Public Engagement in REF 2021
Discussion paper

Background

[The consultation on REF 2021](#) is open until October 15th 2018. Two documents have been published, Draft Guidance and Draft Panel Criteria and Working Methods.

We advise that you take a quick look at both these documents in advance on the workshop on Friday, to familiarise yourself with their content. On the next two slides we provide a quick overview of their focus and of the consultation questions that are posed within them.

The focus of the workshop is on the guidance about public engagement in both documents, and on what (if anything) could be changed or added to improve this. By improve, we mean:
- Make it clearer
- Make it more coherent and consistent
- Make it more 'appropriate' (a term used consistently in the consultation. We are interpreting 'appropriate' to mean in accordance with good practice, and realistic within the constraints of the REF exercise)

In fact, there are very few explicit mentions of public engagement in the two documents, although what is included offers strong encouragement to universities to consider including impacts arising from public engagement in their submitted case studies. Slide 4 includes the key references from both documents.
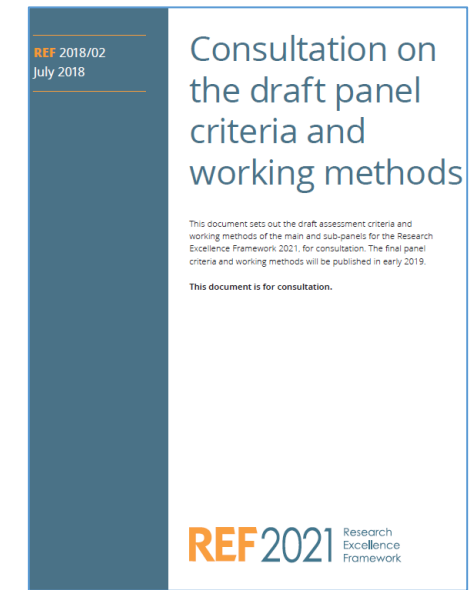
The purpose of this document is to foreground what we consider to be the most significant issues with the clarity, appropriateness an consistency of the guidance. Key recommendations we will be outlined about how these might be addressed in revisions to the guidance.

We will present the rationale for and some of the detail of our proposed response at the workshop on the 14th September.

We invite you to come prepared to contribute to and build on our current thinking and approach. Throughout this briefing document we have highlighted prompt questions which we hope you will have time to consider in advance. We also invite you to bring references to or examples of frameworks, tools or resources which you think we could usefully include in our response. We also invite you to come prepared to share other issues and challenges with the guidance which we haven't foregrounded, which you think it is important to address during the consultation.

REF 2018/01
July 2018

Draft guidance on submissions

This document sets out the draft general framework for assessment in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF) and guidance to UK higher education institutions about making submissions to REF 2021, for consultation. It includes draft guidance on procedures, the data that will be required, and the criteria and definitions that will apply. The deadline for submissions is midday, Friday 27 November 2020.

This document is for consultation.

REF 2021 Research Excellence Framework

REF 2018/02
July 2018

Consultation on the draft panel criteria and working methods

This document sets out the draft assessment criteria and working methods of the main and sub-panels for the Research Excellence Framework 2021, for consultation. The final panel criteria and working methods will be published in early 2019.

This document is for consultation.

REF 2021 Research Excellence Framework

[Link](#)   [Link](#)

Previous consultations and reviews of PE in the REF
There has been lots of activity to shape and inform the framing of public engagement in the REF, and you can access [an overview and links here](#) on the NCCPE website.

Of particular note are:
- [The NCCPE's review of Public Engagement in the 2014 REF](#), which analysed the database of impact case studies and impact templates to examine how public engagement featured and to draw oud lessons and recommendations to inform REF 2021
- [The NCCPE's response to the 2017 consultation](#) on the REF
- The [briefing paper](#) and [write up](#) of a workshop hosted by the REF team in February 2018 which explored how public engagement should feature in the guidance for REF 2021

The two consultation documents

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This document is for consultation.

REF 2021 Research Excellence Framework

Contents

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document is for consultation. The document:
   - sets out the draft framework and generic criteria for assessment in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF)
   - specifies the content, data requirements and related definitions for submissions to REF 2021
   - guides higher education institutions (HEIs) on policy and practical matters in preparing submissions.

Consultation on the draft panel criteria and working methods

This document sets out the draft assessment criteria and working methods of the main and sub-panels for the Research Excellence Framework 2021, for consultation. The final panel criteria and working methods will be published in early 2019.

This document is for consultation.

