



## **Lord Stern's review of the Research Excellence Framework**

Response from the Chartered Association of Business Schools

The call for evidence is available at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/research-excellence-framework-review-call-for-evidence](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/research-excellence-framework-review-call-for-evidence)

The closing date for responses was **Thursday 24 March 2016**.

## Questions

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Name of Organisation (if applicable): Chartered Association of Business Schools

Please check the box that best describes you as a respondent to this consultation

	<b>Respondent type</b>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternative higher education provider (with designated courses)
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<input type="checkbox"/>	Awarding organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	Business/Employer
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## Section 1

### **The primary purpose of the REF is to inform the allocation of quality-related research funding (QR).**

1. What changes to existing processes could more efficiently or more accurately assess the outputs, impacts and contexts of research in order to allocate QR? Should the definition of impact be broadened or refined? Is there scope for more or different use of metrics in any areas?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

Our members, like many others, have concerns about the gaming that has taken place to date and look for much stronger and clearer guidelines on what is expected in submissions. While some suggest that expecting all research active staff to be submitted, this is by no means universal and would create a significantly greater workload for those assessing the submissions.

It is recognised that the use of metrics is inevitably problematic and that reaching a consensus on what should or shouldn't be included is unrealistic. Therefore it must be accepted that we must settle for the best option rather than searching for a mythical perfect option.

The measurement of **impact** is where our members see the greatest scope for improvement. It would be well received if impact were to increase in importance, but this would require clearer definition of what this meant, how it should be presented, and acceptable forms of evidence. An indication of threshold levels would also be useful.

There is some support for requiring all researchers submitted to include examples of impact as part of the submission to be reviewed by the panels.

Our members recognise the difficulties involved in relying on peer review, but it is considered a vital part of the process and we would definitely wish for it to remain.

2. If REF is mainly a tool to allocate QR at institutional level, what is the benefit of organising an exercise over as many Units of Assessment as in REF 2014, or in having returns linking outputs to particular investigators? Would there be advantages in reporting on some dimensions of the REF (e.g. impact and/or environment) at a more aggregate or institutional level?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

There is support amongst our members for including some reporting at institutional level, especially when looking at impact, where it is much more likely to work across a number of disciplines, although some feel this is adequately covered in the narrative as it is.

It is felt there is scope for reducing the number of Units of Assessment by combining linked areas, for example business and management with economics.

## Section 2

**While the primary purpose of REF is QR resource allocation, data collected through the REF and results of REF assessments can also inform disciplinary, institutional and UK-wide decision making.**

3. What use is made of the information gathered through REF in decision making and strategic planning in your organisation? What information could be more useful? Does REF information duplicate or take priority over other management information?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

There is some suggestion that the REF has become the dominant management information metric and that the focus on high quality journal publications stifles innovation and impact. It is also biased against early career researchers and discourages a supportive, collegiate research culture that has been a key part of university research work.

It is noted that without the REF research performance would likely decline.

4. What data should REF collect to be of greater support to Government and research funders in driving research excellence and productivity?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

Greater importance could be given to research environment and culture, and an indicator of capacity building within each institution, measured by the number of home grown PhD and ECR staff who achieve success.

There could also be a measure of the longevity of relationships with external end-users of the research.

Updates on previously submitted impact case studies could indicate the sustainability of the outputs.

## Section 3

### **The incentive effects of the REF shape academic behaviour, such as through the introduction of the impact criteria.**

5. How might the REF be further refined or used by Government to incentivise constructive and creative behaviours such as promoting interdisciplinary research, collaboration between universities, and/or collaboration between universities and other public or private sector bodies?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

There is some consensus that the REF has damaged these areas of activity and that more should be done to encourage and reward interdisciplinary research. There is support for interdisciplinary research being given an added weight.

A separate panel could be set up to review this. Equally there could be a measure of engagement as currently this could be overlooked in the quest for impact.

There seems a need to moderate between the panels to ensure that there is consistency. At present it would appear that some are much harsher than others. The assessment Business and Management (UoA19) resulted in one of the lowest counts of 4\* outputs of any unit of assessment in REF2014. This might also make it easier to compare across Units of Assessment.

