not eligible for submission to REF 2021.

We are making entries for journals and scholarly editions, and find that many do not give a month, though sometimes they give a season. What should we do?

If the journal issue is not denoted by the month of publication, you should enter your best possible estimate of the month of publication.

If it gives a season, and the month of publication is not otherwise known, please enter the following months:

- 1 = winter (beginning of year)
- 4 = spring
- 7 = summer
- 10 = autumn
- 12 = winter (end of year)

What is a justifiable rationale for grouping 'short items' as one output?

Tightly-grouped, short items with significant research in common are eligible to be submitted as a multi-component output (paragraph 271, Panel Criteria and Working Methods). In order to encourage the submission of outputs that fully represent the breadth and diversity of research in the arts and humanities, this provision is in place to support the submission of groups of items that would not individually be sufficiently substantial to be submitted as single items. For example, a cluster of related, short encyclopaedia articles, or a series of separately published poems that are part of a defined sequence, would fall into this category. We expect outputs submitted as 'groups of short items' to be accompanied by a clear statement explaining the rationale for their grouping.

Separately published papers are discrete outputs and cannot be grouped together as a single output. Where research has been split by a publisher and would only be considered a single coherent work when viewed together, these should be returned as one research output.

What can be included in a multi-component creative practice output?

This provision is in place to support the presentation of a range of items that collectively and coherently represent the research dimensions of a single creative practice research output. Guidance on the submission of a multi-component output in relation to creative practice is provided in paragraph 265 and in Annex C of the Panel Criteria and Working Methods. Multi-component outputs are expected to include a range of item *types* which may include, for example images, video and/or audio files, a patent, which collectively enable the panel to access the research dimensions of the creative practice output. It is recommended that outputs submitted under this provision are accompanied by a clear statement explaining the research dimensions of the creative practice submitted as a research output.

When will the panels look at author contribution statements on outputs? What if the information on outputs is wrong?

Sub-panels 1-6 and 9 will only routinely refer to author contribution statements on outputs in cases where there are more than 15 authors and the submitted member of staff to whom the output is attributed is not identified as either the lead or corresponding author. If there are errors in an author contribution statement contained within the output, HEIs should flag this in the co-author contribution statement that they provide for the sub-panel to consider. If the sub-panel has any concerns about the information provided, the HEI may be asked to verify the co-author contribution through audit.

In all other cases (15 or less authors, or lead or corresponding author), if the sub-panel has any concerns surrounding the author contribution, we may seek to verify this through audit.

Will supplementary information be audited?

We do not expect to audit routinely supplementary information that has been published for submitted outputs. Audit queries may be raised by the panels about the relationship between the output and the supplementary information. As with all information provided by HEIs in submissions to REF 2021, this must be capable of verification.

Are outputs requiring security clearance (as distinct from 'confidential' outputs) eligible for submission, and what should we do to ensure that these outputs can be appropriately assessed?

HEIs may request permission to submit outputs that require security cleared assessors. Permission will be given only where we are able to identify an expert assessor with the required level of security clearance. Requests to submit these outputs should be submitted through the REF submission system, using the same template as impact case studies requiring security clearance. Please clearly specify that you are requesting the submission of an output rather than a classified case study.

Should the research specialisms set out for the survey of submission intentions be used for the output allocation field, for those sub-panels requiring this?

In most cases, but not all. The information requirements for each UOA (where applicable) for the output allocation field are on the REF website at www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/additional-guidance/.

What formats are acceptable in submitting digital media or software outputs?

Digital media and software outputs should be submitted according to the guidance on formats provided in Annex K of the 'Guidance on submissions', supplemented as appropriate by the guidance offered in Annex C of the 'Panel Criteria and Working Methods'. The details provided on how to access the output (or contextual information – see para. 265 of the Panel Criteria and Working Methods) should clarify what platform or technical requirements are required. Where possible, digital items should be accessible from a range of devices, and care should be taken to avoid the use of obsolete formats. The availability of such outputs in multiple formats, and/or with supporting documentation in other formats, is also welcomed where this will assist panellists' access to the research. Outputs may be submitted either in physical form (as for instance through a USB storage device), or electronically (though a link), but not both, nor through a mix of physical and electronic forms.

The guidance says that outputs first published in final form in this period, that were pre-published in the last, are eligible where the pre-published version wasn't submitted in REF 2014. Does pre-published include 'online first' publication?

Yes. The final print version of an output made available in the REF 2021 publication period may be submitted to REF 2021 providing the online first version was not submitted by any HEI to REF 2014.

