

REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria

Page 2: Respondent details

Q1. Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of:

Subject association or learned society

Q2. Please provide the name of your organisation.

Joint response from SCUDD (Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) and TaPRA (Theatre and Performance Research Association)

Q3. If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

k.m.newey@exeter.ac.uk

Q4. If your response is in relation to specific main panels, please indicate which one(s):

Main Panel D: Arts and Humanities (Sub-Panels 25-34)

Q5. We are seeking views during the consultation on both the draft guidance on submissions and the draft panel criteria and working methods. Please select the documents for which you would like to provide a response:

Both documents

Page 3: Guidance on submissions: Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework

Q6. 1a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework':

Strongly agree

Page 4: Guidance on submissions: Part 2: Submissions

Q7. 2a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 2: Submissions':

Agree

2b. Please provide any comments on Part 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Given the changes to UoA33, we would like to see further clarity and guidance on multiple submissions (75d and 76). Given the experience of REF2014, where many institutions chose to submit Music and Drama units as separate submissions to UoA35, further and very clear guidance on separate HEI submissions to the much expanded Sub-Panel 33 is needed. SCUDD member Departments, and individual researchers represented by TaPRA, anticipating submission to Sub-Panel 33 need to be confident that the requirement for a single submission, except in exceptional circumstances, does not put researchers at a disadvantage in their HEIs, and that HEIs are given clear guidance about the treatment of disciplinary units which do not normally share a research environment within their institution. The current guidance offers a timeline of seeking permission for multiple submissions which is truncated (requests in a little over 12 months). HEIs must be given clear guidance as soon as possible. There is room for confusion around electronic forms of submission (87-90): practice-research outputs may not always be available in an uploadable or digital form. Again, individual researchers and member Departments must be confident that the REF guidelines offer them sufficient information to negotiate with their HEIs about alternative forms of submission. We welcome the highlighted commitment to interdisciplinary research (103-105), and the clear guidelines for its assessment. Open Access for our discipline constitutes challenges around the submission of practice-research, and monographs. The suggestion that enhanced gradings will be awarded for UoAs which go beyond the minimum requirements for OA needs further detail and a clear understanding that such 'reward' will be proportionate and fair, in relation to any individual UoA's resources, as indicated at REF5. There are potential difficulties in determining the 'acceptance date' as set out at 217. Publication date would be clearer, less onerous for researchers and administrators, and more auditable. At Annex C: further clarification required for 'Other' – in particular "a portfolio of critical work (a number of related articles, essays, books, etc. on a related topic that address different aspects of a single project and are collectively greater than the sum of their parts" – as there is a widespread assumption that it is not possible to submit a selection of related journal articles or other peer-reviewed publications. This is not sufficiently clarified at 261. What does 'critical work' refer to in this context? Would there be an expectation here of double-weighting and, in such a case, could it be considered as a single output for two co-authors?

Page 5: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff details (REF1a/b)

Q8. 3a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details':

Strongly agree

3b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 1. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the requirement that an HEI must articulate the 'substantive connection' to the submitting unit of staff on minimum (0.2 to 0.29) fractional contracts (123). This would seem to be in the spirit of the Stern Report, which aimed at minimising 'game playing' over submission of staff, by bringing in 'REF stars' on minimal contracts without close connection to their submitting UoA. We welcome, however, the exceptions listed at 126, which indicate the REF commitment to Equality and Diversity. The converse of this implementation of the Stern recommendations is that staff who are (by contrast) very closely connected with their UoA must also be confident that HEIs will not be permitted to manipulate their contracts to their individual disadvantage. Our joint memberships report to us that there is evidence in the discipline (Drama & Theatre broadly defined) of some HEIs trying to alter terms and conditions of employment in the run-up to REF 2021. We note that there will be cross-checks of staff submitted against HESA data to 'identify any significant anomalies' (68). We would like to see a much stronger commitment from REF about ways that the Guidelines to Submissions can ensure that staff are protected from having contracts changed in the run up to submission.

Q9. 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? (Indicative 300 word limit)

The guidelines attempt to offer clear guidance. However, in the disciplines represented by our organisations, they may mean that Early Career Researchers on some Postdoctoral Fellowships funded through AHRC Standard Grants, will be ineligible. This could be a significant barrier in the career development of such Postdoctoral Fellows. Many such Postdoctoral Fellows work within larger projects with a considerable degree of independence, even if the overall programme is not of their devising. Such Postdoctoral Fellows are active researchers in the discipline, and their work is essential for the development of excellence in our discipline, and the development of the next generation of researchers. Further clarity on the eligibility of such Postdoctoral Fellows would be welcomed.