## Section 4

**Previous studies have focused on the costs of REF with respect to the time and resources needed for the submission and assessment processes. The Review is also interested in views and any associated evidence that the REF influences, positively or negatively, the research and career choices of individuals, or the development of academic disciplines. It is also interested in views on how it might encourage institutions to `game-play' and thereby limit the aggregate value of the exercise.**

6. In your view how does the REF process influence, positively or negatively, the choices of individual researchers and / or higher education institutions? What are the reasons for this and what are the effects? How do such effects of the REF compare with effects of other drivers in the system (e.g. success for individuals in international career markets, or for universities in global rankings)? What suggestions would you have to restrict gaming the system?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

The issues that need to be resolved in the review are:

1. How to stop the negative behaviours of academics in terms of “high transfer fees”, discouraging collaborative working and support for ECRs from experienced researchers;
2. Discourages creative, risky and innovative work;
3. Discourages shorter term research projects;
4. How to stop gaming by institutions;
5. The focus on research at the expense of teaching;
6. The focus on publishable research over impact.

Possible solutions:

- a. Assign IP to the institution rather than the individual (although this may make the UK a less attractive destination for researchers);
- b. Lower the expectations on ECR in terms of quantity required;
- c. Restrict the use of fractional appointments permitted to submit where they are based in a non-UK institution;
- d. Anonymise submissions to prevent any unconscious bias

7. In your view how does the REF process influence the development of academic disciplines or impact upon other areas of scholarly activity relative to other factors? What changes would create or sustain positive influences in the future?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

It accentuates the bias towards single disciplines and more narrowly defined subject fields and against problem-led, cross-disciplinary research. It also creates an undue focus on specific proxy measures of quality which do not fully capture the broader range of added-value that comes from robust research.

Specifically, two kinds of research are under-represented: (1) research that has real-world impact, and; (2) research that provides conceptual frameworks and analytical tools that add value in teaching and help engage non-academics.

To counter these effects we would propose a wider range of metrics and/or a reduction in the weighting of publications in peer-reviewed journals. The latter represent a fairly narrowly-defined measure of quality and do not represent added-value beyond specialist scholars in any real sense.

The forthcoming TEF will help as regards point (2) above. But there should be a place in any future REF for research on pedagogy and innovations that facilitate the communication and adoption of the outcomes of research efforts by non-academics.



## Section 5

**Much of REF focuses on the retrospective analysis of success achieved by institutions either through output or impact. Yet the resources provided anticipate continued success based on that track record. Are there means of better addressing forward-looking institutional plans and priorities, and how these might feed in to national policy?**

8. How can the REF better address the future plans of institutions and how they will utilise QR funding obtained through the exercise?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

As indicated above, we would advocate a strengthening of institutional measures as a counter to measures that capture the outputs of individual scholars. This may be achieved via a revision of the 'Environment' section of the REF return.

Business Schools that have achieved one or more of the global accreditations offered by the AACSB, EFMD (EQUIS) or AMBA undergo a rigorous and repeated process (for re-accreditation) which assesses continuous improvement across a range of institutional measures of quality. Whilst we would not advocate this level of detail or scope (these go well beyond research) these provide insights into the consistent tracking of organization-level quality. The first two of these pay specific attention, for example, to the mission/vision-strategy-planning cycle and consider whether schools are acting according to their espoused strategy, following from previous accreditation visits. They also take into account ethics and values and the degree to which these are evident in the actions of faculty and staff, as opposed to being just principles.

It may be of benefit to introduce some measures of research quality and impact at the University-wide level. This supports the need for more problem-led, interdisciplinary research. But it would also take into account the overall institutional context, which guides strategy, implementation and resourcing of research. Such an approach might also capture disciplinary trade-offs being made by institutions (sacrificing quality in one area to fund excellence elsewhere) alongside efforts made to bridge schools and disciplines to promote innovative research.

National policy places the emphasis on interdisciplinary research which addresses the wider challenges of our economy and society. Some Universities are responding to this agenda better than others and any future REF should attempt to differentiate.

## Final thoughts

**The Review is keen to hear of creative ideas and insights and to be open in its approach.**

9. Are there additional issues you would like to bring to the attention of the Review?

Please tell us your thoughts in no more than 500 words:

Our members would welcome clarification on duplicates, where a research project is worked on by more than one member of the same institution.

In addition we would like to see clarification on whether it is permissible for academics submitting books as one of the four outputs, also being able to put forward published articles on part of the same book.

***The Chartered Association of Business Schools** is the voice of the UK's business and management education sector. We support our members to maintain world-class standards of teaching and research, and help shape policy and create opportunities through dialogue with business and government.*

*The UK's business and management education sector represents 1 in 5 university students and contributes £3.25b to the UK economy. Its management students go on to lead global businesses and its entrepreneurs contribute to our dynamic economy. Its research has an impact across society and helps to turn our capacity for invention into viable businesses. Our 150 members consist of 122 business schools and higher education providers, as well as affiliate stakeholders, corporate members and international partners.*

Thank you for taking the time to let us have your views. We do not intend to acknowledge receipt of individual responses unless you tick the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply ✓

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