REF 2021 – Summary of draft guidance on submissions (July 2018)

Part 1 – Overview of the assessment framework (paragraphs 20-65)

- This section provides an overview of the:
  o purpose of REF 2021 (paragraphs 20-23)
  o principles which underpin the exercise (paragraphs 24-28)
  o over-arching framework for the assessment (paragraphs 29-40), including the assessment criteria which are the same as REF 2014. The same starred levels are used as REF 2014 (U/C; 1-4*) but revised weightings are set:
    ▪ Outputs – ‘originality, significance and rigour’ (60%)
    ▪ Impact – ‘reach and significance’ (25%)
    ▪ Environment - ‘vitality and sustainability’ (15%)
  o publication of the results (paragraphs 41-50)
  o approach to equality and diversity (paragraphs 51-55)
  o updated timetable for REF 2021 (paragraph 56)
  o summary of the key changes since REF 2014 (paragraphs 57-58)
  o institutional eligibility to participate in REF 2021 (paragraphs 59-65)

Part 2 – Submissions (paragraphs 66-117)

- This section provides an overview of the:
  o scope of submissions, i.e. data on staff, outputs, impact and environment (paragraphs 66-69)
  o requesting exceptions for very small units where FTE is less than 5 (paragraphs 70-74)
  o an overview of the process for making multiple submissions to the same UOA (paragraphs 75-79) – refer also to the panel criteria (paragraphs 184-191)
  o joint submissions by 2 or more HEIs (paragraphs 80-86)
  o the submission process and data verification (paragraphs 87-102)
  o interdisciplinary and collaborative research (paragraphs 103-106) – this includes an overview of the process to support the assessment of interdisciplinary research, including the Interdisciplinary research advisory panel (IDAP) to oversee the process and the appointment of interdisciplinary research (IDR) advisers to sub-panels.
  o open access policy (paragraphs 107-116) – an overview of the policy with a recognition that more time is needed to fully embed open access as an intrinsic part of the research process. Institutions are advised to rely on shared services e.g. SHERPA rather than undertaking additional work to verify compliance.

Part 3 – Data requirements and definitions (paragraphs 117-368)

Staff (REF1) (paragraphs 118-193)

- Category A eligible staff (paragraphs 119-122) (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTIONS 5 & 6) - Category A eligible staff are defined as academic staff with a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater, on the payroll of the submitting institution on the census date (31/07/2020), whose primary employment function is to undertake either ‘research only’ or ‘teaching and research’. Staff should have a substantive research connection with the submitting unit (see below). Staff on ‘research only’ contracts should meet the definition of an independent researcher (see below). (Staff on ‘teaching and research’ contracts are considered to be independent researchers). There is supplementary criteria for staff with particular employment circumstances including NHS joint appointments and secondments (paragraph 121) which are subject to consultation in some areas (see consultation questions 5 & 6).
- **Substantive connection** (paragraphs 123-127) - For staff employed on minimum fractional contracts (0.20 to 0.29 FTE) on the census date, the HEI will need to provide a short statement (up to 200 words) evidencing the clear connection of the staff member with the submitting unit.

- **Independent researchers** (paragraphs 128-133) (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 4) – Staff on ‘research only’ contracts who meet the definition of an independent researcher are classified as Category A submitted staff and must be submitted to REF. For the purposes of the REF, an independent researcher is defined as an individual who undertakes self-directed research, rather than carrying out another individual’s research programme. Possible indicators of independence are listed below. Institutions should note that each indicator may not individually demonstrate independence and where appropriate multiple factors may need to be considered:
  - leading or acting as principal investigator or equivalent on an externally funded research project
  - holding an independently won, competitively awarded fellowship where research independence is a requirement. An illustrative, but not exhaustive, list of independent fellowships can be found at [http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref,2021/downloads/List%20of%20independent%20research%20fellowships.pdf](http://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref,2021/downloads/List%20of%20independent%20research%20fellowships.pdf)
  - acting as a co-investigator on an externally funded research project
  - leading a research group or a substantial work package
  - significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research.