Outputs first published in final form in this period are eligible where a pre-published version was not submitted in REF 2014. Do outputs submitted as reserve outputs count as being submitted in REF 2014?

Yes. Reserve outputs are included in the list of submitted outputs that can be accessed on the REF 2014 website.

What information do we need to include in the abstract required for outputs in languages other than English?

For research outputs in a language other than English (including outputs submitted in the medium of Welsh), a short abstract in English should be provided to describe the content and nature of the work (maximum 100 words). The abstract should also indicate which language the output is in as well as any languages extensively quoted in the output. A separate field for each output in REF2 will be available for the abstract.

Main Panel D states in the ‘Panel criteria’ that it expects to receive special issues of journals and curatorial projects where the researcher has made a demonstrable contribution to the research published (in addition to any chapter published in the same work). Will Main Panel C similarly expect to receive special issues and curatorial projects?

In paragraph 206 of the ‘Panel criteria and working methods’, the panels set out that they will welcome all outputs fulfilling the eligibility criteria, and they will consider them equitably. Institutions intending to submit special issues and curatorial projects to Main Panel C may wish to consider using the provision set out at paragraph 259 of the ‘Panel criteria’, according to which institutions should provide 300 words on the research process/content where this is not evident from the output.

What are the arrangements for copyright on journal articles, conference proceedings and other outputs that are returned to the REF?

UKRI has agreed a royalty-free [licence](#) with the Copyright Licensing Agency to enable access for REF purposes to books, journals, periodicals and conference proceedings purchased by the UK higher education community.

The licence permits the REF team, subject to publishers’ permission and granting access, to access journal articles and conference proceedings directly from publishers’ websites and provide them to panel members for the purposes of the REF. It also permits HEIs to provide research outputs to the REF team for the purposes of the REF. Where an HEI has a subscription permitting access to the full text of a submitted research output, the HEI is authorised to download the publisher’s PDF file for transmission to the REF Team. For research outputs available in print, HEIs may provide scanned or photocopied copies.

What is supplementary information?

Supplementary information is typically further information related to the research that isn’t included in the output itself, and is published alongside the output to support and complement the main text. This can include, for example, tabular data, additional materials and method information, multimedia files like video or audio files, charts and graphs.

HEIs should provide the DOI (or other URL, if no DOI is available) for any supplementary information published alongside a submitted output where this differs from the submitted output’s DOI.

****UPDATED CONTENT** What are the timescales for responding to support queries about citation data in March 2021?**

The timescales and response targets are set out in the [Service Level Agreement](#) for the citations matching service. We appreciate that in some circumstances HEIs may need to raise support queries about citation data close to the REF submission deadline. Where the time from the point the query is raised to the submission deadline is shorter than the SLA target for the query, Clarivate will make best endeavours to resolve the query before the deadline. However, we are not able to guarantee that such queries will be resolved by the submission deadline.

We have a submitting unit that has been affected by a major unforeseen event during the assessment period. Can any provision be made to recognise this?

Units that have been affected by major unforeseen events in the period 1 January 2014 to 31 July 2020 can put a case forward to the REF Steering Group to request a reduction in the number of outputs required for the affected unit(s). The steering group will consider cases where there has been a major event affecting the submitting unit's research infrastructure or facilities that has consequently had a significant effect on the productivity of a large proportion of staff in the unit. We would expect there to be additional, usually external, evidence of this effect (for example, formal extensions to grants).

In making the request, the institution will need to set out (max 500 words):

- Details of the event, including timing and the nature of the effect on the research infrastructure and / or facilities.
- How this in turn has affected the productivity of staff in the unit, including details of how many of the unit's staff were affected, the nature of the effect and its duration, including details of any additional (preferably external) evidence of the effect.
- The institution's calculation of how many outputs they are seeking a reduction for, using Table L2 in the 'Guidance on submissions' by analogy.

The steering group will not require individual staff details (such as staff names) in the request, but institutions will need to be able to verify the information provided in the event of audit.

Requests may be made by emailing info@ref.ac.uk. The deadline for submitting requests is 1 July 2020. Requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the steering group. Advice may be sought on any discipline-related matters from the main and sub-panel chairs. The steering group's decision on the request will be final.

Where requests are accepted, the output requirement for the unit will be amended in the submission system. The sub-panel for the relevant UOA will be notified of the accepted request.

Irrespective of whether or not output reductions are made, the submitting unit can include details of the major unforeseen event in the narrative sections of the environment (REF5a/b) to enable the assessing sub-panel to understand the wider context of the unit's environment.

