

## First questions around revised REF timetable

The survey proposed four potential options for the revised overarching timeframe and asked:

At this point in time, what is your preference for the revised REF submission deadline?

- A. A single deadline, by 31 March 2021
- B. A phased deadline, starting with staff & outputs in March 2021
- C. A delay of six months or more for all aspects
- D. Other (please specify)

The second question in the survey suggested options for the approach to the **assessment period** for impact and asked:

The end of the assessment period for impact is 31 July 2020. Which of the following options would you prefer as an initial step towards taking account of the effects of Covid-19 on impact submissions?

- A. Universal extension to the assessment period for impact to the 31 December 2020.
- B. Keep 31 July 2020 in place as the end of the assessment period, but ensure a case-by-case mitigation\* route for individual, affected case studies that have been delayed past this point.
- C. Other (please specify) 50 words

In summary, the institutional response considered:

- 31st March was an appropriate timeframe for the submission of staff, outputs and environment sections of the return.
- Support for a later submission date for Impact case studies
- Acknowledgement that, on balance there is likely little value in a change to the impact period beyond 31st July.
- The provision of the option to submit Impact Evidence late and accept that some might not now be able to be sourced.

More than 20 responses were received despite the short timeframe for input and the University's response to the questions are below:

## Submission deadline

**Q1: At this point in time, what is your preference for the revised REF submission deadline?**

- A single deadline, by 31 March 2021
- A phased deadline, starting with staff & outputs in March 2021
- A delay of six months or more for all aspects
- Other (please specify) *max 50 words*

Please provide a brief rationale for your answer (max 350 words):

The University supports a phased deadline with staff, outputs, and Environment Statements submitted at 31 March 2021. There should be an extension for the submission of Impact Case Studies to 31 May 2021.

Cambridge consulted across all UoA and while responses provided some nuanced opinions there was almost unanimous agreement that significant delays to the submission date would create more problems that it would resolve.

Working as outlined above will maintain momentum and prevent significant further delays to plans for non-REF activity. Additional disruption to the research activity of staff would risk disengagement from colleagues who have been integral to preparations, and have been postponing study leave or other commitments for the REF.

A longer extension creates additional work and implies a requirement for extensive revisions to already well-developed submissions. Decisions would have to be retaken and narrative documents redrafted. The impact of COVID-19 on future planning will be unknown for some time and is difficult to reflect on in the REF submission in a meaningful way. Doing so would require additional resource, increase the cost of REF to all Universities, and provide little, if any, benefit.

A slightly later submission date for Impact would allow time to complete the writing and review process and, where appropriate, adjust case studies to reflect any immediate necessary changes to the narrative as result of COVID-19. Further additional time should be allowed for the collection and submission of impact evidence as well as provision for any that might now be unobtainable.

The impact on publication dates will differ depending on disciplinary practices. Consideration might be given to retaining the current publication timeframe as a 'soft deadline' (to allow the review process to begin) with dispensation for a longer publication window for those delayed by COVID- up to the impact submission date.

## Impact

**Q2. The end of the assessment period for impact is 31 July 2020. Which of the following options would you prefer as an initial step towards taking account of the effects of Covid-19 on impact submissions?**

- Universal extension to the assessment period for impact to the 31 December 2020.
- Keep 31 July 2020 in place as the end of the assessment period, but ensure a case-by-case mitigation route for individual, affected case studies that have been delayed past this point.
- Other (please specify) *max 50 words*

Keep 31 July in place as the end of the assessment period for all case studies without case-by-case mitigation. Provide allowance for the late submission of evidence and accept claims in good faith if evidence cannot be obtained.
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Please provide a brief rationale for your answer (max 350 words):

<p>A range of views were provided however few supported a universal extension to December.</p> <p>On balance, the University believes that there is little value in extending the impact period beyond 31 July and any potential benefits would be significantly outweighed by the additional work required, placing burden on those (including external partners) still addressing the effects of COVID-19.</p> <p>A mitigation route on a case-by-case basis would inevitably require detailed and potentially intrusive justification, and require panels to make additional judgements.</p> <p>Universal extension to the impact period would require all ICS to be reviewed to consider additional data relating to the extended period, creating significant administrative burden for little or no reward, as colleagues try to adapt to a new way of working. It would also require corroborating evidence already obtained to be revisited, placing burden on collaborators and impact beneficiaries.</p> <p>Some UoA support extending the impact period as it offers hope that cancelled impact activity can be rescheduled or reformatted. However, the widespread effects of COVID-19 felt by all institutions may well continue through any defined period of extension. Any benefit would therefore be limited given the difficulties in planning and carrying out impact activities under possible continued lockdown measures over an unpredictable period. If necessary, consideration could be given to recognising cancelled impact activity during review.</p> <p>Extending the impact period might allow consideration of activity around COVID-19. Cambridge argues however, that while this might be topical, and Cambridge would have several major activities it could present, it will probably not be possible to assess fully the impact for some time and should therefore be included in future exercises.</p> <p>Whilst Cambridge does not support an extension to the impact period, some mitigation in light of the current crisis is appropriate. The University recommends a pragmatic approach to evidence requirements, with an extension to the evidence submission date and an allowance for omissions when evidence has become unobtainable as a direct result of COVID-19. In this way universities can continue to make progress and not be forced to pressure partners (across the world) who are focused on more pressing matters.</p>
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