

Consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework

Page 1: Respondent details

Q1. Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of
Representative body
Please provide the name of your organisation Royal College of Nursing

Page 2: Overall approach

Q2. 1. Do you have any comments on the proposal to maintain an overall continuity of approach with REF 2014, as outlined in paragraphs 10 and 23?
<p>We support the plan to maintain overall continuity. Anything that could be done to reduce the burden of work involved for all concerned would be welcomed.</p> <p>We acknowledge that there will be necessary incremental changes based on the evaluation work undertaken and especially with regard to the assessment of impact (para 10).</p> <p>We recognize the importance of clearly updating processes to avoid confusion with previous assessment exercises.</p>

Page 3: Unit of assessment structure

Q3. 2. What comments do you have about the unit of assessment structure in REF 2021?
<p>UoA 3 is a very large unit of assessment, and we advocate for the retention of a nursing and midwifery subpanel as we recognize the importance of disciplinary specific expertise.</p> <p>The nursing discipline provides 'clinical' care (to people with physical, mental health and social care needs) but it also provides health services. The panel sub-panel must include a mix of 'clinical' and 'health-services' researchers to cover the breadth of the discipline.</p> <p>With such a high volume of submissions and complexity we strongly believe the selection of the UoA chair is crucial to assure equity and stakeholder engagement.</p>

Page 4: Expert panels

Q4. 3a. Do you agree that the submissions guidance and panel criteria should be developed simultaneously?
Yes
<p>Comments:</p> <p>We agree peer review should remain an important part of the process. (hence why we argue for a cognate disciplinary sub-panel). We recognize the importance of the appointment of sub-panel chairs with a strong track record of effective stakeholder engagement if the ambition that they will 'consult their subject communities on the criteria' (para 33) is to be an effective process.</p>

Q5. 3b. Do you support the later appointment of sub-panel members, near to the start of the assessment year?

No

Comments:

Our preference would be for the appointment of subpanel members early in the process to ensure shared ownership of interpretation of the criteria. At the very least we recommend a discipline specific core group is established in the first instance, to draft criteria and facilitate the consultation of subject communities. We recognize there is merit in appointing additional stakeholders nearer to the assessment itself depending on gaps in the committee's expertise.

Q6. 4. Do you agree with the proposed measures outlined at paragraph 35 for improving representativeness on the panels?

Yes

Comments:

a) The appointment of main and sub-panel chairs should be made through an open application process. They should be accountable for demonstrating equality and diversity E&D in their decision making b) Other panel members should be appointed through a nomination process. A nominations process is a sensible solution for panel members, given the scale of these appointments. c) E&D should be monitored centrally d) We agree that E&D training should be provided to ensure a shared understanding

Q7. 5a. Based on the options described at paragraphs 36 to 38 what approach do you think should be taken to nominating panel members?

We think the existing process of nominations is fit for purpose, especially when coupled with more overt E&D considerations. As previously, it must ensure UK wide representation and as far as possible a range of specialisms within the discipline.

Q8. 5b. Do you agree with the proposal to require nominating bodies to provide equality and diversity information?

Yes

Comments:

We believe panel and subpanel chairs should be accountable for ensuring E&D is demonstrated in their appointments and E&D should be monitored centrally. We recognize this may be aided by requesting nominating bodies to indicate if they have an E&D policy and that they have applied it

Page 5: Staff

Q10. 7. Do you have any comments on the proposal to use HESA cost centres to map research-active staff to UOAs and are there any alternative approaches that should be considered?

We recognize the principle of using HESA data to introduce a degree of independence into the identification of 'research active' staff however due to the nature of the nursing discipline and the developmental nature of nursing research, using HESA cost centers alone may prove disadvantageous and weaken / skew submissions from the discipline. This is because a large number of staff are on teaching only contracts because of the way nursing education has been commissioned.

Furthermore HESA cost centres allocated by virtue of teaching may not reflect the area(s) of research undertaken. Perhaps HEIs could submit HESA cost centre numbers but then also indicate which staff are research active staff within each category and which UoA individual staff are attached to.

Q11. 8. What comments do you have on the proposed definition of 'research-active' staff described in paragraph 43?

We welcome the inclusion of all 'research active staff' are submitted. However as indicated in our response to question 7, because of the way in which nursing education is commissioned, research activity may be masked by contractual arrangements. Research active staff in nursing undertaking excellent research (as per para 40) on 'teaching only' contracts must be acknowledged and there needs to be a mechanism for including them in this process.

We do not agree that HEIs should be preventing from choosing which UoA they submit to. There needs to be flexibility in terms of which UoA staff are allocated to but there also needs to be a way by which background discipline can also be identified – this could better accommodate interdisciplinary research and make disciplinary contributions more visible.

The definition for research active staff is acceptable, but it lacks detail about what is meant by including 'a measure of independence' in the definition which is necessary before we can comment fully on this aspect.