- **Significant responsibility for research** (paragraphs 137-142) – staff with significant responsibility for research are those for whom explicit time and resources are made available to engage actively in independent research, and that is an expectation of their job role. Staff with significant responsibility for research are those for whom:
  a. ‘Explicit time and resources are made available’. Indicators of this could include:
    - a specific proportion of time allocated for research, as determined in the context of the institution’s practices and applied in a consistent way
    - research allocation in a workload model or equivalent.
  b. ‘To engage actively in independent research’. Indicators of this could include:
    - eligibility to apply for research funding as the lead or co-applicant
    - access to research leave or sabbaticals
    - membership of research centres or institutes within the HEI.
    - Plus see indicators above
  c. ‘And that is an expectation of their job role’. Indicators of this could include:
    - current research responsibilities as indicated in, for example, career pathways or stated objectives
    - expectations of research by role as indicated in, for example, job descriptions and appraisals.

It is assumed that in many cases that staff meeting the definition of Category A eligible staff will accurately identify significant responsibility for research. Where it does not, an institution must develop a process detailed in its code of practice on how staff with significant responsibility for research will be identified, which may vary by UOA where employment practices vary at this level. This process will be subject to audit by the REF team to verify that eligible staff who are not submitted do not have significant responsibility for research.

- **Category A submitted staff** (paragraphs 134-136) - Category A submitted staff are defined as Category A eligible staff who have been identified as having significant responsibility for research on the census date. This will include all staff on research-only contracts who are ‘Category A eligible’.

- **Early career researchers** (paragraphs 144-147) - ECRs are defined as members of staff who meet the definition of Category A eligible on the census date, and who started their careers as
independent researchers on or after 1 August 2016. For the purposes of the REF, an individual is
 deemed to have started their career as an independent researcher from the point at which: a. they held a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater, which included a primary employment
 function of undertaking ‘research’ or ‘teaching and research’, with any HEI or other organisation,
 whether in the UK or overseas, and b. they first met the definition of an independent researcher
 (see above). A request may be made for a reduction in the number of outputs required from each
 submitting unit in connection with ECRs (see table below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date at which the individual first met the REF definition of an ECR:</th>
<th>Output pool may be reduced by up to:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On or before 31 July 2016</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 August 2016 and 31 July 2017 inclusive</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1 August 2017 and 31 July 2018 inclusive</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On or after 1 August 2018</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Staff circumstances** (paragraphs 149-193) (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 7) – similar to REF 2014
  and reflecting the ongoing commitment to equality and diversity, a series of measures are included
  which recognise the effect that individual circumstances may have on research productivity. This
  includes reductions for the number of outputs required from each submitted unit, with tariffs
defined for commonly applicable circumstances (such as ECR status, secondments, family leave). In
certain cases, it could involve the removal of the minimum of 1 output requirement. Institutions
will be invited to submit staff circumstances by March 2020 (deadline tbc). Alternatively,
institutions may choose to manage the effect of any staff circumstances within the unit’s standard
output requirements (FTE * 2.5). If this is the case, the institution’s code of practice must detail
how staff circumstances are managed in the output selection process and more generally, it must
document fair and transparent processes for the selection of outputs which take into account
equality and diversity considerations. Equally, if reductions are claimed and applied, the
institution’s code of practice must set out how they will ensure that any applied reduction is
reflected in the affected researcher’s contribution to the output pool, rather the reductions being
used to reduce the contributions from unaffected staff. These measures are subject to
consultation.

- **Category C staff** (paragraph 58b) - (e.g. clinicians on honorary contracts) are no longer eligible to be
  returned as staff but their contribution can be included in the Environment section.