****UPDATED CONTENT** There will be a release of citations contextual data in February 2020. Will it be possible to get an update of citations contextual data closer to the submission deadline?**

We recognise that it would be useful for HEIs to have access to more up-to-date citations contextual data when they are preparing their submissions. In accordance with the open approach to citation data provision in REF 2021, we have therefore agreed with our citation data partners to provide a further release to HEIs in September 2020. This will cover the years 2014 to 2019.

Updated 31/07/2020:

There will be a further release of contextual data to institutions in January 2021. Please see: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/citation-and-contextual-data-guidance/>

When submitting outputs to sub-panels in Main Panel D, should we submit a 300 word statement for all outputs, including monographs and journal articles or just for practice research outputs where the research is not self-evident?

Main Panel D Panel Criteria requests the submission of a 300 word statement in order to make clear how the submitted output meets the definition of research, where the role of the researcher, or the research process, is not evident within the output. This is more likely to be the case for practice research outputs. The research process is normally evident in outputs such as monographs, book chapters, and journal articles, and so 300 word statements are not typically required for these outputs. The 300 word statement should not be used to provide a commentary on the originality, significance and rigour of the output - any evaluative commentary on the perceived quality of an output will be disregarded by the panel.

The ‘Guidance on submissions’ states that those parts of submissions that contain factual data and textual information about research activity will be published at the end of the exercise. How will this information be licensed?

This information will be licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC-BY 4.0), and published in the following ways:

- The data that forms the REF2 (research outputs) element of submissions will be published, except for the attribution of outputs to staff. The REF2 data, along with the data that forms the REF4 (environment data) element, and research groups, will be published in a form that will be viewable online and also downloadable.
- Where a redacted version of an impact case study (REF3) has been returned by 29 January 2021, we will publish the redacted version; otherwise we will publish the unredacted version that was returned in the submission. We will make these available as downloadable documents, and also provide the case studies in a searchable database. The additional contextual data will also be included in the database. The CC-BY 4.0 licence will apply both to the database and the downloadable impact case study documents.
- The institutional-level environment statement and unit-level environment templates will be made available as downloadable documents.

The REF 2021 outcomes, reports and analyses described in the ‘Guidance on submissions’ will also be published under a CC-BY 4.0 licence.

The following will not be published: information in REF1 (staff) and REF6 (unit reduction requests and requests to remove the minimum of one requirement); outputs and impact case studies marked ‘not for publication’; and the corroborating evidence provided for impact case studies.

Is there a way of ordering the presentation of outputs for the panels, so that we can easily cross-reference them in the environment statement?

Additional clarification added 28/02/2020, see text in italics

A unique output identifier is required for each output listed in a submission, which should be provided by the institution. This can include numbers and/or letters. The identifier should be permanently associated with the output and does not need to be changed if outputs are removed or added. The panels will be provided with this output identifier so it can be used to refer to specific outputs in textual parts of the submission, as required.

Sub-panels 11 and 12 require the name and contact details of a senior industrialist in the output additional information field, where claims are made relating to the industrial significance of an output. Will this information be published?

All additional information for REF2 will be published as part of the submission information, and it is not possible for HEIs to redact elements of the 'additional information field'. Publication of names and email addresses is not necessary for the purpose of the REF and, where HEIs determine that it is not appropriate to provide these, they should instead provide the individual's position and company in the 'Additional information' field.

Updated 28/02/2020:

If audited, the institution will be expected to provide contact details for the individual.

In Main Panel D, for outputs where the research dimensions are not evident within the output/representation of the output itself, can we submit both a 300-word statement and a fuller written description?

Paragraphs 265-267 of the 'Panel criteria and working methods' provide further information about the submission of research outputs supported by contextual information in Main Panel D. Contextual information can be provided with the output itself, as long as the 300 words clarifies what is the output and what is the contextual information.

Do journal articles or conference contributions included in multi-component outputs need to meet the open access requirements?

Where the output comprises a journal article or conference contribution (whether as a sole item, or as part of a multi-component output) that meets the definition of an 'in-scope' output at paragraph 223 of the 'Guidance on submissions', the in-scope item will need to comply with the open access requirements (or have an appropriate exception applied). The open access requirements do not apply to contextual information. Items included in contextual information, including journal articles or conference contributions, are therefore not required to comply.

The UOA 11 descriptor does not include the ACM category 'social and professional topics'. What does this mean for submissions?

Sub-panel 11 has produced some additional guidance on this issue, which can be accessed via the website of the UK Computing Research Committee (<http://www.ukcrc.org.uk/>).

Open access

Will the 5% tolerance band be applied at UOA or institutional level?

