Research Excellence Framework Consultation

Response from the Chartered Association of Business Schools

The call for evidence is available at: https://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2016/201636/

The closing date for responses was **Friday 17 March 2017**.

Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework

Page 1: Respondent details

> **Q1. Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of**
>
> Representative body
>
> **Please provide the name of your organisation**
> Chartered Association of Business Schools

Page 2: Overall approach

> **Q2. 1. Do you have any comments on the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 23?**
>
> Our members would like there to be sufficient continuity for it not to be reinventing the wheel. We encourage gradual evolution and tweaking as opposed to wholesale changes. In particular, our members were pleased with the use of peer review, although have some concerns about the level of expertise when subject areas such as business and management studies cover a wide range of specialisms, such as marketing, finance, organisational behaviour.
> It is recognised that REF takes up a significant amount of time for institutions and we welcome a more streamlined approach to the assessment.
> The terms impact and environment could still benefit from clearer definition. For 'impact', perhaps 'effects and beneficiaries' could be more useful.
> There is some concern that the recommendations of the Stern Review would in fact result in a radical change from REF 2014. With this in mind, we suggest that there should be careful deliberation to ensure that following the guidelines of the Stern Review does not upset an overall continuity between REF 2014 and REF 2021.

Page 3: Unit of assessment structure

> **Q3. 2. What comments do you have about the unit of assessment structure in REF 2021?**
>
> Our members were generally pleased with the Unit of Assessment structure being similar/ the same as the one used in REF 2014, although some members commented that more care could be taken to define Business and Management's UoA so that it is coherent.
> However, care should be taken with the balance within subgroups so that we avoid the creation of niche subgroups. We would also urge that there should not be separate output profiles for specific subject areas within sub-panels, as this would damage cross area work and make it more difficult for institutions to know how their research should be classified.
> The mechanisms to recognise and encourage submissions of interdisciplinary research should be strengthened as specialised research is not always easily categorised within current UoAs. Several of our members suggested that submissions to the Business and Management Studies UoA 19, which could be classified as economics papers should be allowed, as economists in HEIs often conduct business oriented research.
> We would welcome better panel guidance on the assessment of scholarship from underpinning cross-disciplinary subject disciplines, for example, statistics and geography whose scholars may be located in a business school but whose work underpins Business and Management Studies research rather than being directly relevant to it.

Page 4: Expert panels

Q4. 3a. Do you agree that the submissions guidance and panel criteria should be developed simultaneously?

Yes

Comments:
The vast majority of our members were in favour of this proposal. Several members suggested that these should be published sooner rather than later, and that panels and sub-panels should be involved in determining the criteria.

Q5. 3b. Do you support the later appointment of sub-panel members, near to the start of the assessment year?

Yes

Comments:
The majority of our members were in favour of this proposal and would urge that sub-panel Chairs be appointed early, and that they should be expected to consult their subject communities to enable them to contribute to forming the criteria for their Unit of Assessment. It is important that submission criteria be released as soon as possible to enable sufficient time to present submissions in the correct way. We also suggest that sub-panel members should be appointed after submissions guidance and panel criteria have been developed. A concern over the later appointment of the sub-panel is the time then given for the sub panels to conduct the work required. It can, in some areas, be overwhelming and therefore it is important to design an appropriate timeframe sufficient to complete the work required.

Q6. 4. Do you agree with the proposed measures outlined at paragraph 35 for improving representativeness on the panels?

Yes

Comments:
The proposal received widespread support from our members. However, several cautioned that this should not distract from the importance of panels functioning efficiently, and research excellence being the most important criterion.

Q7. 5a. Based on the options described at paragraphs 36 to 38 what approach do you think should be taken to nominating panel members?

