

06th January 2022

BY EMAIL

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Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal,

Research Excellence Framework 2021

1. Further to my letter of 23 September 2021, I am writing to provide additional details on the arrangements for publishing the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results. No response is required to this letter.
2. These additional details follow the conclusion of user research to establish the user requirements and information design for publishing the above results. The outcomes of this research have informed decisions about the format and presentation of the outcomes. A short summary of findings is set out at the end of this letter.

Format, timing and dissemination of results

3. As confirmed in my letter of 23 September 2021, on **12 May 2022** the REF team on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies will publish the results of REF 2021. The results will be made available at **00:01am on 12 May** via the REF website www.ref.ac.uk. Users will be able to download all results from the website, or a selection thereof.
4. On the morning of **9 May 2022**, the REF team will release individual institutions' results to the head of each HEI, in confidence and under embargo until 12 May. The embargoed results released on 9 May will contain the same data as the wider publication: the overall quality profile, the three sub-profiles, the FTE number of Category A staff and the proportion of Category A eligible staff, for each submission made by that institution.
5. The pool of Category A eligible staff will be derived from the 2019/20 HESA staff data, incorporating any adjustments or corrections made through the REF data verification process. Due to remaining issues in fully reconciling the HESA and REF staff datasets, the proportion of eligible

staff submitted will be rounded to the nearest 5% for publication and the published proportions will be capped at 100%¹.

6. A description of the information and data that will be provided as part of the results publication on 12 May (and the embargoed results disseminated on 9 May 2022), is set out in paragraphs 2-9 of my [letter](#) of 23 September.

Sample data and briefings for HEIs

7. In **March 2022** the REF team will provide HEIs with a set of sample ‘dummy’ results data to inform institutional results planning. The REF team will also host a general briefing on REF results for HEI press officers. Further details on the timing of this briefing for HEI press officers will be provided in **February 2022**.

8. In April 2022, the REF team will liaise with institutional and technical REF contacts on how the results and associated confidential feedback will be delivered via the Submissions system. HEIs will be provided with an opportunity to check or amend their authorised Submissions system users.

9. The following table provides a summary of the key milestones in relation to the REF 2021 results:

Date	Activity
Early 2022	User testing on results publication format and presentation
February 2022	Further details to HEIs on timing of briefing for HEI press officers
March 2022	Sample ‘dummy’ results data to HEIs and briefing for HEIs on format of results
April 2022	Comms with HEI institutional/technical REF contacts on how the Submission system will be used to provide results/feedback
9 May 2022	Individual institutions' own results to the head of each HEI, in confidence and under embargo until 12 May
10 May 2022	All results to HEIs, under embargo until 12 May
11 May 2022	All results to the press, under embargo until 12 May
12 May 2022	Publication of REF 2021 results on REF website
June 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Confidential feedback on submissions to heads of HEIs via the Submissions system Publication of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Submissions data - Impact case study database - Overview reports from the Main and Sub-panels - REF Director’s report - Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP) report

¹ An exception to this will be those institutions where Category A eligible staff are not all returned to HESA due to internal employment structures. See the ‘Guidance on submissions’ (paragraph 118).

July 2022	Publication of: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP) report- Institutional-level Environment Pilot Panel (ILEPP) report- Final panel membership & Conflicts of Interest- Meeting minutes
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User research outcomes

10. The key finding from the user research undertaken in autumn 2021 was that users would like greater ability to manipulate the results data than was available for the REF 2014 results. While the 2014 results were felt to be adequate for users to access the information, users felt that more flexibility in how they can view and download the results data for REF 2021 would be beneficial. Users also recommended including explanations for sector specific terms and acronyms, adding further clarification on the role of REF results, and connecting the results more closely to the impact case study database.

11. Following the outcomes of the user research, we are not intending to distribute a printed version of the REF 2021 results to HEIs.

12. We are working with our systems development team to incorporate the feedback provided by users and we will carry out user testing in **early 2022** on the results publication format and presentation.

13. Please do not hesitate to contact the REF team if you have any enquiries about the information set out in this letter, by email to info@ref.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely



Dr Kim Hackett
REF Director