REF 2021 Research Excellence Framework

Contents

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document sets out the draft assessment criteria and working methods of the main and sub-panels for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021, for consultation.

2. The final panel criteria and working methods will be published in early 2019. This document, taken together with the 'Guidance on submissions', also published in draft for consultation (REF 2018/01), will provide a comprehensive description of the information required in submissions to the REF, and how the REF panels will assess submissions.

Key points

3. The REF is a process of expert review. Expert sub-panels for each of 34 units of assessment will carry out the assessment, working under the leadership and guidance of four main panels.

4. UK higher education institutions (HEIs) will be invited to make submissions by 27 November 2020. The REF main and sub-panels will assess submissions during 2021, and results will be published in December 2021. The results will inform the allocation of research funding by the UK higher education funding bodies, from 2022-23.

5. This document sets out a draft combined statement of criteria and working methods across the four main panels, for consultation. Supplementary criteria are set out for each main panel where applicable. The main panels' supplementary criteria are intended to be read alongside the combined criteria, and do not replace it.

You can access a word document that lists all the questions here, although answers need to be submitted via their online platform. Many of the topics being consulted on are specific and technical. We have italicised and highlighted in red those questions where we intend to make a response

The consultation questions

Questions about the Draft Guidance

1. Is the guidance clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework'?

2. Is the guidance clear in 'Part 2: Submissions'

3. Is the guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details'?

4. Possible indicators of research independence are set out at paragraph 130, including a reference to a list of independent fellowships. This list is intended to guide institutions on determining independence for staff holding fellowships from major research funders. The list is not intended to be comprehensive. Do you have any comments on the clarity, usefulness, or coverage of this list?

5. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

6. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

7. Will the proposed approach for taking account of circumstances achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021?

8. Is the guidance in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs' clear?

9. A glossary of output types and collection formats is set out at Annex K, to provide increased clarity to institutions on categorising types of output for submission. Do you have any comments on the clarity and usefulness of this annex?

10. Paragraph 206.b sets out the funding bodies' intention to make ineligible the outputs of former staff who have been made redundant (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy).Do you agree with this proposal?

11. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of co-authored outputs only once within the same submission?

12. . How feasible do you consider to be the approach set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing information on the balance of research activity of different costs within submitting units in UOA 4? (300 word limit)

13. Is the guidance in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact' clear?

14. Is the guidance in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data' clear?

15. Is the guidance in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment' clear?

16. Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A-M

Questions about the Draft Criteria and working methods

1. Do the UOA descriptors provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on

2. Are the criteria clear are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions'?

3. Are the criteria clear and appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs'?

4. Are the criteria clear and appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact'?

5. Are the criteria clear and appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment'?

6. Are the criteria clear and appropriate in 'Part 4: Panel procedures'?

7. Are the criteria clear and appropriate in 'Part 5: Panel working methods'?

8. Overall, do the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieve an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels?

Explicit references to public engagement in the draft guidance

318. There are many ways in which research may have underpinned impact, including but not limited to:

Impacts on, for example, public awareness, attitudes, understanding or behaviour that arose from engaging the public with research. In these cases, the submitting unit must show that the engagement activity was, at least in part, based on the submitted unit's research and drew materially and distinctly upon it. Further guidance and examples are set out in the 'Panel criteria', Annex A.

274. The panels also acknowledge that there are multiple and diverse pathways through which research achieves impact. Impact may be the result of individual or collective research (or a combination of these) within or between a range of organisations, within higher education and beyond, including collaboration beyond the UK. The associated impact may be achieved by a variety of possible models: from individuals, to inter-institutional groups, to groups including both academic and non-academic participants. The relationship between research and impact can be indirect or non-linear. The impact of research may be foreseen or unforeseen. It can emerge as an end product, but can also be demonstrated during the research process. Impact takes place through a wide variety of mechanisms. It may effect change or enrichment for local, national or international communities, groups or individuals. Consequently, public engagement may be an important feature of many case studies, as the mechanism by which the impact claimed has been achieved.

288. Engaging the public with the submitting unit's research (for example, through citizen science, patient and public involvement in health, or through public and community engagement), is an activity that may lead to impact. Sub-panels will welcome, and assess equitably, case studies describing impacts achieved through public engagement, either as the main impact described or as one facet of a wider range of impacts. Panels expect that case studies based on public engagement will demonstrate both reach (e.g. through audience or participant figures) and significance, and will take both into account when assessing the impacts. Examples of impacts arising from public engagement can be found as part of Table 1 (Annex A).