There is also the need for further clarity from Sub-Panel 33 about the position of practice/creative-led research. This is often collaborative and may involve researchers with differing levels of independence; all of whom, however, are essential for the completion of the research submission. In such cases, it is not wholly clear whether the determination of independence relates to specific outputs or the eligibility of specific researchers.

Q10. 5a. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

Yes

Q11. 6a. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

Yes

Page 6: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff circumstances (paragraphs 149 to 193)

Q12. 7a. The proposed approach for taking account of circumstances will achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021:

Strongly agree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The consideration of equality and diversity in the assessment of research excellence is of central importance. HEIs and UoAs must have the opportunity to identify where personal circumstances have led to constraints on individual staff research output. A recognition of the structural inequalities facing women and PoC in the HE sector must be central to any research excellence assessment exercise.

Q13. 7b. The potential advantages of the proposed approach outweigh the potential drawbacks identified:

Strongly agree

Q14. 7c. Please provide any further comments on these proposals, including any suggestions for clarifying or refining the guidance. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the recognition that “that the impact of such a period of leave and the arrival of a new child into a family is generally sufficiently disruptive of an individual’s research work to justify the specified reduction.”

The REF might also consider that there may be circumstances in which a researcher is ineligible for institutional mitigation for personal circumstances (for example, ineligible for maternity or sickness leave due to recent appointment, or ECR status). In these cases, the HEI/UoA should be permitted to make a case for equivalent reduced outputs.

We also welcome the recognition of the ongoing disruption to individual research work caused by chronic disability and illness (both physical and mental) (161 e, I & ii) which – like maternity leave – may be mitigated for by reasonable adjustments, but nevertheless can remain an ongoing disruption to an individual’s research work.

Page 7: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs (REF2)

Q15. 8a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs' is clear:

Strongly agree

8b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the decoupling of researchers and outputs as a way of enabling HEIs and UoAs to shape the best possible portfolio representing their research excellence. However, this decoupling raises issues around the portability of research outputs. The transitional arrangements for dealing with portability for REF2021 are less clear. The more general issue with REF restrictions on portability is the potential for HEIs to use the REF guidelines as a way to claim research outputs as ‘belonging’ to the HEI rather than to the researcher, thus cutting across the principles of academic freedom and intellectual property. This could have far-reaching and unintended consequences about which the funding bodies and the REF might be well advised to develop clear policy for future REF exercises. There is also the more specific potential for an adverse effect on employment of ECRs who may feel they need to hold back from publication because of seeking employment.

Q16. 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? (Indicative 300 word limit)

There are issues with Category I – performance – particularly with the requirement that the output must represent the first public performance. While there is the necessity to define the output so that it falls with the REF period (2014-20), the model here seems to be one of a quite conventional type of performance, happening in one place, at a specified time. This may not always be the case. There may be logistical difficulties in ensuring that the first performance is recorded. Performances may be developmental, or endurance or time-based, or multiple linked performances over an extended period. particularly if these are developed over months or years, in an iterative research process.

Further clarity about how live performance work needs to be represented is required, especially in the case, for instance, of durational performance, a series of scored performances which change according to context, improvisational work performed as a series of performances, or interdisciplinary work in the areas of performance art and live art. This clarity also relates to the form of the output submission, discussed at Annex C: where a performance is documented by "Other" means (ie not an audio/audiovisual documentation) what are the permissible limits of this "Other"?

Q17. 10a. 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?

Yes

Q18. 11a. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of co-authored outputs only once within the same submission?

No

11b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

While the logic of this requirement is explained and understandable from the REF and funding bodies' point of view, this requirement works against demonstrating the strength of collaborative work within a UoA which might be a strong aspect of the research environment, and an indicator of research excellence. The requirement also treats collaborative work within an UoA differently from that beyond a UoA, which seems illogical if the aim is to assess the strength of the UoA's research environment in all its aspects. This proposal has the potential for significant adverse impact on practice-research where researchers within single units may deliberately and expressly collaborate (a resident theatre-making company, for example). It may also have an adverse impact on individual researchers (particularly women and ECRs) who may be 'junior' researchers in larger projects within their UoA, and thus lose the possibility of all their research outputs being considered for the submission pool. This may have an adverse effect of career development for these researchers, thus cutting across the attempt to put equality and diversity at the centre of the REF.