Q12. 9a. The proposal to require an average of two outputs per full-time equivalent staff returned?

Two outputs per FTE is acceptable.

Q13. 9b. The maximum number of outputs for each staff member?

The maximum number of outputs at six could create an onerous burden on the panel - an average of 2/3 would seem reasonable.

Q14. 9c. Setting a minimum requirement of one for each staff member?

If outputs are not portable then we'd support a minimum of one output per staff member. If they are portable a minimum of two.

Q15. 10a. Is acceptance for publication a suitable marker to identify outputs that an institution can submit and how would this apply across different output types?

Yes, acceptance for publication is a suitable marker

Q16. 10b. What challenges would your institution face in verifying the eligibility of outputs?

No new challenges

Q17. 10c. Would non-portability have a negative impact on certain groups and how might this be mitigated?

Yes, this could be a very real problem for Early Career Researchers, who by nature move around a lot following short term contracts. Lack of portability of outputs would be particularly challenging for them, the next generation of Principle Investigators and we would strongly recommend that if this proposal is implemented ECRs are exempt. This needs very careful attention.
We recognize that non portability could lead to greater career insecurity for staff - if the required number of outputs has been achieved short term contracts may not be renewed.

Q18. 10d. What comments do you have on sharing outputs proportionally across institutions?

Care must be taken not to have disincentives for collaboration, sharing proportionally might work, but no criteria for this sharing are proposed in this consultation meaning we cannot comment fully on this point.

Q19. 11. Do you support the introduction of a mandatory requirement for the Open Researcher and Contributor ID to be used as the staff identifier, in the event that information about individual staff members continues to be collected in REF 2021?

Yes

Q20. 12. What comments do you have on the proposal to remove Category C as a category of eligible staff?

I the event that outputs are remain linked to eligible staff we would strong disagree with this proposal. We actively encourage
a) collaboration with, for example, health and social care service staff,
b) clinical research and joint appointments through clinical academic careers.
This could also weaken the impact of research, which would be a bad unintended consequence.

Q22. 14. What comments do you have on the proposal for staff on fractional contracts and is a minimum of 0.2 FTE appropriate?

A minimum of 0.2 FTE seems to be sensible as does a short statement on their eligibility.

Page 6: Collaboration

Q23. 15. What are your comments in relation to better supporting collaboration between academia and organisations beyond higher education in REF 2021?

We are supportive of the acknowledgement of collaboration and recommend that a section in the environment statement requests details regarding collaborative activity

Page 7: Outputs

Q24. 16. Do you agree with the proposal to allow the submission of a reserve output in cases where the publication of the preferred output will post-date the submission deadline?

Yes

Q25. 17. What are your comments in relation to the assessment of interdisciplinary research in REF 2021?

This is very positive, especially the appointment of interdisciplinary "champions" to sub-panels

Q26. 18. Do you agree with the proposal for using quantitative data to inform the assessment of outputs, where considered appropriate for the discipline? If you agree, have you any suggestions for data that could be provided to the panels at output and aggregate level?

No

Comments:

We do not support with the proposal for using quantitative data to inform the assessment of outputs. Within the NMAHP disciplines there are many reported problems using quantitative data such as Altmetrics or citation rates for example papers might be highly cited because they are flawed! It suggests more precision in this process is possible than we believe to be the case.

Page 8: Impact

Q27. 19. Do you agree with the proposal to maintain consistency where possible with the REF 2014 impact assessment process?

Yes

Q28. 20. What comments do you have on the recommendation to broaden and deepen the definition of impact?

We support the broadening and deepening of the definition of impact. Agree they should reflect innovation, practice and theory development which addresses the health and social care needs of society. Our primary concern is the impact on public health and patient care. We particularly welcome the inclusion of public engagement.

We agree that it is important to include ground breaking academic impacts, although this would need very careful definition. Only recognizing "creation of new disciplines" looks too restrictive. We do not think assessing this under "environment" would be appropriate.

Q29. 21. Do you agree with the proposal for the funding bodies and Research Councils UK to align their definition of academic and wider impact?

Yes

If yes, what comments do you have on the proposed definitions?

We welcome the proposal for the alignment of the definitions of impact across the funding bodies and Research Councils. The definitions of academic and wider impact are helpful however assessment of impact may be nuanced: for example, impact could be had via making a difference to health, but this difference might only be trackable by this being formally assessed in a publication. This then seems to count as academic impact because it is a paper, rather than "wider impact". This needs addressing.

Q30. 22. What comments do you have on the criteria of reach and significance?

We welcome a closer look at the meaning of 'reach' and 'significance' in this context. For example 'reach' may often be understood to (only) mean geographical which we would argue is a limited interpretation. Reach and significance are sometimes seen as synonymous.

