The next REF

Tony Cohn
What do we know about the next REF so far?

• Stern review of REF 2014
• Consultation Exercise (closed 17/3/17)
• Proposed Timetable
• Call for Main Panel Chairs (deadline 27/4/17)
• Interdisciplinary Advisory Panel Appointed
REF 2014

- Deadline for submissions was 2013.
- 65% Publications; 20% Impact Case Studies; 15% Environment
- Sub-panel 11 was Computer Science and Informatics
  - Part of main panel B (Science and Engineering)
- Very large sub panel
  - 89 Institutions
  - 2158 Staff
  - 455 Early Career Researchers
  - 7665 Outputs
  - 280 Impact case studies
  - Everything assessed by 3 assessors
- SP 11 Weighted Averages
  26% (4*) 44% (3*) 24% (2*) 5 (1*) 1 (0*) 2.89 GPA
Stern Review
“Building on Success and Learning from Experience”

Issues identified:
• Cost: REF 14 cost £246M (133% more than RAE 2008)
• Gaming
• Selectivity
• Importance of Peer Review
• Effects on research
• Interdisciplinarity and Collaboration
• Effect on careers (REF focussed publication; institution transfers...)
• Capturing the research environment
• Impact
• Periodicity and Dynamism
Stern recommendations

• 30 years of RAE/REF have been associated with research quality improvements; strategic incentives for HEIs; transparent distribution of QR; benchmarking
• Structure of REF should not change
• 5-7 years about right
• Number and shape of UoAs about right
• “All” research staff should be returned.
• Average # of outputs per FTE but scope for more or less for individuals
• Outputs should **not** be portable
• Peer review plus metrics
• Institutional Level ICS
• Drop direct link between ICS and a publication?
• Make clear ICS impact can be broadly interpreted
• Institutional level Environment statement (+ UoA specific ones too)
• Use metrics where possible
• More strategic and imaginative use of REF by Government and UKRI
• No increased REF admin burden on HEIs!
Proposed Timetable

• 1 August 2013 Start of period for income and impacts
• 1 January 2014 Start of period for outputs
• 17 March 2017 Consultation deadline
• Mid-2017 Publish initial decisions on the next REF
• Mid-2017 Appoint panel chairs
• 2018 Publish guidance on submissions and panel criteria
• 2019 Invite HEIs to make submissions
• 31 July 2020 End of assessment period
  (for research impacts, the research environment and related data)
• November 2020 Closing date for submissions
• 31 December 2020 End of publication period for publication of research outputs and outputs underpinning impact case studies
• 2021 Assessment year
• December 2021 Publication of outcomes
• Spring 2022 Publication of submissions and reports
Interdisciplinary Advisory Panel

- **Chair**: Prof. Dame Athene Donald  
  Master of Churchill College Cambridge

Prof. John Clarkson  
Director, Cambridge Engineering Design Centre, University of Cambridge

Prof. Bruce Brown  
Visiting Prof., Royal College of Art

Prof. Mark d'Inverno  
Pro-Warden International, Goldsmiths, University of London

Prof. Rick Delbridge  
Dean of Research, Innovation and Engagement at Cardiff University,  
am academic lead for the Social Science Research Park (SPARK), Cardiff University

Dr Tori Holmes  
Lecturer and Researcher, Queens University Belfast

Prof. Hilary Lappin-Scott  
Senior PVC – Research and Innovation & Strategic Development, Swansea University

Prof. Ursula Martin  
Prof. of Computer Science, University of Oxford

Prof. Hugh Mckenna  
Dean of Medical School Development, Ulster University

Dr Lisa Mooney  
Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Knowledge Exchange, University of East London

Prof. Judith Phillips  
Deputy Principal (Research), University of Stirling

Prof. Barry Smith  
Director of the Institute of Philosophy, School of Advanced Study

Prof. Veronica Strang  
Executive Director of Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University

Dr Sophie von Stumm  
Lecturer, Goldsmiths-University of London

Prof. Joyce Tait  
Director of the Innogen Institute, University of Edinburgh
The REF 2020 Consultation

• 44 Questions; deadline noon 17/3/17
• Joint response from UKCRC, CPHC and BCS Academy
  - initial draft by UKCRC subcommittee (mostly from REF14 subpanel)
  - comments and changes made following wider consultation
• Mostly good consensus, but some tricky issues!

• Some of our answers below...
Should HESA cost centres be used for staff selection

• No!
• Different purposes (T vs R)
• No good alignment
• Not designed for this purpose
• Limits HEIs as independent institutions to manage own research
• Difficulties with Interdisc institutes, Deans etc
• Cross/interdisc staff
• Forced 100% return will encourage HEIs to move staff to new contracts
• Some UOA11 returns only a very small % -- will greatly increase load on subpanel.
The proposal to require an average of two outputs per full-time equivalent staff returned?