This question drew many suggestions and comments from our members. Most considered there to be a need for a greater diversity on the panels, and with this in mind several have suggested that equality and diversity considerations need to be central to the selection process. The point was also made by several members that as business and management studies is a very broad subject area, incorporating elements of other disciplines such as economics, psychology, sociology and criminology, this should be reflected in the composition of expert panels. It was generally felt that the previous method of using nominating bodies would be the best option, although we appreciate there are other ways of doing this. With these comments in mind it is clear that ensuring that the issue of 'diversity', in regards to the diversity of the subject area, the diversity of institutions, and the diversity of members themselves, is very important. Steps to ensure that diversity is represented should be taken within the current framework.

Q8. 5b. Do you agree with the proposal to require nominating bodies to provide equality and diversity information?

Yes

Comments:
Most our members agreed with this proposal, but the question raised a lot of different points to take into consideration. Some saw this as being a burden on HEI's, and thought there may be problems with requiring HEI's to provide personal information on matters like ethnicity. Equality and diversity should also mean a spread of representation from different universities and research groups.

Q9. 6. Please comment on any additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies, provided alongside the consultation document.

We suggest the addition of: College of Paramedics, Health Education England, College of Policing, Academy of Management, American Marketing Association, American Economic Association, Econometric Society, European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM), The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences (INFORMS), Strategic Management Society, Academy of International Business, International Council for Small Business.

Page 5: Staff

Q10. 7. Do you have any comments on the proposal to use HESA cost centres to map research-active staff to UOAs and are there any alternative approaches that should be considered?

There are a number of problems with this approach:
• staff in a teaching and research role could be involved with much more of one than the other, so to put them all in the same category would be misrepresentative.
• some staff move between administrative units (Schools) and these would not be picked up by HESA.
• research staff can be coded in several different ways, for example Business, Economics and Tourism.
• this proposal assumes a close correspondence between research specialisms and teaching activity, when in reality research activity tends to be far more specialised than teaching activity.
• this approach seems to go against supporting interdisciplinary profiles, a key recommendation of the Stern report.
• this approach may result in HEIs changing academic staff to teaching only contracts and thus limiting their career prospects.
The fairest system would be for institutions (probably at school level) to decide which UoAs are most appropriate for individual faculty members.
However, if the proposed approach were used, institutions should have the right to appeal if individuals were incorrectly allocated.

Q11. 8. What comments do you have on the proposed definition of 'research-active' staff described in paragraph 43?

The current definition needs clarification:
• There is a strong argument against including all staff with a teaching and research contract. Those on a teaching-research contract may only be obliged to spend a small percentage of their time on research, and that this would not necessarily entail the "significant responsibility for research" aspect of Stern's definition. In particular, this would disadvantage post 1992 universities which are generally more teaching focused, but with staff contracts containing the phrase 'teaching and research.' Research should always be encouraged, but there needs to be a recognition that not everyone with a research element to their contract should be judged in the same way as those with research focussed contracts. An evidence-based definition of what research active is should be used, using evidence such as publications, grants and impact cases.
• There should be consideration given to excluding research assistants, at least in the early stages of their careers.
• Of course, some faculty will not have research in their job contract, but will still be research active (e.g. teaching fellows.)

Q12. 9a. The proposal to require an average of two outputs per full-time equivalent staff returned?

There is some concern with this proposal. On the one hand, it will certainly alleviate the potential for a dramatic increase in the workload for reviewers, an average of two per person raises issues of a small number of faculty carrying a large number of underperforming faculty. The consensus is that this will only work if every member of faculty is compelled to submit at least one piece of research.

We appreciate that it is difficult to satisfy every institution in this respect, and there is acknowledgement that research intensive institutions will find this easier to comply with than teaching intensive institutions, but we consider that all faculty should be able to produce at least one piece of work. It should also be considered that business schools, especially, can have a large number of non-traditional and adjunct roles, which while involving research and scholarship, do not necessarily produce work appropriate for submission to the REF.

There is naturally some concern that two pieces of research in a six-year period is low, and does not reflect that high quantity of high quality research produced by many researchers. However, the average with a minimum of one should help alleviate this. There is also the suggestion that the average need not necessarily be a whole number and therefore it is possible to decrease this to 1.5 or increase to 2.5.