The tolerance band will be applied at UOA level.

If a staff member who moved institution during the census period lodged an article in the repository of their previous institution, does this meet the open access requirements? Does the new HEI have to check that it is still in the repository?

If the staff member to whom the output is attributed was employed at a different UK HEI at the point of acceptance and the new HEI has not been able to determine compliance with the criteria, the output will not be required to meet the open access criteria.

Where an output was published at a previous institution, how much do HEIs need to do to identify whether an output is compliant or non-compliant with the open access policy?

Journal articles with an ISSN or conference contributions in conference proceedings with an ISSN produced by *staff while they were at a former employer* should not be returned as non-compliant with the REF 2021 OA policy requirements. These outputs may be out-of-scope if accepted for publication before 1st April 2016, or the submitting HEI may know that the output is compliant with the requirements. Otherwise the output should be returned with the exception outlined in paragraph 254a of the Guidance on Submissions.

Can the open access exception at paragraph 254a be used for outputs of former staff?

In-scope outputs produced by *former staff* may not use the exemption in paragraph 254a of the Guidance on Submissions (aka. the institution is submitting something from a staff member that has moved on). The output may have to be returned as non-compliant if it is in-scope and compliance cannot be demonstrated and another exception is not suitable.

Does an output meet open access requirements with regard to being accessible without charge if it is deposited in a repository that requires user to register with an email address to access material?

Yes. If the content of a repository is free-to-use (i.e. users are not required to pay to search, read or download the output) then it would meet open access requirements for the purposes of REF 2021.

How are periods of 'months' compared when assessing compliance with the REF 2021 Open Access policy?

Where elapsed periods are described in calendar months (for example for Open Access eligibility) the period will be determined by comparing the day of the month inclusively.

a. For example, when considering Open Access requirements as set out in paragraph 249a of the *Guidance on Submissions*, if an output was deposited on 28th March and met the access requirements on 28th April, it would be considered to be compliant with the Open Access requirements.

b. If an output was deposited on 28th March and met the access requirements on 29th April, it would be considered to be non-compliant.

When comparing calendar months with dates at the end of the month, the first day of the following month will be used where there is no day matching the previous month.

a. For example, if an output was deposited on 28th January and met the access requirements on 28th February, it would be considered to be compliant with the Open Access requirements.

b. If an output was deposited on 31st January and met the access requirements on 1st March, it would be considered to be compliant.

c. If an output was deposited on 31st January and met the access requirements on 2nd March, it would be considered to be non-compliant

These worked examples are using the access requirements but the same logic applies to other periods such as the three month deposit requirements.

Does our institution have to adopt RIOXX in order to be able to submit to the REF?

No. HEIs may find it useful to adopt RIOXX to help manage open access in their institutions, but the use of RIOXX is not a requirement of the REF.

Does our institution have to use Unpaywall or CORE to submit to the REF?

The REF team will use two metadata services, Unpaywall and CORE, to help with risk-based identification of HEIs that we may wish to select for possible open access audit review. These data tools will help us to identify where an audit should take place, but they will not be used to audit the OA status of outputs at HEIs.

It is not a requirement of the REF that HEIs use either of these metadata services, nor do we expect HEIs to integrate their CRIS or repository systems with these services. We will fully review the risk identification and ranking process for open access, to ensure that HEIs that are not integrated with these services are not put at a disadvantage when compared with those that are.

Some HEIs have nevertheless shown interest in having their outputs appear in these services in order to make available information about the open access status of their research. For HEIs wishing to do so, it is possible to register with both metadata services.

Both services require a URL in the form of an Open Archives Initiative Protocol for Metadata Harvesting (OAI-PMH). Many HEIs will be using a repository that exposes an OAI-PMH and these should be suitable for integration. HEIs can check whether they have a suitable OAI-PMH by searching for their repository on <http://v2.sherpa.ac.uk/opensoar/> - the OAI-PMH URL should be listed on the details page of the HEI's repository.

To register a repository with Unpaywall, you can fill in an online form that is available via the Unpaywall website, under 'About' (Data sources) - select the 'this form' link. The form requires an email address, the OAI-PMH URL and some information about the HEI and the repository.

To register a repository with CORE, HEIs should send an email to theteam@core.ac.uk stating the OAI-PMH URL, HEI name and repository name.

Where an author-accepted manuscript has been deposited under embargo, and is not yet published, is it considered to be publicly available?

No. An author-accepted manuscript must be accessible to be considered as the version of an output that is first made publicly available.

I have an output that is under embargo until its publication date. What is the access requirement under the open access policy?