Page 9: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 3: Impact (REF3)

Q22. 13a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact' is clear:

Agree

13b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 3. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the range and clarity of impact descriptors. However, we would like more clarity about the inclusion of impact on students and/or teaching within and beyond submitting HEIs (290). We would request that our Sub-Panel 33 offer greater clarity about what will be considered distinctive in this area. We would welcome greater clarity on impact case studies continued from REF2014, particularly around the underpinning research publication dates. We expect that in our discipline there will be excellent impacts continuing from 'older' research: we find that the focus only on newer research mitigates against continuing impact over long periods of time – which might be seen as a non-REF understanding of research impact, where foundational research from several decades ago is still instrumental in new understandings, benefit, and influence. Conversely, the guidance is not wholly clear on the inclusion of 'new research' within 'continued' case studies: to what extent will this be permitted and/or encouraged? The current guidance seems to only take into consideration new impact. Given the way that impacts and research might form an iterative cycle, this seems potentially restrictive. Within the discipline, we anticipate that it is unlikely there will be many significant continuing Impact Case Studies which offer no new research or new types of impacts - continuing ICSs are likely to have a mix of new research and new kinds of impacts: further and more detailed guidance about these kinds of ICSs would be welcomed.

Page 10: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Sections 4-5: Environment data and environment (REF4a/b/c-REF5a/b)

Q23. 14a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data' is clear:

Strongly agree

14b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 4. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Q24. 15a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment' is clear:

Strongly agree

15b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 5. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the inclusion of institution-level research Environment data within which Sub-Panels can locate the individual UoA within overall HEI resources and policies. We welcome the integration of the REF2014 Impact Template (REF3a) into REF5 Environment statement. This offers UoAs the opportunity to make clear and concrete links between their research and its impact for the unit overall.

Page 11: Guidance on Submissions: further comments

Q25. 16. Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A-M. (Indicative 500 word limit)

These comments are specific to Sub-Panel 33, and the Annexes, and more generally around the guidance for presenting practice-research submissions to Sub-Panel 33:

We would like to see more clarity on the assessment of practice outputs, particularly over guidance around differing relationships between creative practice and its research content. Will Sub-Panel 33 and Panel D distinguish between creative practice as is, and practice as research/research through practice? Using the criteria in 206a, creative practice could be assessed as 4* without a significant research/knowledge-generating framework. This would seem to be an anomaly – if it is deliberate, then the Panel/Sub-Panel Guidance needs to articulate this.

More clarity is also required on how the qualities described will be accessed for performances and similar via documentation (especially of outputs that are difficult to 'capture' or represent – e.g. a series of performances, durational practice, etc). How will the significance/research of local or intimate work be determined? To what extent are subjective responses and taste-formation to be countered by further guidance?

Annexe C: further guidance should be offered regarding widespread assumptions that peer-reviewed articles or similar (i.e. to enable assessment of 'the research process, research insights' and to take into account various 'times and manners of dissemination') should be submitted as 'supporting evidence' for practice outputs.

Annexe C: the emphasis would seem to be on audio/audio-visual recordings as documentation of the practice-research. Further guidance on "other" methods might be useful here, so as to counteract the assumption that recordings are more acceptable and/or likely to lead to the output being more highly/easily graded. This is likely to be a significant consideration for practice-research which is durational, site specific, or community-based/applied, or performance iterations and other forms of non 'conventional' performance practice-research.

Page 12: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 2: Unit of assessment descriptors

Q26. 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.

UOA 33: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies

Where relevant, please state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

Descriptors for UoA33 are now necessarily broad, as is appropriate for such a multi-disciplinary sub-panel. We hope that there is room for the specific disciplinary standards to be recognised, and the differences between the 6 named disciplines represented on Sub-Panel 33 to be acknowledged. We expect that individual disciplines will not suffer by being evaluated by criteria which are not conventionally applied in their specific discipline.

Page 13: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 1: Submissions

Q27. 2a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Agree

Q28. 2b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Agree

Q29. 2c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the clear arrangements for interdisciplinary research, which is particularly important for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies research.

We would like to see similar clarity on arrangements for cross-referral, particularly for Panel D, Sub-Panel 33, given the cross-disciplinary nature of much drama/theatre/performance studies research.