Annex A: Examples of impact achieved **through** public engagement are integrated into the different areas of impact in Table 1. More detailed advice on achieving and evidencing impact through public engagement can be found on the website of the National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement: http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/.
4. Examples are also provided of impact evaluation frameworks used outside higher education. Impact partners may also have their own evaluation frameworks that could be drawn upon to evidence impact.

Key issues

Equality and diversity

Currently the Guidance and Criteria frame Equality and Diversity almost exclusively in terms of internal HE staff policies and the 'internal' conduct of research. There are very significant E&D issues linked to the generation of impact. There is only one point at which this is acknowledged:

> **'Reach** *will be understood as the extent and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact' Draft Criteria, paragraph 276)*

We will argue that the E&D issues related to impact need to be surfaced and addressed in the guidance, for instance in the Environment section. We will argue that this is a very significant omission, and provide suggestions for how this could be approached.

We welcome your views of how this can be most constructively addressed, and any suggestions you have of frameworks of guidelines which you think we should reference in our response.

Assessment of impact

We will argue that only assessing the 'reach and significance' of impact, and not the 'rigour' of the processes described or of the evaluation undertaken, significantly weakens the robustness of the process.

We are considering suggesting the following framing of the guidance for the assessment of the case studies, and would welcome your views:

This section should provide a narrative, with supporting evidence, to explain:
- How the research underpinned (made a distinct and material contribution to) the impact (*the **rigour** of the methods used to maximise the impact of the underpinning research and/or to secure evidence of how that impact was manifested*)
- The nature and extent of the impact (*the **reach** and **significance** of the impact*)

Rigour will be understood as the extent to which the methods linking the research to the claimed impacts demonstrate intellectual coherence and robustness, sensitivity and adaptation to their social context (including equality and diversity) and enable the adoption of the most robust and appropriate evaluative techniques

We note that there is virtually no mention of the evaluation of impact in either document, and we will propose a short additional section that provides guidance about the value of evaluation in securing robust evidence of impact.

We would welcome your advice about specific evaluation resources or frameworks which we should reference in our response

Consistency

We will argue that while significant steps have been taken to increase the consistency of the guidance there is more that could be done to iron out inconsistency and to increase its robustness. In particular, we will identify significant inconsistency in the ways in which indicators of impact are articulated and deployed in the guidance and draft criteria. There are various different formulations of what count as indicators of impact. For instance:

> The **draft guidance** states:
> *'Impact **includes**, but is not limited to, an effect on, change or benefit to:*
> • *the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding'*
>
> The **draft criteria** list:
> *'performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness or well-being of the beneficiaries' (277).*
>
> The **draft guidance**, in its commentary about public engagement, states: 'impacts on for example public awareness, attitudes, understanding or behaviour…' (p.90, para 139)
>
> The **indictors of impact** listed in Annex A of the draft criteria draw on these and other possible indicators in an unsystematic way.

We will argue that it would be helpful if there was a more consistent and coherent articulation of possible indicators, that draws on established approaches to evaluation particularly in the health sector. We will suggest that it would be useful to differentiate between the following types of indicator (and to use these distinctions consistently):
• Structural indicators: e.g. policies, systems and infrastructure
• Process indicators: e.g. performance, activity
• Outcome indicators: e.g. skills, attitudes, understanding, behaviour, well-being

It is notable that the indicators listed in Annex A (Draft Criteria) for the different Areas of Impact are dominated by structural and process indicators, and many of the Areas fail to include any outcome indicators at all. The Area of 'Understanding, Learning and Participation', however, is dominated by outcome indictors, at the expense of the other types, making this area appear qualitatively different to the others. In effect, it appears to have been used as a convenient place to locate impacts arising from public engagement, which will have unintended consequences: firstly, it will suggest that public engagement is primarily about achieving individual outcomes for people, whereas in practice it can make a significant contribution to both structures and processes in society (for instance through public dialogue or co-production); and secondly, it will discourage people from considering the value of public engagement across all nine Areas of Impact.

To address this we will argue that:
(a) 'Understanding, Learning and Participation' needs to be re-focused so it is consistent with the other 8 Areas – i.e. capturing a broad coalition of organisations and activity focused on a meaningful cluster of social outcomes. We will suggest this might be framed as 'Education, Skills and Community Development'
(b) All nine areas should include examples of Structural, Process and Outcome indicators, expressed in a more consistent way. Slides 8 & 9 offer some exemplar indicators

What does all this mean for public engagement?

