

UCGAL REF Meeting December 2018

The meeting was held at the University of Birmingham on 17 December 2018. It was attended by about 50 people. Four chairs of sub-panels were there: Charles Forsdick (CF), Susan Hodgett (SH), David James (DJ) and Greg Walker (GW). The meeting began with an overview of the 2021 REF process by CF, followed by comments on each of the four sub-panels by each of the speakers. There were then questions from the floor.

REF 2021 overview (CF)

CF reminded the meeting of the purpose of the REF and that it involved assessment across three areas: outputs, impact and environment. In 2021 the proportions for assessment will be 60:25:15.

The changes from 2014 REF are:

- Submission of all staff
- Number of outputs: FTE x 2.5 = number of outputs required. At least 1 output per person; maximum of 5; may include outputs of staff who have left. Some adjustment possible in the light of staff circumstances.
- Transitional approach to non-portability of outputs
- Decoupling of staff from outputs
- Measures put in place to support the assessment of interdisciplinary research
- New definitions of impact
- Open access requirements
- More structured environment statement
- The weightings of outputs, impact and environment will be as above.

CF noted that the definitive criteria are to be published at the end of January 2019.

Panels: There is a 2-stage appointment process. In the first stage, small sub-panels have been formed for criteria-setting. In addition, some sub-panel members have been identified for the assessment phase. In the second stage, further members of sub-panels for the assessment phase will be appointed once institutions have been surveyed about their REF intentions.

UOAs: There will be one submission per unit of assessment. Joint submissions across 2 or more institutions are permitted. However, multiple submissions for sub-panel D26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics) will be permitted with the permission of the REF manager.

CF gave details of who counts as Category A staff.

Non-portability: The 2021 exercise adopts a transitional approach to non-portability: outputs of staff who have changed institution during the REF period may be submitted by both the old institution and the new institution. The long-term aim, however, is for full non-portability of outputs.

Outputs are assessed by the criteria of originality, significance and rigour. They are scored 1*-4*. CF gave a reminder about open access and confirmed that none of the sub-panels represented would be using metrics for this aspect of evaluation.

Interdisciplinary research: The aim is for equitable treatment of interdisciplinary research. HEIs are advised to identify outputs which they consider to be interdisciplinary. The REF guidance contains a section on interdisciplinary working and a sub-panel has been appointed to oversee the handling of interdisciplinary research.

A Code of Practice must be submitted by each university in the summer of 2019. The CoP will include plans for protection of staff and processes for selecting outputs for REF. These will be reviewed and

universities may be asked to make revisions to ensure equality of treatment. Colleagues should have an opportunity to contribute to the CoP guidance through institution-level consultation.

Eligible outputs should be normally published by noon on 27 November 2020 (the REF submission date). Outputs published after 27 November 2020 and before 31 December 2020 may be included, but will require additional documentation.

Impact: Research underpinning case studies must have been conducted between 2000 and 2020, with the impact taking place between 2013 and 2020. Case studies submitted in 2014 can be resubmitted but they need to fit the criteria and to demonstrate new impact.

Environment: Categories for the environment template will be confirmed in January 2019. The template will include a statement on impact. There will be assessment of environment at institutional level as well as at UoA level.

Timetable

End January 2019. Final guidance.

2019. Technical details given on the submission system. Submissions of Codes of Practice

2020. Submission phase. Submission deadline: 27 November 2020.

2021. Assessment phase. Publication of Results in December 2021.

Area Studies (SH)

In REF 2014 a lot of linguistics was submitted to the sub-panel.

The sub-panel is very interdisciplinary. Half the work submitted is from arts and humanities and half from social sciences. The sub-panel is interested in ideas that permeate the boundary between the two. It covers all regions and all times, and incorporates a very wide range of disciplines. As a consequence, the criteria are broad and the sub-panel encourages a mixing of approaches. It will need to work very closely with other sub-panels, as it is not possible to have experts on everything on the panel. Further assessors will need to be appointed in 2020 following a further application and appointment process. People are encouraged to allow themselves to be put forward as assessment members.

Currently Linguistics is represented on the sub-panel and the situation will be assessed again after the HEI submission intentions are known.

SH noted that in REF 2014 there was no difference in assessed quality between large and small submissions. There was a broad range of submission types. Multiple submissions have also been accepted in the past for the Area Studies sub-panel with permission from the REF manager.

Education (DJ)

DJ assured the meeting that the consultation process had been genuine. All points sent in had been carefully considered.

He noted that REF has a disciplinary structure but in reality the research being assessed is often interdisciplinary. The attempt to make interdisciplinarity visible is genuine. There is significant formal and informal cross-referral among subpanels.