• Not complete agreement but overriding view was to stick with REF-14 rules
• Reducing average #outputs will
  • Cause grade inflation
  • Reduce differentiation
  • Will encourage gaming (which areas of CS to submit) and not truly reflect diversity of a UoA
  • Lead to divisiveness in departments (those with high # selected)
• If there is latitude in #outputs/person, the prefer small interval
• Having as many as 6 in small departments would have a big skew effect.
• Should have at least 1 output/person whatever
What is a suitable marker for output eligibility

- We prefer existing rules from REF14
  - Date of appearance in public domain rather than e.g. date of acceptance
- Clarify rules about (e.g.) journal papers based on conference papers in previous REF
  - Possible unfairness for journal papers published early in the REF period
Would non-portability have a negative impact on certain groups and how might this be mitigated?

- It may have the effect of making it more likely that ECRs will emigrate, since they may be less competitive in recruitment exercises as a result;
  - would be detrimental to the UK, having trained them.
- One mitigating action would be to exclude from non-portability the outputs of individuals who were themselves too junior to be returned to REF2014.
- The same rule could be applied for individuals recruited from overseas who were not returned to the previous REF.
- Preventing portability is addressing a “non-problem”
  - Healthy to have inter HEI movement
    - (though recognise issue of last minute transfers)
    - Possibly limit # ported publications (pro rata to period in new institution?)
- Too complicated to share outputs across institutions
What comments do you have on the proposal for staff on fractional contracts & is a minimum of 0.2 FTE appropriate?

- REF 14 minimum FTE was 20%
- Increasing %FTE would help stop gaming
  (but discriminate against partly retired staff)
- Limit #outputs for p/t staff?
What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond higher education in REF 2021?

• We support reducing the number of outputs required for staff who have moved from outside academia to academia similar to ECRs. An issue may be in policing this effectively.
What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

• SP-11 had a very broad range of outputs in 2014 though few explicitly marked as interdisciplinary, and few crossed referred.

• Analysis showed that on the whole fundamental topics were rated slightly higher than more applied topics which may have been more interdisciplinary but life and medical science was one of the more highly rated topics

• One feature of REF2 014 that was helpful in encouraging interdisciplinary research was the ability to submit the same output to two or more different sub-panels. We strongly recommend that this feature be retained in REF 2021.

• favour only proposal (c): the environment submission can capture the institutional and local approaches that promote and reward excellent interdisciplinary research. We are not sure that champions at the main panel level would be of any benefit.
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?

• “yes”; but ...

• Scopus not very comprehensive (cf Google Scholar)
  • 55% of outputs had 0 to 5 citations and < 25% had a meaningful number of citations.

• Evidence of gender bias in citations

• Wide variety in citation patterns within subfields of SP-11
Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

• Keep weighting but move template to environment
• Made a proposal to mitigate effect of submitting X.99 FTE
• Broaden definition of impact
• Increase time period since impact may take a long time to come to fruition
• Allow academic impact on other disciplines?
• Impact on teaching
What comments do you have on the criteria of reach and significance?

- We believe these criteria were understood by HEIs and sub-panels last time and worked well.
- One point that might be clarified further how reach and significance are weighted against each other, i.e. must a top-rated impact activity have both large reach and significance, or does excellence in one measure offset a less extensive performance in the second (i.e. would a local activity with very deep impact score 4*?).
What do you think about having further guidance for public engagement impacts and what do you think would be helpful?

• Further clarity is certainly needed here. Although the results of the last REF have been instructive in distinguishing between mere dissemination and impact, it would be helpful for the guidance to emphasise that public-engagement-based impact should be subject to the same level of rigour as other types of impact with respect to the articulation of the evidence of change. Any such ICS should clearly describe the purpose of the engagement.

• Shouldn’t be just numbers of people, but influence on thinking...
What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration?

• The minimum number of case studies should be reduced from two to one.
• If all staff are submitted, the number of staff members per case study should be increased so that the overall number of case studies is roughly the same.
• If all staff have to be submitted, some SP11 UoAs, which submit a small proportion of their staff may decide not to submit as they will not be able to find enough impact case studies.
• Issue for theory heavy (and new) departments
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?

• We agree that case studies with good impact could arise from bodies of work which do not have 2* outputs, and there is support in our community for reducing the minimum requirement to 1*

• However, we believe that there should still be a link between impact and a research output.
Other ICS issues

• Continuation of ICS impact should be allowable
• Pre-submit information for audit
What are your views on the introduction of institutional-level assessment of impact and environment?

• Most institutions would find difficulty in identifying many impact case studies that truly involve multiple departments.

• Often interdisciplinary research is between different institutions within EU or other research projects rather than between departments in the same institution.

• If institutions have to submit institution level case studies, it is likely that in many cases these would have to be taken from departments that would then have to find other case studies to submit. It is likely that institution level case studies would increase both the overall assessment and submission burden.

• It is also unclear then how QR income associated with such ICS should be distributed within the institution (this is a particular issue for those HEIs that distribute QR to departments according to the national formula).
  • Proposal for 5% to departments from institutional ICS
Questions??