

REF UoA Administrators' Meeting

Institutional Response to Research England 2nd Survey: Proposed Mitigations for the REF Submission

Following the announcement by Research England that March 31st 2021 would be the revised submission date, a second webinar was held on Wednesday 24 June, setting out the proposed modifications for REF 2021.

After the webinar, and to inform the REF development work, views were invited from the HE sector on mitigations proposed in support of the various elements of the submission.

In addition to the webinar and summary document for the various proposed mitigation measures, additional FAQ have been provided by Research England and are available here: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/faqs/>

The full summary (produced by Research England) of the mitigation measures is appended to this document and the following elements were highlighted to UoA for comment in advance of the institutional response to Research England:

Outputs

- Where an output was originally expected to be published by the 31 December and has been delayed past that date, it is still eligible for submission. Either final form or accepted manuscript may be returned and audit evidence of the delay, the originally expected publication date and the 'journey to it being made publicly available' will be required.
- An optional (100 word) statement can be provided to explain how an output has been affected by COVID-19. It is not expected that this will be used in the case of all affected outputs and the examples given at the webinar of output types where this might be relevant were performances and exhibitions. Statements will provide context but the panels will only review the output materials submitted.
- Removing the minimum of one requirement. As with staff circumstances, can be applied where a researcher has not produced any outputs within the REF period. It will apply to staff who have not been able to produce an output due to COVID-19 and where they were not able to produce an output before COVID-19 due to equality related circumstances.
- An Open Access exception can be applied where an output has not been made publicly available in the required timeframe as a result of COVID-19.

Impact

- An additional statement can be provided with cases studies where there has been a 'very significant disruption' to an impact, regardless of whether the impact claimed extends beyond 31st July 2020 . The statement can be up to 100 words and should include information that does not fit into the ICS template (e.g. to explain difficulties with gathering evidence). Statements are not expected for all affected case studies.
- Panels will assess achieved (not potential) impact and submitted material only.

- Information provided in the statement should be verifiable.

Environment

- The institutional Environment Statement can include an optional statement of 500 words to provide context on the *particular* effects of and response to COVID-19. General statements are not invited. Any information must be verifiable and statements will be reviewed using an approach of 'no detriment' on the basis of statements or where a statement is not provided.

The University's response to the second survey is provided below for information.

REF2021 Survey: Proposed modifications to REF2021

Introduction

The purpose of this short survey is to gather views on proposed modifications to the REF 2021 exercise. Responses are invited from any organisation, group or individual with an interest in the conduct, quality, funding or use of research. The REF webinar held on 24 June outlined the proposed modifications; information about this webinar, and a brief overview of the proposals, can be found here: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/events/consultation-webinar-on-proposed-modifications-to-the-2021-research-excellence-framework/>.

The deadline for responses to the survey is noon, 8 July 2020.

The REF team will copy responses to the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, Research England and the Scottish Funding Council.

We will publish a summary of responses. We may publish individual responses to the survey in the summary. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the relevant Freedom of Information Acts across the UK. The Acts give a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case the four UK funding bodies. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means that responses are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. For further information about the Acts see the Information Commissioner's Office website, www.ico.gov.uk or, in Scotland, the website of the Scottish Information Commissioner www.itspublicknowledge.info/home/

Any personal data will be processed according to the requirements of the Data Protection Act 2018, the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), and UK Research and Innovation's Privacy notice. If you provide personal data about other people in your response you should ensure that you have a lawful basis for doing so.

For further information relating to UK Research and Innovation's Privacy notice, please visit <https://www.ukri.org/privacy-notice/>

Outputs

Q1: Taken as a whole, the proposed modifications for outputs are appropriate.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Please provide any comments on your answer, including where applicable any considerations in relation to interdisciplinary research and/or equality and diversity (500 words):

The proposals to allow outputs delayed as a result of COVID-19 to be eligible for submission are helpful and appropriate.

Further clarification of what is intended by, and what will be required as, evidence in terms of the 'journey to being effectively shared/publicly available' is needed. The position taken in the recently published FAQ would appear reasonable. Formal recognition should be given for instances where publishers may not be able to provide this in a short timeframe while they continue to mitigate against COVID-19 and alternative provisions offered. A timeframe for providing any such evidence needs to be confirmed.

The provision for applying for the consideration of additional staff circumstances and for Open Access exceptions in the context of COVID-19 are clear and reasonable.

The University has no particular considerations in relation to interdisciplinary research or equality and diversity, COVID-19 has impacted on all elements of the submission in various and unpredictable ways and is likely to continue to do so.

Once the mitigations are agreed, any implications on the submission system or on the data required for submission will need to be communicated rapidly to the sector and its suppliers.

Impact (REF 3)

Q2. The additional statement proposed for affected impact case studies is appropriate.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Please provide any comments on your response (300 words):

The University sees no value in preparing statements that will not affect quality scores but will create considerable additional burden.

If optional statements are introduced, detailed guidance (including examples) of what constitutes 'very significant disruption' is required, along with clarification of the statements' purpose and potential value.

