

RESPONSE TO REF CONSULTATION BY UK DEANS OF SCIENCE

Respondent's details

Are you responding:	On behalf of an organisation
Name of responding organisation/individual	UK Deans of Science
Type of organisation (Delete those that are not applicable)	Professional body
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Consultation questions

Consultation question 1: Do you agree with the proposed key features of the REF? If not, explain why.

No. We agree on the emphasis given to excellence but timing is a key issue and 2012 is too soon.
UK Science has had significant impact on business, industry, the professions, the economy and society by building upon excellent research. However we have concerns about how impact will be measured.
2012 is too early for the assessment as new criteria are included. There is no urgency for the assessment. Resources are already concentrated towards excellence and in science it does not do harm to support institutions with pockets of excellence. It is beneficial to support excellence wherever it is found.

Consultation question 2: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing outputs? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following proposals:

- that institutions should select research staff and outputs to be assessed
- for the categories of staff eligible for selection, and how they are defined
- for encouraging institutions to submit – and for assessing – all types of high-quality research outputs including applied and translational research
- for the use of citation information to inform the review of outputs in appropriate UOAs (including the range of appropriate UOAs, the type of citation information that should be provided to panels as outlined in Annex C, and the flexibility panels should have in using the information)

and on the following options:

- whether there should be a maximum of three or four outputs submitted per researcher
- whether certain types of output should be 'double weighted' and if so, how these could be defined.

We agree that institutions should select research staff and outputs to be assessed

Further clarification is needed on the submission of fractional staff

We agree that institutions should be allowed to submit all types of high-quality research outputs

We agree with the proposed method for using citation data. Panels that use this should be clear about methods used as soon as possible and inform institutions well in advance.

We suggest that a maximum of four publications be allowed and not three.

Should certain types of output be double weighted? – Not in the sciences

Consultation question 3: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing impact? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following:

- how we propose to address the key challenges of time lags and attribution
- the type of evidence to be submitted, in the form of case studies and an impact statement supported by indicators (including comments on the initial template for case studies and menu of indicators at Annex D)
- the criteria for assessing impact and the definition of levels for the impact sub-profile
- the role of research users in assessing impact.

Scientific research has had significant impact and we support the proposals to include impact in the criteria. The mechanism for a valid assessment has yet to be developed. We have made a good start and we welcome the agenda but more time is needed to embed it into an assessment system of such importance.

UK scientists help other people to create impact but we often do not deliver it ourselves. A challenge is to reflect this in the assessment of impact.

Impact is effected not just on the UK economy but world wide.

Panels should make the final decision on impact assessment, informed by research users.

Impact seems to discriminate against early career researchers

Consultation question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to assessing research environment?

This is an important indicator of the research quality of a submitted unit and with a relatively low weighting seems to be undervalued.

Esteem is an important contributor to environment and should be included.

Critical mass should be defined in such a way that it does not disadvantage smaller specialist units.

Consultation question 5: Do you agree with our proposals for combining and weighting the output, impact and environment sub-profiles? If not please propose an alternative and explain why this is preferable.

60-65% for outputs provides appropriate weight to the most important indicator of research quality. Impact is important but 15-20% is suggested as this is new, and environment should be increased to 20%.

Consultation question 6: What comments do you have on the panel configuration proposed at Annex E? Where suggesting alternative options for specific UOAs, please provide the reasons for this.

Diversity within the main panels will be problematic.

We have identified issues with the assessment of the following:

Engineering

Psychology

Sports Science

Geography/Earth sciences

We leave detailed comments to the subject specialists.

Clear guidance should be provided on multiple and pooled submissions.

Consultation question 7: Do you agree with the proposed approach to ensuring consistency between panels?

Yes.

Consultation question 8: Do you have any suggested additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies? (If suggesting additional bodies, please provide their names and addresses and indicate how they are qualified to make nominations.)

Representation from the UK Deans of Science could be helpful in the larger panel structure.

Consultation question 9: Do you agree that our proposed approach will ensure that interdisciplinary research is assessed on an equal footing with other types of research? Are there further measures we should consider to ensure that this is the case and that our approach is well understood?

Impact assessment may encourage interdisciplinary assessment. Mechanisms will be needed to ensure that panels are not too narrowly focussed. If metrics are used then it must be made clear

how these will be used. Interdisciplinary research is difficult to assess using metrics based upon those used in single disciplines.

Consultation question 10: Do you agree that our proposals for encouraging and supporting researcher mobility will have a positive effect; and are there other measures that should be taken within the REF to this end?

Yes, however there is a need to be more specific about the relationship between quality research and mobility.

Consultation question 11: Are there any further ways in which we could improve the measures to promote equalities and diversity?

The citation process and impact assessment may discriminate against early career researchers.

Consultation question 12: Do you have any comments about the proposed timetable?

The timetable is too tight. More time needed to analyse the effects of the impact pilot. There is no urgency as the previous assessment was comprehensive and has not yet had its full effect.

Consultation question 13: Are there any further areas in which we could reduce burden, without compromising the robustness of the process?

The more clearly impact and other criteria are defined, the less burden there will be on institutions and assessors.

Consultation question 14: Do you have any other comments on the proposals?

There is a risk that impact may be assessing past performance as opposed to research vitality and potential.

The protection of strategically important science is essential and the potential harm to the UK if we get this wrong should not be underestimated.