While we are pleased to see PE acknowledged as an important pathway to impact, we think there are elements of the current framing of the guidance and criteria which will mitigate against the full potential of PE being realised, and robustly assessed.

We will identify the following broad recommendations:

- It is vital that stronger signals are sent to the sector about the need take account of E&D in reporting on their impact activities, not just in their staff policies. An obvious hook for this is in the definition of Impact, which includes 'the reduction or prevention of harm, risk, cost of other negative effects'. There should be a clear expectation set by the panels that equality and diversity will be addressed in impact planning (in the 'environment'), and guidance about what will count as evidence of impact (in terms of both 'reach' and 'significance') within impact case studies.
- A greater emphasis on rigour and evaluation is vital if we want to see a step change in the quality of submissions and the robustness of assessment in 2021. This needs to be signalled unequivocally. Including 'rigour' in the framing of impact assessment would send such a signal, as would clearer guidance about the use of evaluation to provide robust evidence
- The lack of consistency with which the guidance and criteria currently frame indicators of impact risks placing public engagement in a 'silo'. By describing these indicators in a more coherent and consistent way, it will be possible to demonstrate how public engagement can contribute value across all nine Areas of Impact.

To back these up we will provide
- Suggested wording and links to relevant frameworks and tools to focus attention on how E&D issues should be foregrounded and factored into the guidance and criteria
- Concrete suggestions for how meaningful indicators of impacts arising from public engagement can be 'wired in' across the nine Areas of Impact

The next 2 slides outline our current thinking about how to do the latter:
- They try to provide a consistent set of descriptions of the nine Areas of Interest
- They suggest how members of the public can be meaningfully engaged in each of these areas
- They describe some generic indicators which we think would help provide greater consistency and coherence, and identify some indicators specifically focus upon impacts arising from public engagement.

We welcome your views and feedback on this proposed approach, and any suggestions for how it could be improved

Integrating public engagement across all areas

This table attempts to provide a more consistent and coherent framing of the 9 areas of impact, and to model how PE contributes to each

Area of impact / domain	Motivation	Professional communities	Public roles	Contribution of public engagement?
Impacts on creativity, culture and society	To stimulate participation in the arts and culture; to support creative expression	People working in arts and cultural sector	Audiences; participants; communities of place and interest; volunteers; supporters	Stimulate involvement in arts and culture; widen participation and representation; support development of services better tuned to users
Impacts on the environment	To enhance the environment, address climate change, stewardship, conservation	People working in all areas of society, committed to positive impacts on the environment	Citizen scientists; activists; volunteers; communities of place;	Stimulate behaviour change; build understanding and awareness; contribute to public debate
Impact on social welfare	To address poverty and inequality and other social challenges	People working in social care, and to address poverty social exclusion and social mobility	Citizens; community members; carers	Contribute to public debate; support development of services better tuned to users; inform policy development; address behaviours
Impacts on production	To create new, or improve existing products and production processes	People working in manufacturing and on the production of new products	Consumers; employees; union members	Hold to account for business practices; contribute to shaping of new products so they better meet customer needs
Impacts on commerce and the economy	To generate wealth, create efficiencies, improve financial regulation	People working in financial services and regulation, and in businesses with a 'bottom line'	Consumers; customers; employees; communities of place; citizens	Hold to account for business practices; contribute to shaping of new products so they better meet customer needs; stimulate innovation
Impacts on practitioners & professional services	To enhance professional practice & deliver high-quality services that meet 'users' needs	People working to deliver high quality services, in any sector	Service users; customers; members; trustees and governors; clients	Hold to account for quality of service; contribute to shaping of new services so they better meet user needs; embed reflective practices
Impacts on public policy, law and services	To create effective, just and fair polices, regulations and laws	Government (national, devolved and local); regulators and law makers	Citizens; consumers; community members; voters	Contribute to public debate; support development of policies, governance and laws; inform policy development through dialogue
Impacts on health, wellbeing & animal welfare	To improve human and animal health and wellbeing	People working in & allied to healthcare, social care or animal welfare to deliver services; companies supplying products & services, carers & community initiatives	Patients; carers; parents; pet owners	Stimulate awareness and understanding; address behaviours; enhance services through patient involvement; improved prevention, treatment and support
Impacts on education, lifelong learning and community engagement	To stimulate lifelong learning, citizenship and participation across society	People working in formal and informal education and community development	Learners; community members; pupils; parents	Stimulate take up of lifelong learning; encourage participation in civic life; enhance services through user engagement