**Outputs (REF2)**

- **Eligibility definitions for research outputs** (paragraphs 197-200):
  - **Number of outputs** - Submissions must include a set number of items of research output,
    equal to 2.5 times the combined FTE of Category A submitted staff included in the
    submission. Rounding to the nearest whole number will be applied to give a whole number
    of outputs for submission. The total required may be adjusted to take into account any
    applicable reductions for staff circumstances (see above).
  - **Eligibility of outputs** - In order to be eligible, outputs must meet the definition of research,
    be submitted in the timeframe, be attributable to a current or former member of staff who
    made a substantial contribution to the output and (where the policy applies) be available in
    open access form.
  - **Outputs per staff member** – Outputs may only be attributed to individuals who made a
    substantial research contribution to the output and each UoA submission should include:
    - A minimum of one output for each Category A submitted staff member, which has
      been produced or authored solely, or co-produced or co-authored, by that staff
      member (unless individual circumstances apply).
A maximum of five outputs may be attributed to an individual staff member (both Category A submitted staff, as well as any former staff whose outputs are eligible for submission). The attribution of the maximum number of outputs to a staff member will not preclude the submission of further outputs on which that staff member is a co-author, where these are attributed to other eligible staff in the unit.

- Outputs from former staff (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 10) (paragraphs 203-207) - Outputs attributable to these staff are eligible for inclusion where the output was first made publicly available while the staff member was employed by the institution as a Category A eligible member of staff. The version of the output submitted must be the version that was first made publicly available when the institution employed the staff member (which could mean the online first or preprint version in some cases). It is proposed that the outputs of staff who have been made redundant are not eligible for submission (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy). This proposal is subject to consultation.

- General eligibility of outputs (paragraphs 208-212) (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 9) – additional guidance is provided in potential outputs types (see consultation question 9), on outputs with significant material in common and the ineligibility of PhD theses and outputs from research students and assistants, except where these outputs were co-authored by an eligible member of staff.

- Open access policy (paragraphs 213-245) – The key change made in the draft ‘Guidance for submissions’ is that there is a new tolerance on non-compliance rule which states that for each submission, a maximum of five per cent of in-scope outputs that do not meet the policy requirement or do not have an exception applied can be submitted. Additionally, there is increased flexibility on the compliance of outputs shared via pre-print services. Beyond this, the policy is largely unchanged i.e. journal articles and conference papers published in conference proceedings with ISSN's which were accepted for publication from 1st April 2016 must have the author accepted manuscript deposited in a repository as soon as possible after acceptance and no later than 3 months after this date (Exceptions apply).

- Timing of publication (paragraphs 246-250) – Outputs must be first brought into the public domain during the publication period 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2020. Where an author-accepted manuscript is the version of an output to be first made publicly available, either that date or the earliest date that the version of record is first made publicly available can be considered to determine eligibility. Outputs which were pre-published (e.g. online first, preprint, working paper) in 2013 are eligible for submission as long as the output was not submitted to REF 2014 by the same institution.

- Confidential reports (paragraphs 251-3) – the process for submitting these outputs is described.

- Data requirements for outputs (paragraph 254) – the information required by the REF panels.

- Outputs pending publication (paragraphs 256-257) – where outputs are scheduled to be published between the REF submission date and the end of the publication period, institutions may nominate a reserve output.

- Co-authored/co-produced outputs (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 11) (paragraphs 258-262):
  - Submitting the same output in different UoA submissions - Where a co-authored output is eligible for return in different submissions (whether from the same HEI or different HEIs), the output may be returned in any or all of these submissions.
  - Returning outputs only once per submission (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 11) - To present the fullest and most favourable impression of research in the submitting unit, it is proposed that co-authored outputs may only be returned once within the same submission, aside from the exception below on double-weighting co-authored outputs. This proposal is subject to consultation.
- Double-weighting co-authored outputs - Where there are substantial pieces of co-authored work, reflecting large-scale or intensive collaborative research within the same submitting unit, and a double-weighting request has been submitted for the output, institutions may attribute the output to a maximum of two members of staff returned within the same submission. This output may be counted as the required minimum of one for each staff member.