Page 14: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 2: Outputs

Q30. 3a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Strongly agree

Q31. 3b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Strongly agree

Q32. 3c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs', in particular on:- the proposed criteria for double-weighting outputs in Main Panels C and D, and on whether requests to double-weight books should automatically be accepted- whether Annex C 'Main Panel D – outputs types and submission guidance' is helpful and clear - where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the clear statement by Panel D that none of the sub-panels propose to use citation data.

Panel D's proposal for the automatic acceptance of a submission's double-weighting of monographs is supported in our discipline (Sub-Panel 33) as recognition of the time required for the breadth and depth of research involved. In addition, we would like to see guidance around the double-weighting of substantial practice-research outputs in order to give individual researchers, their UoAs, and their HEIs confidence and clarity over Sub-Panel 33's approach to double-weighted practice-research.

We welcome the guidance (211) that "the panel will judge the research content of the material submitted regardless of the classification"; this is especially helpful in cases of performances that have subsequently been made to camera (or concurrently then edited), etc. However, it would be useful to better understand the extent of a live performance that the panel would expect to watch (and whether a video can be edited, etc).

Further guidance over the use of the 300 word supporting statement would be useful here: if the statement is to focus on guiding the reviewers to the research questions implicit in the output, we would appreciate further guidance about where additional data (rather than research information) about the circumstances of the 'original' live performance, whatever its nature might be offered? That is, in Annex C it could be clearer whether the distinctive contribution of individual researchers to performances (broadly defined) should be discussed in the 300 statement or via additional material submitted for the output (i.e. 'supporting evidence')

Page 15: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 3: Impact

Q33. 4a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Strongly agree

Q34. 4b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Agree

Q35. 4c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the inclusion of Impact in the Environment statement for each UoA. However, the relationship (for the purposes of assessment) between the submitted case studies and the Environment Statement, which includes a discussion of the unit's strategic pathways to impact, could be clearer.

Even given Par. 324, it could be made clearer – especially in the case of practice outputs or applied performance research – that research findings or data might be co-extensive with evidence of impact, and also that pathways to impact and research outputs might be similarly co-extensive.

Page 16: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 4: Environment

Q36. 5a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment':

Strongly agree

Q37. 5b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment':

Strongly agree

Q38. 5c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment', in particular on:- whether the difference in section weightings across main panels is sufficiently justified by disciplinary difference (paragraphs 322 and 323)- whether the list of quantitative indicators provided at www.ref.ac.uk is clear and helpful- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Panel D, and Sub-Panel 33

We welcome the increased weighting of People and the decreased weighting of Income, Infrastructure and Faculties for Panel D, as reflective of the role played by individual researchers in the Arts and Humanities.

REF5b – to what extent is there an expectation that this section will reference strategic statements described in the unit's REF2014 Environment Statement?

We would like to see Panel D look at ways of treating non-HESA income which supports individual's research. This is particularly important – indeed, crucial – for practice-research supported by funding from national Arts Councils. This funding has the same reputational status as UKRI funding, and the same enabling function of creating excellent research (as practice-research) but remains invisible in current arrangements. Clarification of what may or may not be acceptable to include here would be welcome. Furthermore, HEIs and UoAs with significant non-HESA income which nevertheless supports research (particularly practice-research) may otherwise be significantly disadvantaged.

This has been an ongoing problem in all RAE/REF exercises, and needs action.

Page 17: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 4: Panel procedures

Q39. 6a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Strongly agree

Q40. 6b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Strongly agree

Q41. 6c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 4: Panel procedures', in particular on:- where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (Indicative 300 word limit)

These are clear and straightforward.

Page 18: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 5: Panel working methods

Q42. 7a. a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Strongly agree

Q43. 7b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Strongly agree

Q44. 7c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 5: Panel working methods', in particular on: - where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome the clear guidance on panel working methods, and in particular we welcome the proposals in the consultation on improving interdisciplinary assessment. We welcome the strengthening of the panels and the willingness to bring in more expertise.

However, we would like to stress the importance of the potential for cross-referral to other UoAs and query its restriction to the exceptional (365). Cross-referral is a sensible and straightforward way to reflect and manage the fact that the structures of universities do not, and should not be required to, map onto the REF panel and UoA structure.

Page 19: Overall panel criteria and working methods

Q45. 8a. Overall, the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels.

Strongly agree

8b. Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the main panels. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The balance is appropriate, and allows – for example – Panel D to reflect the greater emphasis on People across its disciplines in producing and evidencing research excellence.