Q13. 9b. The maximum number of outputs for each staff member?

By using a defined average, it is important to have both a minimum and a maximum. In the previous question, we argued there should be a minimum of one. On that basis, we argue that a maximum of six is reasonable. This allows flexibility for star performers to have submitted up to six times more than the minimum and three times the average. A higher maximum would enable star performers to hide a poorly performing department. A lower maximum would unfairly penalise departments which support highly productive researchers.

This of course leaves open the problem of co-authors and how they should be counted. There seems to be no guidance regarding how the process would handle a situation where two authors from the same institution co-author six pieces of research. This needs urgent clarification.

Q14. 9c. Setting a minimum requirement of one for each staff member?

In the above sections, we have argued for a minimum of one piece of research per staff member. However, this comes with some caveats. First, there needs to be special consideration given to faculty who change institutions shortly before the submission date (i.e. up to one year before), especially if the portability of research disappears. There should also be exemptions given for faculty focusing on worthwhile activities in leadership, mentoring, or public and community engagement positions as opposed to research and published work. Stern refers to the importance of rewarding research that has societal impact, even if it is not in a form that would be published in a journal.

Q15. 10a. Is acceptance for publication a suitable marker to identify outputs that an institution can submit and how would this apply across different output types?

The majority of our members agreed with this, although a significant proportion thought this could be very problematic to implement especially where the output is in book or report form. There are solutions to this, for example having an agreed form of letter from publishers and report recipients.

Q16. 10b. What challenges would your institution face in verifying the eligibility of outputs?

The following points were made:.
• it should be relatively straightforward in the case of articles, but more difficult for books and other types of outputs.
• staff churn could make this difficult and this could potentially generate arguments between institutions, however staff turnover should be seen as healthy.
• there may be a difficulty with gaining documentation that clearly demonstrates acceptance date and establishing who was employed where at these dates
• This may result in the allocation of publications between institutions having to be dealt with during the hiring process and an agreement having to be reached between the previous and new institutions, and each needing to keep a formal record of who gets which publications.

Q17. 10c. Would non-portability have a negative impact on certain groups and how might this be mitigated?

The vast majority of our members say that non-portability should not be enforced, although it is acknowledged that there is game-playing in operation. Early career researchers were singled out as a specific cause of concern. There are ways to mitigate the damage this could cause them either by removing them from the minimum of one submission requirement or by waiving the non-portability rule specifically for them. There is a fear that the measure could tighten the labour market, especially in the final two years before the submission for REF 2021. This would have the greatest impact on those seeking career progression. A possible solution to this would be to apportion outputs between the new and old institutions reflecting the time spent by the academic at each institution in the period. This could be cumbersome to perform, but should help to keep the job market alive.

Q18. 10d. What comments do you have on sharing outputs proportionally across institutions?

Many of our members agree with the principle behind this measure and believe it would reduce game-playing. However, there are warnings about the complexity of such an arrangement and we would urge a very clear methodology for the apportionment. There is a danger that this could generate bad feeling between institutions, and may discourage institutions from working together.
A simpler method would be to treat this situation in the same way as co-authored submissions and allow the full 100% to be submitted by both institutions.

Q19. 11. Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for the Open Researcher and Contributor ID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2021?

Yes

Comments:
The majority of our members support this proposed measure. Several institutions noted that they already do this. Those of our members who were opposed suggested that not all institutions were at the same level of engagement with this, and that it would add further bureaucracy to the system. There is a fear that this could discourage recruitment of international staff.

Q20. 12. What comments do you have on the proposal to remove Category C as a category of eligible staff?

Our members are supportive of this proposal, as not many Category C staff were involved in REF2014.

Q21. 13. What comments do you have on the definition of research assistants?

This is a bit of a grey area in universities, and therefore it should be left to HEI's to decide who should be submitted. Submitting research assistants should be an option, where the institution judges it to be appropriate.

Q22. 14. What comments do you have on the proposal for staff on fractional contracts and is a minimum of 0.2 FTE appropriate?