Where an output is under embargo until its date of publication, the embargo period is considered to both begin and end on the publication date. The output should therefore meet the access requirements of the open access policy under route 2 (see paragraph 249b of the Guidance on submissions), and no later than one month after the date of publication.

What can we do if there is a delay in depositing an author's accepted manuscript because of making reasonable adjustments for a disability?

If the author's accepted manuscript is amended following specialist help or adjustments, which can happen as part of reasonable adjustments made for disability, then the updated manuscript may be deposited in place of the originally deposited output (see paragraph 240 of the Guidance on submissions).

Alternatively, the HEI can wait until the version of record is available and deposit that instead of the author's accepted manuscript (see paragraph 237 of the Guidance on submissions). If the version of record is being deposited, and the output was accepted for publication on or after 1 April 2018, it might not be available to deposit within three months of acceptance – where this is the case, the HEI should use the exception for outputs deposited within three months of publication (see paragraph 255b of the Guidance on submissions).

Interdisciplinary research

What is the definition of IDR?

For the purposes of the REF, interdisciplinary research is understood to achieve outcomes (including new approaches) that could not be achieved within the framework of a single discipline.

Interdisciplinary research features significant interaction between two or more disciplines and/or moves beyond established disciplinary foundations in applying or integrating research approaches from other disciplines.

What role will the interdisciplinary advisers play on the panels?

All sub-panels will have at least two members appointed as interdisciplinary advisers. The interdisciplinary advisers will offer guidance to the sub-panels in their assessment of interdisciplinary outputs to enable their robust and valid assessment. This may include advising on the allocation of outputs and the calibration and moderation of scoring. Interdisciplinary advisers will not necessarily be expected to assess all interdisciplinary outputs submitted to their panel. The advisers will work in a network with their counterparts on other sub-panels. The network will meet at key points during the assessment phase and will provide a forum for reviewing joint working arrangements and identifying wider expertise requirements.

Impact

Can the same impact case study be submitted by more than one submitting unit?

Where more than one submitting unit made a distinct and material research contribution to an impact, each of those submitting units may submit a case study of the impact. Each submitting unit will need to show that its research made a distinct and material contribution to the impact. This applies whether an HEI wishes to submit the same impact in different submissions, or different HEIs.

Can the same underpinning research be used in more than one impact case study? And can these case studies be submitted within the same UOA?

Units are not prohibited from submitting more than one case study based on the same body of research. However, they should take into account the extent to which this might reduce the reach and significance of the impact described.

An Impact case study is being built around my work but I am hoping to move institutions. Can I bring my impact to date with me?

The institution submitting a case study must have produced research which has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact described in the case study. Where a researcher has moved to a different institution during the period in which a body of research underpinning a case study was produced, the submitting institution should make clear that the research undertaken during the period the researcher spent at that institution made a material and distinct contribution to the impact claimed.

Can publications that link to impact case studies still be submitted as outputs?

Yes. Underpinning research referenced in a case study may also be included in a submission as an output (listed in REF2), without disadvantage. In these situations, the assessment of the impact case study will have no bearing on the assessment of the quality of the output.

Does the impact claimed need to be tied to an individual specific output within the body of work?

No. The panels recognise that the link between research and impact can be indirect and non-linear.

Do all the outputs referenced in an impact case study need to be of at least two-star quality?

Submitting units are required to provide up to six key references that represent the body of research or a research project produced by the submitting unit that underpins the impact described in the case study. The sub-panels will not expect each referenced item to meet the quality threshold, but will wish to be satisfied that the research as a whole was of at least two-star quality. Where sub-panels identify within the referenced research at least one output of two-star quality or higher, and this is a key output underpinning the impact, this will normally be sufficient to demonstrate that the underpinning research as a whole meets the quality threshold.

Do all the outputs referenced in an impact case study need to be of at least two-star quality?

Submitting units are required to provide up to six key references that represent the body of research or a research project produced by the submitting unit that underpins the impact described in the case study. The sub-panels will not expect each referenced item to meet the quality threshold, but will wish to be satisfied that the research as a whole was of at least two-star quality. Where sub-panels identify within the referenced research at least one output of two-star quality or higher, and this is a key output underpinning the impact, this will normally be sufficient to demonstrate that the underpinning research as a whole meets the quality threshold.

Can an HEI submit an impact case study in a UOA, even if the individual who conducted the research is returned in a different UOA?

Yes, we recognise that individual researchers may undertake research across multiple disciplines over time and that UOA boundaries are not rigid. Provided the underpinning research is within the scope of the UOA in which it is submitted, a case study may be submitted in a different UOA from the individual.

