



Research  
England

## Circular letter

# Research Excellence Framework: support for panel members

To	Heads of English higher education providers
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Enquiries to	General queries to <a href="mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org">researchpolicy@re.ukri.org</a>

Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal

## Research Excellence Framework: support for panel members

1. I am writing to you to underline the importance of the contribution that universities make in supporting their staff to serve as panel members in the Research Excellence Framework (REF). All four UK funding bodies are writing to their respective institutions to underline the importance of this contribution.
2. As colleagues are aware, we have recently confirmed the revised submission deadline and the exercise will resume on 31 July 2020. The REF team has also announced a revised timetable for appointing further panel members and assessors to the REF. The call for panel nominations is currently open, with further appointments aiming to ensure each sub-panel has an appropriate breadth of expertise and volume of panel members necessary for the assessment of REF submissions.
3. The revised timetable for the work of the panels in assessing submissions will be from May 2021 to February 2022. The REF team are currently working with the panels to consider how the assessment schedule can best accommodate panel members' usual academic duties in this period. However, we recognise that the delay to the process will introduce particular challenges for panel members in terms of where the weight of the assessment work will fall.

4. As an indication of the workload for panel members and assessors, during the assessment phase each sub-panel will meet regularly to assess submissions. In preparation for meetings during this phase, sub-panel members and assessors will be expected to review a range of submitted material. This will involve a substantial workload for individual members, especially in reviewing outputs. As part of our contingency planning in response to COVID-19, we are exploring whether parts of the assessment process will need to be held on a virtual basis. This is likely to result in shorter but more frequent meetings of the sub-panels. However, where it is safe and appropriate to meet in person, some meetings are likely to be held over several days and may involve staying away.
5. Expert review by the appointed panels is at the heart of the REF process and underpins the confidence held in the outcomes from the exercise by the HE sector, government and the public. While panel member and assessor appointments are made on an individual basis, part of the success of an expert review process in past exercises has relied on the willingness of institutions to support staff members taking a role on a REF panel.
6. I understand that the wider context in which universities are operating at present is uncertain, and that there may be ongoing disruption in the period ahead. As a shared endeavour across the entire UK higher education sector, we consider that the robust, current information about research excellence and its impact, which is delivered through the REF, will be of particular importance in this context. This will rely on the ability and capacity of the panels to undertake their role. I would therefore like to encourage you to continue to recognise the importance of providing appropriate relief from academic duties for those members of your staff members who serve on REF panels.
7. Any questions about this letter should be addressed to [researchpolicy@re.ukri.org](mailto:researchpolicy@re.ukri.org).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Sweeney', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

David Sweeney

Executive Chair