We appreciate the efforts to deal with this issue in REF2014 but they were insufficient and sub-panel members felt powerless to deal with even obvious cases of "ringers", who were primarily based at overseas institutions and had very tenuous links with the UK-based institution under assessment. A much stricter definition of the strength of the link in such cases is needed along with the delegation of powers to sub-panels to award zeros to outputs where they are unsatisfied of the veracity of the alleged link. The proposal of a short statement to be submitted with staff submitted to REF 2021 was enthusiastically greeted by a number of members.
There is an argument supporting a higher FTE for staff on fractional contracts in order to avoid the tactical appointments of top researchers, but on balance we believe the statements should suffice so long as panels can act where they feel there is game-playing.

Page 6: Collaboration

Q23. 15. What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond higher education in REF 2021?

Our members are generally supportive of this, and it is certainly an area where business schools excel. There are many positives to encouraging collaboration and it certainly highlights the public value derived from publicly funded research. However, this encouragement shouldn't be restricted to the REF and there is some concern that this may distract from the real purpose of the exercise. It is difficult for collaboration to be defined by a single metric and it could reflect a micro-management attitude to research. Perhaps this aspect could be incorporated within the impact measurement. With these comments in mind we suggest that there is perhaps a need for greater clarification on how this proposal would be achieved in a way that would not unnecessarily burden HEI's, and provide positive results.

Page 7: Outputs

Q24. 16. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will post-date the submission deadline?

Yes

Comments:
While the majority of our members agree with this, there is some concern that this just adds further unnecessary complexity.

Q25. 17. What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

Interdisciplinary research is incredibly important and should be encouraged, although the strategies may be hard to implement in practice. Some members suggested that interdisciplinary research should be more incentivised, and that mechanisms used to support interdisciplinary research should be extended. The appointment of interdisciplinary champions is supported.

Q26. 18. Do you agree with the proposal for using quantitative data to inform the assessment of outputs, where considered appropriate for the discipline? If you agree, have you any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels at output and aggregate level?

No

Comments:
The majority of our members are not in favour of this proposal for business school outputs, and those who are, are clear to emphasise that this should only support (not supplant) other measures. There are many issues with the quality and reliability of such data and it naturally gives additional importance to journal articles over other forms of publications. This is not helpful. It is also impossible to compare such metrics across disciplines. For all of these reasons we would not want to see metrics form part of the analysis for UoA19.

Page 8: Impact

Q27. 19. Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

Yes

Comments:
This seems a sensible proposal given that impact was only recently introduced. If there are to be any changes they should be highlighted as soon as possible so that time is not wasted.

Q28. 20. What comments do you have on the recommendation to broaden and deepen the definition of impact?

In principle, the idea that impact on teaching and learning should be included is a good one, especially in light of TEF and related developments. It may be difficult to implement this in practice, but that is true of the previous approach to impact. There is some concern that this will move away from the original intention of the Impact element of the assessment, which was to show how academic research impacts upon the rest of society, and there is a risk of impact becoming very insular and self-focussed. For this reason, there needs to be a clear definition of what is valid and monitoring the use of this as opposed to external impact

Q29. 21. Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and Research Councils UK to align their definition of academic and wider impact?

Yes

If yes, what comments do you have on the proposed definitions?
The definitions should be simpler and clearer and there should be consistency in how it is understood. Both academic and wider impact are important, but one should not dominate the other.

Q30. 22. What comments do you have on the criteria of reach and significance?

This was not an area where there is much concern. Whilst the definitions are currently quite vague, this is probably right. The sub-panels don't seem to have had any difficulties with these and institutions are relatively comfortable that they know what is meant by reach and significance.

Q31. 23. What do you think about having further guidance for public engagement impacts and what do you think would be helpful?

There is a need for greater guidance, preferably via examples of where dissemination and impact are and are not aligned. There are many types of public engagement, but not all have the same level of impact. It is not always an easy task to measure such impact, but purely giving a talk in a public venue may or may not have impact. There is some concern that this type of activity is not necessarily related to research.