Where an individual moved to the HEI after 1 August 2013, and their research had a continuing impact that started before they joined the HEI, which part of the impact can the HEI claim?

The HEI can claim the impact from the point at which research carried out by staff while working in the HEI made a distinct and material contribution to it. Any impact prior to that point can be described in the case study as context only (to help explain the background the impact), but cannot be claimed as part of the impact underpinned by the submitting HEI's research.

Does the indicative maximum of 6 references to research in an impact case study refer to a combined total of research references and grant information?

No. In addition to the maximum of 6 research references, grant information details may also be provided, where appropriate.

****UPDATED CONTENT** How many testimonials can be included as corroborating sources for impact?**

A maximum of 10 references to sources that can corroborate the impact may be included in each case study. This may include any number, within the maximum of 10, of factual statements already provided to the HEI. These must be submitted to the REF team by the deadline of 29 January 2021. The details of a maximum of five individuals relating to these 10 sources may be entered for each case study, and these are to be submitted through the submission system. These five individuals may be contacted directly by the REF team to corroborate the information provided as part of the audit process. We do not envisage contacting more than five individuals for any particular case study, which is why we have set this limit. If a larger number of individuals could potentially provide such corroboration, then five should be selected that best represent this larger group. The corroborating sources listed should focus on the key claims made within the case study. For further guidance on corroborating evidence, including the use of testimonials, please refer to paragraphs 310 and 311 of the 'Panel criteria and working methods'.

Updated 31/07/2020:

The deadline for submitting corroborating evidence is 1 June 2021.

Do the staff who produced the underpinning research for an impact case study have to be employed in the submitting unit during the eligibility period for the underpinning research?

We would normally expect staff to have been employed in the submitting unit during the eligibility period for underpinning research; that is, the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020. However, we recognise there may be exceptional circumstances where this is not the case – where research that has made a distinct and material contribution to the impact was undertaken shortly before 1 January 2000, the *direct* output(s) of the research were published on or after 1 January 2000, and where the staff member(s) left the institution in the interval between these points.

Can you clarify what is required for audit for impact case studies in paragraph 65 of the audit guidance?

Paragraph 65 describes two types of evidence. Firstly, there is the evidence and indicators of impact (provided in section 4 of the impact case study template) – these are normally looked at within the assessment process rather than audit. Corroborating sources to verify the impacts claimed should be provided in section 5 of the case study template. These sources will be made available to panels where requested via panel-instigated audit. We will also audit a proportion of case studies and will examine these sources during that process.

The second type of evidence relates to eligibility of the case study. The third sentence of this paragraph should be read as follows (italics indicate clarifying wording): 'Evidence to *verify the eligibility of the case study* may include relevant extracts of staff contracts, records of research grants, or other appropriate evidence.'

How strict is the indicative maximum of ten references to sources to corroborate an impact?

We expect that up to ten references to sources to corroborate the impact will normally be sufficient, though it is recognised that in some instances further references may be required.

Can multiple items be grouped as a single source to corroborate an impact?

HEIs may group multiple items of evidence into a single source to corroborate the impact where this is an appropriate way of presenting related evidence items. In these cases, the HEI must clearly identify and describe each item in the grouped source in section 5 of the impact case study template.

Can multiple items be grouped as a single source to corroborate an impact?

HEIs may group multiple items of evidence into a single source to corroborate the impact where this is an appropriate way of presenting related evidence items. In these cases, the HEI must clearly identify and describe each item in the grouped source in section 5 of the impact case study template.

I have corroborating evidence for a case study in a format unsuitable for PDF. How can I submit this?

Where the evidence can be freely accessed online, a URL can be provided either directly in section 5 of the REF3 template, or embedded in a PDF document and submitted as part of the corroborating evidence. Where the evidence cannot be provided in PDF, it should be retained by the institution for provision in the event of audit and not submitted routinely. The submitted information should make clear which sources are being provided upfront and which (if any) are being retained by the institution where it cannot be provided in PDF.

Is it a requirement for impact case studies to be based on underpinning research carried out by a Cat A eligible staff member?

No. The underpinning research must be carried out by staff working in the submitting HEI and must be within the scope of the relevant UOA descriptor. It may include research undertaken by staff employed on non-Category A eligible contracts.

Additional clarification added 12/12/2019

It may also include unpaid staff or staff who would have been considered as 'Category C' in a former REF/RAE, on the basis that their research was clearly focussed in the submitting HEI. Research undertaken by research students is not considered as having been carried out by staff while working in the submitting HEI.