- Interdisciplinary research identifier & forensic science identifier (paragraphs 263-266) - For the purposes of the REF, interdisciplinary research is understood to achieve outcomes (including new approaches) that could not be achieved within the framework of a single discipline. Institutions are invited to identify outputs across their submissions that meet this definition. Sub-panels will consider this information in determining the most appropriate means of assessing the output, with advice from the interdisciplinary adviser. This process is distinct from a request for cross-referral. The forensic science identifier will be used to generate a quality sub-profile for forensic science across the exercise to review the health of UK research in this field.

- Research activity costs - UOA 4 – Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience only (SEE CONSULTATION QUESTION 12) (paragraphs 267-271) – submitting units to UOA 4 are asked to identify the cost level of the research which produced the output. This information will be used for the purposes of allocating funding at the appropriate rate and will not be routinely made available to the sub-panel. The approach is subject to consultation.

- Double-weighted outputs (paragraphs 272-276) - Institutions may request that outputs of extended scale and scope be double-weighted (count as two outputs) in the assessment. The panels provide more information in the ‘Panel criteria’ about outputs that may merit double-weighting in their discipline areas. A reserve output may be nominated for assessment in the event that the double weighting request is rejected.

- Additional information and outputs in languages other than English (paragraphs 277-280) – an overview of typical additional information is provided with the specifics provided in the panel criteria and working methods.

- Citation data (paragraphs 281-286) – Outputs will continue to rely on expert review as the primary means of assessment but in specified cases (stated in the Panel Criteria) panels will make use of this data to inform assessments. This will take the form of a count of the number of citations up to a specific point in time.

Impact (REF3)

- Definition of impact (paragraphs 291-296) – this is the same with the exception that impacts on teaching within, as well as beyond, the submitting institution will now be eligible for submission. However, for further advice on impact on teaching within the submitting institution refer to the draft panel criteria and working methods (paragraph 290).

- Submission requirements for impact (paragraphs 297-307) – the impact sub-profile will be established on the basis of impact case studies which must meet these requirements:
  - Applicable dates - Case studies must describe impacts that occurred specifically within the period 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020 and be underpinned by excellent research (i.e. of at least 2* quality) which was produced by the submitting unit in the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020.
  - Standardising quantitative indicators of impact - submitting units are invited to refer to the guidelines for presenting quantitative data set out in the ‘Guidelines for standardising quantitative indicators of impact within REF case studies’. These guidelines have been developed to enable more consistent presentation of quantitative evidence in case studies, both to better inform the panels’ assessment and to enable more effective analysis of the case studies post-REF 2021 by the funding bodies and other stakeholders.
Confidential information – where case studies include confidential information processes are in place to manage this.

Number of impact case studies – this is unchanged from the announcement in April. 2 case studies are required for 0-19.99 FTE and a further case study is required for every 15 FTE thereafter for the first 110 FTE submitted. Submissions will not be expected to provide impact case studies that are representative of the spread of research activity across the whole submitted unit. The strongest examples should be submitted.

Eligibility definitions – case studies must meet the REF definition of impact and the timing limitations. More than one submitted unit (within the same HEI or in different HEIs) may include the same impact within their respective case studies, so long as each submitted unit produced excellent research that made a distinct and material contribution to the impact.

- Impact case studies continued from REF 2014 (paragraphs 308-310) – All impact case studies must meet the same eligibility criteria and if this criteria is met, case studies continued from examples submitted in 2014 will be eligible for submission in REF 2021. Submitting units will be asked to identify continuing case studies. Continued case studies are defined as those where the underpinning research is the same i.e. no new research is referenced since the 2014 case study and there is significant overlap in the impact described.

- Underpinning research (paragraphs 311-319) – the rules are substantively the same on underpinning research. Bodies of work are referenced but these must be embodied in qualifying outputs which meet the timing and quality thresholds. There is a recognition that the relationship between the research and impact can be indirect or non-linear.

- Case study template (paragraphs 320-322 and Annex G) – the template (Annex G) is largely the same as 2014 with the addition/amendment of some administrative fields. The page limit has been increased from 4 pages to 5.

