

REF Strategy Group Meeting 05 December 2024 – Executive Summary

- Risk Register Updates: The risk register was updated with RAG ratings. Notably, Risk 11 concerning Open Access (OA) requirements was advised to be re-rated as 'red', with the Open Research Strategy Group seeking legal advice on the rights retention policy. Risk 6 regarding impact case study development was noted as potentially 'amber' due to faculty financing. Risk 7 (lower PGR student numbers) needs mitigation through exploring external funding and investment schemes, and Risk 10 (which overlaps with Risk 7) can be mitigated by strategic resource use and planning. An action was raised for the Research Excellence Manager to update the risk register to reflect these considerations.
- REF Preparedness Survey Report:
 - A significant finding was the consistent issue of Professional Services (PS) support being raised across all responses.
 - The group stressed that REF support needs to be embedded within units, rather than relying on a 'tag team' approach, and the university must align its ambition with the support it offers. Investment for REF may need to be ring-fenced as a direct cost, with all REF costs considered holistically. The REF Operations Group was tasked with identifying the necessary support and resources for the REF submission and planning its provision.
 - An internal REF 2029 timetable will be developed by the REF Operations Group, comprising a schedule for information release (following Research England's policy modules) and internal REF checks that require approval by the REF Strategy Group. This timetable should also include the scheduling of regular REF fora.
 - The REF preparedness survey paper is to be presented at the University Research Committee (URC), and Associate Deans for Research (ADRs) will disseminate its content at upcoming Faculty Research Groups (FRGs).
- Critical Friends Process: While there is currently no central REF budget, the payment of critical friends should be included in the list of required REF support. The process was approved by the group, with a future REF forum slated to discuss the value of critical friends to inform policy creation.
- PCE Pilot: Guidance for the Provisional Contribution to Excellence (PCE) pilot was circulated on 29 November. There is vocal criticism within the sector regarding its high burden and lack of streamlining, with HEIs given approximately ten weeks to compile significant data for an assessment period of about eight months. Research England's key message is that this is an experiment, and the final indicators will be fewer. The objective of participation is to inform the process, not to provide feedback on the quality of the submission.