Q31. 23. What do you think about having further guidance for public engagement impacts and what do you think would be helpful?

This appears to be sufficiently clear already

Q32. 24. Do you agree with the proposal that impacts should remain eligible for submission by the institution or institutions in which the underpinning research has been conducted?

Yes

Q33. 25. Do you agree that the approach to supporting and enabling impact should be captured as an explicit section of the environment element of the assessment?

Yes

Q34. 26. What comments do you have on the suggested approaches to determining the required number of case studies? Are there alternative approaches that merit consideration?

Ensuring the number of impact case studies submitted does not increase significantly when all research active staff are returned will need to be managed carefully. One approach would be to have an upper limit in relation to FTE submitted, with a minimum of one, and let institutions decide how many with the proviso that they equitably reflect the disciplines returned within the UoA.

Q35. 27. Do you agree with the proposal to include a number of mandatory fields in the impact case study template to support the assessment and audit process better (paragraph 96)?

Yes

Q36. 28. What comments do you have on the inclusion of further optional fields in the impact case study template?

Describing these fields as 'optional' might not be helpful. They should be mandatory 'if applicable'

Q37. 29. What comments do you have in relation to the inclusion of examples of impact arising from research activity and bodies of work, as well as from specific research outputs?

Yes, sensible.

Q38. 30. Do you agree with the proposed timeframe for the underpinning research activity (1 January 2000 - 31 December 2020)?

Yes

Comments:

Yes maximum, but no minimum

Q39. 31. What are your views on the suggestion that the threshold criterion for underpinning research, research activity or a body of work should be based on standards of rigour? Do you have suggestions for how rigour could be assessed?

We think that 1* would be a reasonable threshold – good national research can have big impacts with good reach and significance.

Q40. 32a. The suggestion to provide audit evidence to the panels?

We agree that in principle and whenever feasible, claims to impact should be underpinned by robust audit however the requirement to provide audit evidence to the panels should be balanced with the extensive resources needed to undertake audits of impact.

Would all be audited or just a sub sample? – if the latter, how would the panel deal with only having audit data for some submissions/aspects of submissions?

Q41. 32b. The development of guidelines for the use and standard of quantitative data as evidence for impact?

It would be very challenging to develop guidelines that weren't restrictive – there would always be important exceptions to the guideline "rule" in this area

Q43. 33. What are your views on the issues and rules around submitting examples of impact in REF 2021 that were returned in REF 2014?

It is important that this is allowed given the nature of impact and how it develops over time however case studies should demonstrate additionality.

Setting quotas here would not be helpful.

Page 9: Environment

Q44. 34a. Do you agree with the proposal to change the structure of the environment template by introducing more quantitative data into this aspect of the assessment?

Yes

Comments:

Q45. 34b. Do you have suggestions of data already held by institutions that would provide panels with a valuable insight into the research environment?

The total no of research active staff holding teaching and holding research contracts and information of the nos. of tenured and fixed term research active staff.

Q46. 35. Do you have any comment on the ways in which the environment element can give more recognition to universities' collaboration beyond higher education?

We think should be asked this as a specific question in this section

Q47. 36. Do you agree with the proposals for providing additional credit to units for open access?

Comments:

We are not clear what this questions refers to as all outputs already have to be on open access. We assume this does not refer to open access to data as this is addressed in question 37.

Q48. 37. What comments do you have on ways to incentivise units to share and manage their research data more effectively ?

We strongly disagree that open access of data should be an expectation in the next REF. This is something that needs to be worked towards – it is unfair to impose this now, as many of the studies for the 2020 REF are already in progress and may not be set up to be able to share data. It would disproportionately affect some disciplines (eg health, teaching) where specific participant permission would be needed to share data in this way.

As a prerequisite this would need to be a key element of grant proposals - that curating data is included. From a governance perspective, permission to share data in this way needs to be built into all study permissions. For example, in health related clinical research

Page 10: Institutional level assessment

Q49. 38. What are your views on the introduction of institutional level assessment of impact and environment?

As proposed, this needs careful piloting, and it is unclear whether this would be possible within the timeframe for the next REF.

Page 11: Outcomes and weighting

Q51. 40. What comments do you have on the proposed approach to creating the overall quality profile for each submission?

Appears reasonable.

Q52. 41. Given the proposal that the weighting for outputs remain at 65 per cent, do you agree that the overall weighting for impact should remain at 20 per cent?

Yes

Comments:
Certainly no higher

Q53. 42. Do you agree with the proposed split of the weightings between the institutional and submission level elements of impact and environment?

No

Comments:
Institutional environment should be 5% (like impact) and environment at 10%

Page 12: Proposed timetable for REF 2021

Q54. 43. What comments do you have on the proposed timetable for REF 2021?

Acceptable

Page 14: Contact details

Q56. If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

ann.mcmahon@rcn.org.uk