Additionally, further guidance is necessary regarding what verification is required. Where there is difficulty obtaining evidence from a partner organisation due to COVID-19, what verifiable information can the HEI be expected to provide in the additional statement? It is essential to recognise the importance of maintaining relationships with partner organisations and the current proposals and FAQ fail to do so.

The FAQ around mitigations for impact recognise that impact evidence might be difficult to secure and suggest that the statement can be used to highlight this. The webinar and the formal guidance on mitigations confirm that only the submitted materials will be assessed. Further specific clarification is required to confirm the penalties for failure to provide evidence and to explain whether, and how, information provided in the statements might mitigate the risk of penalty.

Allowance for additional time to submit corroborating evidence in line with the original REF schedule should be confirmed.

The mitigation that supports the eligibility of outputs where publication has been delayed due to COVID-19 should, where relevant, be extended to those outputs underpinning research in Case Studies.

Environment (REF4a/b/c, REF5a/b)

Q3. The proposed modifications for the environment are appropriate.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Please provide any comments on your response (300 words):

The optional statement within the Institutional Environment Statement is a sufficient opportunity for those institutions that choose to report on COVID-19 to do so. Confirmation of the assessment approach of 'no detriment' allows institutions to consider the additional burden of providing such a statement without concern that failure to do so might impact on the overall quality profile. Restricting this inclusion to the non-assessed part of the return through the institutional statement provides reassurance of this approach.

Further guidance on the 'future planning' section of environment statements in the context of COVID-19 is anticipated and will hopefully provide clarity as to how this is compatible with the overall aim of reducing burden.

Background

Following the June 2020 announcement of the revised submission deadline and extension to the impact assessment period for REF 2021, the REF team are engaging with the sector on potential further revisions to the exercise to take account of the effects of COVID-19 on submissions.

Proposed mitigations are outlined for each of the submission areas – outputs, impact and environment below.

Page 2 outlines the questions we are asking the sector about these proposed mitigations and provides details of how to complete the accompanying survey.

Outputs

Delayed outputs, originally expected to be publicly available by 31 Dec 2020

- Delayed outputs may be submitted, where originally expected to be publicly available by 31 Dec 2020
- Can be submitted in final form (if available by 31 March 2020) or as accepted manuscript / pre-dissemination version
- Will require audit evidence of delay / date originally expected and of journey to being effectively shared / publicly available

Affected outputs statement

- Can provide *optional* statement of *up to* 100 words to explain to the panel how output has been affected by COVID-19; not expecting statement to be provided for all affected outputs
- Statement to help the panels understand set of submitted materials in relation to the original intended output; panels will only assess submitted materials
- Audit evidence required

Removing the minimum of one output requirement

- Can apply min one of reduction for staff member with no eligible output due to COVID-19 (inc any eligible through mitigations) **AND** where the staff member has been unable to produce an eligible output before COVID-19 due to equality-related circumstances
- Reductions made through existing REF6a process at the point of submission

Open Access 'other' exception

- Where an in-scope output has not met open access requirements because of disruption related to COVID-19, the 'other exception' may be applied
- 'Other exception' for 2020 outputs not included in the risk identification process for open access compliance

Impact

Affected impact case studies statement

- Where there has been very significant disruption to an impact, the submitting HEI can provide contextual information to the panels
- Optional statement of *up to* 100 words, only containing information that would not otherwise fit in case study template (e.g. particular challenges in accessing evidence)
- Not expecting statement to be provided for all affected case studies
- Statement to help the panels to understand wider context for submitted case study
- Panels will only assess submitted materials
- Information provided should be verifiable

Environment

Institutional-level statement on COVID-19

- Can provide *optional* statement of *up to* 500 words as part of institutional-level environment statement (REF5a)
- HEIs submitting to only one UOA and not completing a REF5a will also be able to provide statement
- To provide context to panels on *particular* effects of / response to COVID-19 - not expecting general statements
- Information must be verifiable
- Approach of 'no detriment' to assessment of submissions on basis of statement, or where not provided

Guidance on forward looking aspects

- Addendum to the panel criteria, published by 31 July
- Acknowledging challenges facing submitting units / institutions, providing points of guidance for consideration, indicating panels' expectations
- Further information on application of assessment criteria (vitality and sustainability)

Survey questions

Outputs

- Taken as a whole, the proposed modifications for outputs are appropriate (indicate level of agreement)
- Please provide any comments on your answer, including where applicable any considerations in relation to interdisciplinary research and/or equality and diversity (500 words)

Impact

- The additional statement proposed for affected impact case studies is appropriate (indicate level of agreement)
- Please provide any comments on your answer (300 words)

Environment

- The proposed modifications for the environment are appropriate (indicate level of agreement)
- Please provide any comments on your response (300 words)

How to respond to the survey

- The survey on the proposed mitigations is available at <https://ref.ac.uk/events/consultation-webinar-on-proposed-modifications-to-the-2021-research-excellence-framework/>
- The deadline for responses is noon, Wednesday 8 July 2020
- Further FAQs, including on areas related to the proposed mitigations will be available from Monday 29 June
- Any questions about the proposed mitigations and survey can be sent to info@ref.ac.uk
- Decisions on further mitigations to REF 2021 will be announced in July