Integrating public engagement across all areas

This slide offers a set of exemplar indicators which could be adapted for each domain, with examples of indicators linked to impacts arising from public engagement

Impact domain

- Creativity & culture
- Environment
- Social welfare
- Production
- Commerce and the economy
- Practitioners & prof services
- Public policy, law & services
- Health, wellbeing & animal welfare
- Education, lifelong learning and community engagement

Structural indicators

- Evidence of influence on policies, guidelines, standards or regulations pertaining to each domain
- Evidence of influence on decision making and accountability arrangements (e.g. governance arrangements)
- Evidence of influence on the strategic objectives of an organisation
- Evidence of influence on arrangements to support collaboration and partnership working (e.g. formal partnership arrangements)
- Evidence of adoption of regulations and routines to enhance social responsibility, ethical practice, equality and diversity and sustainability
- Evidence of positive environmental benefits

Process indicators

- Evidence adoption of new or changed methods, models, techniques and approaches (e.g. enhanced co-production; changes to resource-use)
- Evidence of influence on project activity and operations, product development and/or service delivery
- Evidence of challenge to 'received wisdom' or established paradigms and assumptions
- Evidence of influence on capacity building activity (e.g. CPD; curricula; teaching methods)
- Evidence of changes to working practices, e.g. through increased reflective practice
- Evidence of influence on decision-making outcomes (e.g. planning decisions)
- Evidence of changes to extent, quality and longevity of collaboration
- Evidence of changes to management practices
- Evidence of decision making processes being influenced
- Evidence of changes to progression opportunities for individuals with protected characteristics
- Evidence of improved access to resources or opportunities
- Evidence of uptake of research in public debate and discourse
- Evidence of the identification and mitigation of risks, and hazards
- Evidence of influence on consideration of ethics and values
- Evidence of reduced costs, greater profitability, enhanced efficiency or productivity
- Evidence of improved accountability / monitoring

Outcome indicators

- Evidence of increased awareness and understanding
- Evidence of increased skills
- Evidence of increased empathy or tolerance
- Evidence of increased creativity
- Evidence of increased educational attainment
- Evidence of increased confidence
- Evidence of increased motivation
- Evidence of increased trust
- Evidence of enhanced health and wellbeing
- Evidence of enhanced quality of life
- Evidence of influence on social mobility
- Evidence of improved equality and diversity outcomes
- Evidence of strengthened or extended networks
- Evidence of changed behaviours
- Evidence of increased 'user' satisfaction with products or services
- Evidence of enhanced patient outcomes

Indicators potentially linked to engagement of the public

Structural indicators

- Evidence of research process involving the public in the shaping of new policies, guidelines and regulations
- Evidence of research process resulting in public involvement becoming embedded in governance and accountability arrangements
- Evidence of research process ensuring public 'voice' holds organisations to account

Process indicators

- Evidence of research process leading to enhanced public involvement in the shaping and delivery of services
- Evidence of discussion and debate being stimulated in the public sphere
- Evidence of individual / group decision making being influence by research
- Evidence of the increased uptake of lifelong learning Evidence of increased public participation in the different domains
- Evidence of widened participation and access (e.g. by marginalized, under-engaged and/or diverse audiences

Outcome indicators

- Evidence of how specific individuals or groups have been directly affected in all indicator areas

What else do you think needs to be addressed in our response?

Please come along prepared to share other **significant issues or concerns** with the draft guidance which you think we should address in our response

Please also come prepared to talk about the aspects of the draft guidance which you find **particularly helpful and constructive** that you think we should comment positively upon

We will devote part of the event to considering the wider issue of sector **capacity building** to ensure, collectively, we 'rise to the challenge' of the REF, and maximise the opportunities it presents to embed higher quality engagement with the public in the research community. Please come prepared to share your views of:
- **The particular barriers / blocks to the integration of high quality public engagement in REF submissions**
- **The 'triggers' or methods you have deployed which have been successful**
- **Ideas for how the NCCPE and other agencies might provide well targeted support**

With thanks to everyone who contributed to drafts of this paper

Please direct any enquiries to nncpe.enquiries@uwe.ac.uk

National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) is internationally recognised for its work supporting and inspiring universities to engage with the public.

We work to change perspectives, promote innovation, and nurture and celebrate excellence. We also champion meaningful engagement that makes a real and valued difference to people's lives.

The NCCPE is supported by the UK Higher Education Councils, Research Councils UK and Wellcome, and has been hosted by the University of Bristol and the University of the West of England since it was established in 2008.

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