Q32. 24. Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

Yes

Comments:
The real difficulty here is that impact can take a significant amount of time to emerge and be measurable in any way. Therefore, there is a stronger case for portability. That said, if the impact is a result of research undertaken in an institution then it is right that it should remain with the institution. However, this should be moderated to take into account the fact that the work may not have taken place solely at the same institution.

Q33. 25. Do you agree that the approach to supporting and enabling impact should be captured as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment?

Yes

Comments:
We agree with the suggestion to no longer require separate impact templates but that this should instead be submitted as part of a wider environment template which would still allow for the recognition of support for impact.

Q34. 26. What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration?

There is broad support for keeping the number the same as REF 2014. However, given the increased number of submissions required this would inevitably mean more case studies being submitted. There is an argument that smaller institutions should be permitted to submit just one case study.

Q35. 27. Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to support the assessment and audit process better (paragraph 96)?

Yes

Comments:
There is a role for these but narrative will still be important and assessment should not be wholly driven by the mandatory fields. However, if impact case studies are to be removed as a separate requirement then it is not clear how these mandatory fields would work. If impact is to be included as a separate section of the environment template, then of course there should be criteria established to support the assessment and audit process but one needs to be wary of not increasing the length of the environment statements to such an extent that they become unwieldy (in the event that impact and environment appear on the same statement).

Q36. 28. What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

We support this suggestion, but recommend that they be limited, to prevent submissions becoming too lengthy and complex.

Q37. 29. What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from research activity and bodies of work, as well as from specific research outputs?

This is a sensible proposal and would present a more accurate view of how impact arises.

Q38. 30. Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research activity (1 January 2000 - 31 December 2020)?

Yes

Comments:
The majority of our members agree with this proposal. From those who don't, there are suggestions that the timeframe should begin earlier as real impact can take many years to become apparent. On the other hand, going back so far could disadvantage younger scholars. With these comments in mind, we suggest that the proposed timeframe is a suitable compromise, as it will allow some pieces of work which have been in development for a significant period, but will not let old research projects foreshadow more current research.

Q39. 31. What are your views on the suggestion that the threshold criterion for underpinning research, research activity or a body of work should be based on standards of rigour? Do you have suggestions for how rigour could be assessed?

Our members were generally in favour of this suggestion. However, several members made the case that measuring 'rigour' is very subjective, and there is not a universally accepted definition. We suggest rigour could be assessed via:
• publication in peer reviewed publications
• requirement for an element of theory development
• reporting the findings of basic research.

Q40. 32a. The suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?

This suggestion drew a lot of criticism from our members, mainly because it would increase administrative burdens and costs. As such, we suggest that this measure should be optional if it is used at all, and that it should be up to the sub-panels to decide where and what is required.

Q41. 32b. The development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?

Our members are cautiously supportive of this, with the general view being that such guidelines may be helpful, but that they should not be set in stone and should leave institutions with a lot of scope to present data in their own way. There is a concern that quantitative data will privilege those forms of impact that can be more easily measured, even if they are not always so important.

Q42. 32c. Do you have any other comments on evidencing impacts in REF 2021?

The fact that the Impact Assessment was challenging to the panel does not mean we need to have more narrow criteria if it is felt that impact assessment is important.

Q43. 33. What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2021 that were returned in REF 2014?

We would support the submission of examples of impact returned in REF2014 as impact can take time to evolve and bear full fruit. However, this should only be accepted where there is sufficient evidence to support the case that the impact is not merely a continuation but a 'new', perhaps unintended, impact that is significant and which has emerged in the years since REF2014. This could be supported through additional research activities undertaken during the intervening period. If a small unit need only submit one case study it is not clear how a rule that only a proportion of all impact case studies can be thus submitted would actually make sense.

Page 9: Environment

Q44. 34a. Do you agree with the proposal to change the structure of the environment template by introducing more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment?