- Corroborating evidence (paragraphs 323-328) – this must be provided to the REF team by 29 January 2021. It is important to note that this will not routinely be shared with sub-panels and the onus is on submitting units to provide appropriate evidence within each case study of the particular impact claimed. Similarly, institutions may include URLs for the purpose of verifying or corroborating claims made in the submission but panels will not follow URLs to access additional evidence or information to supplement the submission.

Environment data (REF4)

- Environment data (paragraphs 329-350) – As in REF 2014, the environment data will consist of a) research doctoral degrees awarded b) research income awarded and c) research income in-kind. Research income for the period 2015/16 to 2019/20 will be presented to assessment panels as an average over five years in order to moderate the more dynamic effects arising from the introduction of the Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 102 in 2015–16.

Environment (REF5)

- Institutional-level environment statement (paragraphs 351-357) - This statement (REF5a – Annex H) will detail the institution’s strategy and resources to support research and enable impact, relating to the period 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020. It will be appended to each unit-level template (REF5b) submitted for panel review. The sub-panels will take into account the information provided in the institutional-level statement when assessing the unit-level template. The ‘Panel criteria’ describes how the sub-panels will use the information in form REF5a to inform the assessment of the REF5b unit-level template. The institutional-level statement will not be separately scored by the sub-panels. The word limit ranges from 2,000 to 3,200 depending on FTE returned by the institution and the format of the REF5a will be as follows:

b. **Strategy**: the institution’s strategy for research and enabling impact (including integrity, open research, and structures to support interdisciplinary research) in the assessment period and for the next five year period.

c. **People**: the institution’s staffing strategy, support and training of research students, and building on the information provided in codes of practice, evidence about how equality and diversity in research careers is supported and promoted across the institution.

d. **Income, infrastructure and facilities**: the institutional-level resources and facilities available to support research, including mechanisms for supporting the reproducibility of research as appropriate to the research focus of the HEI, and to facilitate its impact.

- **Unit-level environment statement** (paragraphs 358-365) - This statement (REF5b – Annex I) will provide information about the environment for research and enabling impact for each submitting unit, relating to the period 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2020. It will include the following sections:

  a. **Unit context, research and impact strategy**.

  b. **People**, including: – staffing strategy and staff development – research students – equality and diversity.

  c. **Income, infrastructure and facilities**.

  d. **Collaboration and contribution to the research base, economy and society**.

The word limits for the unit-level environment templates (see Annex F) are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Category A submitted staff in the submission (FTE)</th>
<th>Word limit for environment template (REF5b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – 19.99</td>
<td>8,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 29.99</td>
<td>8,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 – 39.99</td>
<td>9,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 – 49.99</td>
<td>10,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 – 69.99</td>
<td>11,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 or more</td>
<td>12,000, plus 800 further words per additional 20 FE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Supporting quantitative indicators** (paragraph 361) – a guidance document has been provided on supporting quantitative indicators that may be drawn upon when completing the statements: [https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref,2021/downloads/Guidance%20on%20environment%20indicators.pdf](https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/ref,2021/downloads/Guidance%20on%20environment%20indicators.pdf)

- **Category C staff** (paragraphs 366-368) - Information about the contribution of Category C staff to the environment for research and enabling impact may be provided in the ‘Collaboration and contribution’ section of the REF5b template. Category C staff are defined as individuals employed by an organisation other than an HEI, whose contract or job role (as documented by their employer) includes the undertaking of research, and whose research is primarily focused in the submitting unit. These staff may no longer be returned in REF1.

**Overview of annexes**

- Annex A: Assessment criteria and level definitions
- Annex B: Quality profiles
- Annex C: Definitions of research and impact for the REF
- Annex D: Units of assessment
- Annex E: Timetable
- Annex F: Format and page limits for textual parts of submissions
- Annex G: Impact case study template and guidance
- Annex H: Institutional-level environment statement (REF5a)
- Annex I: Unit-level environment template (REF5b)
- Annex J: Standard data analyses
- Annex K: Output glossary and collection formats
- Annex L: Index of definitions and data requirements
- Annex M: List of abbreviations