Has the model data collection statement for HEIs been updated?

Yes. An update was released in February to include periods of employment within the personal data that may be included in impact case studies.

How should confidential or classified information contained within corroborating evidence for impact case studies be submitted to ensure confidentiality?

We are not intending to publish the corroborating evidence for impact case studies. All panel members, advisers, observers and others involved in the assessment process are bound by a confidentiality agreement. This should provide HEIs the confidence to submit commercially confidential material as corroborating evidence. The HEI may also wish to consider whether a redacted version of the case study should be provided for publication. Where there are certain panel members who have commercial (or other) conflicts of interest in assessing the material (including the corroborating evidence) HEIs can identify these at the point of submission, according to the arrangements set out at paragraph 307.b. of the 'Guidance on submissions'.

Where any material within the corroborating evidence is classified, the evidence should not be provided upfront but should be held by the HEI in the event of audit. Where this is the case, HEIs should indicate in section 5 of the impact case study template whether the corroborating evidence is held by the HEI or has been submitted directly.

Environment

Are the qualifying dates for doctoral completions the same as the dates for income?

Yes. Data about research income and research doctoral degrees awarded must fall within the assessment period: 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020.

What kinds of data can institutions provide in the environment statement? Can they include TEF and/or KEF data?

Institutions can provide any data that they consider appropriate as evidence for claims made in the statement. A working group of the Forum for Responsible Research Metrics was established to consider the types of data that institutions might select to include, and the group provided guidance to the panels. Guidance on the inclusion of quantitative data can be found [here](#).

Some institutions might choose to merge smaller units or redistribute staff – will there be space in the environment statement to explain these decisions?

As in 2014, the environment template includes a section for submitting units to outline the 'unit context and structure, research and impact strategy', including how research is structured across the unit. The panels set out their expectations for the environment statement in the 'Panel criteria', Part 3, Section 5.

How will the panels use the new institutional-level statement in their assessment of the environment?

The sub-panels will use the information provided in the institutional-level statement to inform and contextualise their assessment of the relevant sections of the unit-level template. The institutional-level statement will not be separately assessed or separately scored by the sub-panels.

Are institutions able to include quantitative indicators in their environment statements that were ruled out by the Forum for Responsible Research Metrics?

Yes. The examples provided by the Forum are not intended to be prescriptive, or exhaustive. When including indicators, institutions should follow the eight principles set out in [Annex A of the Forum's guidance](#).

Can we include diagrams and tables in the Institutional and Unit level environment templates?

The 'Guidance on submissions', Annex F, sets out that the REF5a and 5b templates may include formatting, tables and non-text content so long as the guidance on maximum word limits and on minimum font size, line spacing and margin widths are adhered to. Where tables are used, these must be included in a format that means they contribute to the word count. Diagrams should be used sparingly, and only where their use will more effectively summarise information than text alone, i.e. to improve readability.

Can doctoral degrees awarded to students based at overseas campuses be returned in REF4a?

No. Only doctoral degrees returned to the HESA student record can be returned in REF4a. The only exception to this rule is represented by cases in which institutions want to return their contribution to the doctoral degree of a student instance for which another institution has reporting responsibilities, within a formal collaborative arrangement.

What constitutes a 'material change' in order to request amendments to HESA data?

A material change arises when incorrect data does not allow your submission to be within the stated tolerance limits. These limits are as outlined in the guidance on REF 4 data provided to institutions in September 2019 with the HESA data.

How should we map our HESA environment data to UOAs?

It is the submitting institution's responsibility to allocate REF4 data to the relevant UOAs. While often related, we recognise that HESA cost centres and UOAs are not the same, and therefore validation checks on submitted REF4 data in the submission system only apply at the institution (and not UOA) level. The mapping should, however, be logical, with a clear rationale able to be given for the decisions. During audit we will investigate instances where there appear to be significant differences between submitted data and other returns.

When data are assigned to non-academic cost centres in HESA, these may be allocated to a UOA where they relate to it; otherwise, they should be excluded from the institution's submissions. This will not affect the validation as the submission system will only enforce upper limits to the submitted data.

Is a PhD by publication eligible for inclusion in REF4a?

The only qualifications that may be included in REF4a are those returned to field QUAL of the HESA record as 'D00: Doctorate degree that meets the criteria for a research-based higher degree' and 'D01: New Route PhD that meets the criteria for a research-based higher degree'. Notice that 'D01' has been removed from 2017-18 onwards. PhD by publication, PhD by portfolio and professional doctorates recorded as E00 are not eligible for inclusion in REF4a.