He also noted that there is a substantial amount of information in the public domain. This includes data on the 2014 REF and a series of overview reports. For examples there is a paragraph in the Education sub-panel report on modern languages and linguistics research returned to Education. The definition of impact has changed because it was considered too narrow in 2014. The definition now includes public engagement and awareness-raising. The impact of pedagogic research on pedagogy in the researcher's own institution can now be reported.

DJ noted that Education had received 10 nominations for sub-panel members from UCGAL. One has been appointed to the sub-panel. He recognises the need for serious consideration of linguistics research as further members of the sub-panel are appointed.

English Language and Literature (GW)

GW noted that English is broad sub-panel, including all areas of language and linguistics. He pointed out that there is considerable overlap between sub-panel descriptors.

He noted that the sub-panels aim to make the REF work for the disciplines and the research community.

Where necessary, cross-referral is used, but GW advises leaving the decision to cross-refer to the sub-panel, who will tend to be generous.

He assured the meeting that the process is not designed to catch people out. The sub-panels can be trusted to make the right decisions and, for example, to do the best for interdisciplinarity.

GW assured the meeting that all outputs are read. He repeated the information about the stages of appointment: sub-panel members for the criteria-setting phase and the assessment phase have already been appointed. Further appointments for the assessment phase will be made when institutional intentions are known.

Modern Languages and Linguistics (CF)

CF noted that the sub-panel covers all areas of Linguistics. Whilst the UoA descriptor explicitly lists European languages, outputs relating to non-European languages were submitted in 2014 and it is anticipated that this will be the case again in 2021. The output types are eclectic. There will be substantial Linguistics coverage: the international member of panel D is a linguist; the deputy chair of the sub-panel is from Linguistics; 7 Linguistics sub-panellists have already been appointed. It is anticipated that this is not the full set, and further consideration of what areas need to be filled will be carried out when institutional intentions are known. This may include additional sub-panel members and/or specialist readers. There will be substantial collaboration across the sub-panels. Specifically, Linguistics assessors on the various sub-panels will be encouraged to form a sub-group as in 2014.

Question-Answer session

Note: The individual speakers have not been identified in this section. The first few questions came from organisation representatives, as indicated.

Q. LAGB. To make a dual submission to sub-panel D26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics), what should an institution do?

A. There will be continuity with 2014 and multiple submissions will be permitted. The institution should apply to the REF manager for permission. A case will need to be made, which will often be structural. The institution's decision will reflect the best way to showcase the research and will take into account Environment and Impact.

Q. LAGB. There is concern about granularity in the expertise available to the sub-panel, in particular the level of coverage of syntax and semantics. It would be helpful to specify the level of detail required in the institutional statement of intentions.

A. This level of detail is important. The information on institutional intentions was not helpful in predicting sub-panel needs in 2014. For 2021 institutions will be invited to submit more detailed data. Discussions are currently in progress to determine how the question should be phrased to get information at the right level of granularity. A taxonomy of specialities is proposed. This information will feed into a further round of nominations.

Q. PALA. Impact. Is it true that case studies need to be funded and to include quantitative data?

A. It is not true. Quantitative data is sometimes useful. In other case studies, quantification is inappropriate and the focus is on the depth of the impact. The sub-panels use appropriate judgement. Funding is not essential for a case study. The underpinning research can be a body of work, not necessarily a published article. It is possible to have a profound impact on a few people. A rigidly linear process from research to impact is not always helpful, so non-linear linkages are also accepted.

Q. BAAL. Applied Linguistics is a very broad discipline; how will breadth of coverage be ensured?

A. The survey of intentions will inform sub-panels of what kind of research will be submitted. They will then be able to make additional appointments as necessary, though they can only appoint people who have been nominated. The appointments process can be tricky in small sub-fields, and there will be a need to work across sub-panels or to appoint specialist readers. The panellists stressed that there is always a need to adapt to issues as they arise, but that there are structures in place to deal with such issues.

Q. BACL. Where should research in clinical linguistics be returned?

A. Essentially it doesn't matter. The research can be sent anywhere and the research will be cross-referred if necessary. The important thing is to ensure that this research has been mentioned in the institutional statement of intentions

Q. How should the '300 words' commentary be used?

A. This will be clarified in January 2019, as will criteria for double-weighting. The commentary is only needed to support double-weighting, or when the research content of the output is not clear e.g. textbooks, translations, corpora and databases. On the whole it is HEI managers rather than sub-panels that need convincing.