Yes

Comments:
The majority of our members agreed with this proposal, with several suggesting that achieving a balance between qualitative and quantitative data is important. The template is well structured and includes relevant subsections which can effectively highlight the significant work that institutions are doing but which at the same time does not increase the burden both on the institutions themselves and on the panels.

Q45. 34b. Do you have suggestions of data already held by institutions that would provide panels with a valuable insight into the research environment?

Below are some suggestions from our members:
• Equality and diversity data
• Research grant data
• Membership of research centres/institutes
• PhD completions
• Sabbaticals awarded
• Expenditure in supporting research
• Accreditation data
• Staff development data including mentoring and management systems and research development programmes
• Demographic and employment statistics.
However, we do not support mandating of the provision of these data, as some will be confidential and potentially sensitive.

Q46. 35. Do you have any comment on the ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaboration beyond higher education?

It is felt that this is already covered elsewhere with the REF exercise and is probably not needed under the environment category as well.

Q47. 36. Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

No

Comments:
We do not believe that it would be appropriate to award additional credit for open access, provided that institutions conform with the guidelines on making outputs available in this form. The research assessment should be about quality, not ease of access. It is not at all clear how any credits might be awarded in any case.

Q48. 37. What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to share and manage their research data more effectively ?

Research Council grants already require this as standard. However, if the REF wanted to go further, it could require all primary data created during a project, that led to a publication, to be placed in an open access repository after a suitable period (say 2 years), in the same way as publications. This will increase costs for institutions managing this repository, and also the UKDS who will need to be sent a list of the data sets archived elsewhere for easy interrogation. This will all require additional funding.

Page 10: Institutional level assessment

Q49. 38. What are your views on the introduction of institutional level assessment of impact and environment?

There seems no argument for trying to assess institutional impact as it will only be an amalgam of impact submissions from the individual UoAs. There is, however, some argument for including an institutional environment score.
However, we note that the presumption seems to be that excellent research occurs within excellent institutions, with an excellent research environment. This is not always the case. There are many examples of pockets of research excellence occurring within institutions where the average level of support given to researchers is not particularly impressive, and, perhaps those excellent researchers should receive additional credit for delivering their top-quality research despite their environment. Consequently, it is difficult to see what merit introducing institutional environment audit brings to the exercise. If the institution is, on average, better than the UoA, it will raise the REF score, whereas if the institution lags the UoA, it will lower it. Is this fair? If the REF is to acknowledge and reward excellence wherever it may be found, this proposal would seem to work against this principle.

Q50. 39. Do you have any comments on the factors that should be considered when piloting an institutional level assessment?

Our members are largely positive towards the proposals outlined in the Stern Review.

Page 11: Outcomes and weighting

Q51. 40. What comments do you have on the proposed approach to creating the overall quality profile for each submission?

While there is some support for this proposal there is concern it could penalise areas of research excellence within less high quality submissions where the institutional environment may have little impact on the UoA.

Q52. 41. Given the proposal that the weighting for outputs remain at 65 per cent, do you agree that the overall weighting for impact should remain at 20 per cent?

Yes

Comments:
Our members are generally supportive of this proposal, although we acknowledge that this is a difficult area. One could argue that it is only impact that really matters; if research is changing things for the better then who should care where it is published? However, such a high weighting for impact could encourage market oriented research with immediate impact, while discouraging theoretical work or work with long-term impact.

Q53. 42. Do you agree with the proposed split of the weightings between the institutional and submission level elements of impact and environment?

No

Comments:
There are difficulties, mainly around impact, and there is a preference for lower weightings for institutional scores. The proposed split would seem to favour older institutions based on history rather than the quality of research output. Great care needs to be taken in assuming the institutional effect on the quality of UoA submissions.

Page 12: Proposed timetable for REF 2021

Q54. 43. What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2021?

We support the proposed timetable, especially the extension by one year. However, guidelines and procedures resulting from any changes made need to be agreed as soon as possible, and by the end of 2017 at the latest.

Page 14: Contact details

Q56. If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

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