My institution has not received income-in-kind data from UKRI but we were awarded access to a research council's facility as part of a partnership or collaboration where another institution was the lead. How can we make sure the contribution is considered in the assessment?

If the lead institution is eligible to submit to REF 2021 then it is their responsibility to contact your institution and inform you of your share of the research income-in-kind. Also, they should deduct this income from their submission.

If the lead institution is not eligible to submit to REF 2021 (for example, it is not UK-based), then you can include income-in-kind data in REF5b but not in REF4c.

My institution has received income-in-kind data from UKRI but we were awarded access to a research council's facility as part of a partnership or collaboration where other institutions were involved. What should I do?

It is your responsibility as the lead institution to calculate the proportions of the income-in-kind that apply to partner institutions, inform partner institutions of the proportions, and not include the proportions attributed to other HEIs in your own submission. These calculations may be subject to audit to ensure there is no double counting of income-in-kind.

The finance return for English HEIs was made to HESA up to 2017-18. From 2018-19 onwards it is instead returned to the Office for Students (OfS). How does this affect the REF4b element of our submission?

For HEIs in England, paragraphs 92, 93, 346 to 350, and 354 of the 'Guidance on submissions' should be read as referring to the finance return made to OfS, and the OfS definitions in the finance record, as applicable for 2018-19 onwards.

Can institutions include within their REF submissions research income-in-kind received from funders other than the UKRI research councils and UK health research funding bodies?

Income-in-kind data relating to the assessment period that is awarded by funders not listed in the 'Guidance on submissions' may be included as appropriate within the unit-level environment template (REF 5b). Such data will not be provided by the REF team and would need to be collated by submitting institutions themselves, should they wish to include it.

Panels

****UPDATED CONTENT** How and when will panel members for the assessment phase be appointed?**

We intend to carry out a survey of institutional submission intentions during 2019 which will be used to inform the panel membership requirements for the assessment phase appointments. In early 2020, we will invite associations or organisations with a clear interest in the conduct, quality, funding or wider benefits of publicly funded research – except for mission groups, individual UK HEIs and groups within or subsidiaries of individual UK HEIs - to make nominations for the assessment phase panel membership. The nominations will be considered by the panel chairs and the funding bodies to ensure that appointments reflect the diversity of the UOA subject disciplines.

Updated 31/07/2020:

Updated timings for the appointment of panel members is available on:
<https://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/nominating-panel-members/>

What is the difference between sub-panel members and assessors?

Assessors are appointed to contribute to the assessment of particular aspects of submissions (e.g. outputs or impact) as requested by the sub-panel. Sub-panel members retain responsibility for producing the draft assessment outcomes for each submission as a whole and for recommending these to the main panel.

Audit

How will audit sampling be done in the case of joint submissions?

When auditing staff details (REF1a/b), joint submissions may be included in one or more of the (up to 4) UOAs from which staff are randomly selected.

Note this means that we might only include staff from one of the submitting institutions within the joint submission, when sampling for audit.

What evidence will HEIs be required to submit for staff circs? Will this be required up-front or through audit?

The guidance on submissions sets out the data requirements for any staff circumstances requests. We have attempted to reduce the amount of information we request from HEIs and do not require HEIs to submit any evidence up-front. HEIs should ensure that they have sufficient evidence to satisfy themselves that the circumstances are as claimed. This may be requested through audit. Further details about audit requirements will be published in summer 2019.

We won't be able to accurately identify all staff with significant responsibility for research for the 18/19 HESA staff return. Will this matter in the REF audit?

We recognise that the data returned for 2018/19 may reflect an earlier stage in an HEI's process for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research than that reflected in the data returned for the submission year (2019/20), and that therefore there may be considerable differences between the two years of data. In the event of audit relating to the cases where the 2018/19 record may be used (see the 'Audit guidance', paragraphs 23 and 35), we will first discuss the nature of the data returned in that year with the HEI concerned to ensure this issue can be taken into account, where applicable.

Why does the 'Audit guidance' say that it will use 92 days as the comparison between datePublished and depositedDate in CORE?

The guidance is intended to provide a stable date calculation for use in the risk-based approach to auditing open access compliance. 92 days is the longest that any period of 3 months can be.

The period of 92 days is used only in the calculation of risk in stage one of the verification process for open access. HEIs should use 3 months as the maximum period between acceptance/publication and deposit in their open access processes, as described in the 'Guidance on submissions'. Where substantive evidence of compliance with the deposit requirements is sought, again the requirement is a maximum of 3 months between acceptance/publication and deposit as set out in the policy.