Q. Impact. Does public engagement include talking about other people's research?

A. Public engagement can involve popularising or mediating someone else's research, but public engagement being used as a vehicle for REFable Impact would need to engage audiences with research from the Unit concerned, and ideally including that of the person doing the engaging. Otherwise there would be no link between the underpinning research from the Unit and the impact being claimed. Whilst it measures impact, REF is a *research excellence framework*.

Q. Is measurement of value concerned with the methods or with the results? Can the research be considered world-leading even if results are negative?

A. Research excellence is recognised even when hypotheses have been disproved. Academic significance is how important the research is in its field. The sub-panel assesses the science / rigour rather than whether the initial hypothesis has been proved. The assessors' job is to look at all three aspects: originality, rigour and significance. Calibration is there to ensure that all three have been taken into account. The research needs to be significant but the significance can be negative, i.e. evidence and analysis showing something is wrong or needs to change. This can also be the case with research impact, especially in the policy sphere.

Q. The definition of linguistics is very broad. It includes both pure and applied research and includes, for example, sociolinguistics and anthropology. How is this dealt with?

A. This diversity is true of many other areas as well. There is a great deal of diversity. Calibration is there to forge a common sense of quality. The sub-panel chairs will work together to ensure sufficient expertise across the sub-panels.

Q. Looking at the REF 2014 overview reports, only the Education report had detailed coverage of Applied Linguistics; this was missing in Modern Languages and Linguistics and in English. How can REF support Applied Linguistics?

A. Feedback is separate from the process of assessment. Feedback tends to have to be generic. Feedback does not reflect the rigorous nature of the assessment procedure.

Q. A concern was raised about the use of specialist readers who have not been part of the calibration process.

A. It is correct that a reader brought in for one output will not have been through the calibration process. The sub-panels will prefer to use a panel member, perhaps supported by a specialist reader. The evidence used for a judgement will be brought from the criteria.

Q. To what extent is research income taken into account? Is it recognised that research income and the quality of research done are two different things? How large a part does research income play in the assessment of environment?

A. It is recognised that external funding of research is highly competitive and that this affects different disciplines differently. Research income is only a small part of the Environment assessment, which itself is proportionally only a minor part of the whole assessment. A small unit that does well in spite of a context where there is little research funding available will be recognised. Conversely, income itself is not sufficient for a good environment – the institutional support for research must be demonstrated. There is a mixture of institution types on each sub-panel to ensure representation. The same is true for PGR students – not everywhere will have high numbers but all institutions should be supporting those students. Institutions are advised to make reference to previous REF submissions, showing where the unit was then and where it is now. Including all people in the submission will make a difference, as it changes the metrics especially on research income and on PGR numbers.

Q: What are the likely effects of the change to full submission?

A: The change in rules to requiring submission of all staff has a number of possible effects. Instead of selecting staff, the number of outputs from each person is determined by the institution, and this process may be less open than before. These decisions may be about the kind of work submitted as well as its quality. If an individual's research does not fit the institution's expectations regarding what constitutes research outputs, they may be permitted to submit only the minimum number of outputs (they will be at the 'shallow end' of the submission). It is stressed that outputs of all types are assessed on their merits. It is as possible to get 4* for a paper as for a monograph, and 4* work exists in all areas, new as well as traditional. This is a debate to be had in institutions. The Code of Practice is important, but it might not address the issue of selecting outputs of specific types or in specific fields.

Q. If a unit has outputs but no impact case study, what can they do? Should they submit with another unit in the institution? Can they put in a submission without any impact case studies?

A. In 2014 the Education sub-panel had small submissions in Linguistics that did well, so the unit could be submitted there. It is not possible for an entire submission to be without impact case studies, but if a small unit is submitted as part of a larger submission (e.g. Linguistics within Education), then it is not necessary for the small unit to present case studies. The unit in question will need to negotiate this with their institution.

Q. In the case of staff who have left, does this need to be addressed in the environment statement?

A. This is a new issue for panels, who will need to make judgements and exercise tolerance. However, if everyone in a UoA has left the institution, the Environment assessment will inevitably take a hit. There is a similar issue with 20% appointments (often of international colleagues), where

judgements have to be made as to the nature of that appointment and the nature of the contribution to the unit.

Q. Where a co-authored paper is returned to different sub-panels by two institutions, will it have same score in both panels?

A. The same score cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Calibration and close working between the sub-panels should ensure that the same score is given unless there is a good reason for it not to be. Scores are given by consensus and it must be remembered that judgements are not entirely objective and depend on disciplinary variations. The criteria are the starting point for judgement, not the end point.

Q. How should Computational Linguistics be pitched?

A. The sub-panel will assess all linguistics areas, with a judgement being made on the advisability of cross-referral. The institution could ask for the whole submission to be cross-referred as interdisciplinary.