

Terms of Reference of the Future Research Assessment Programme

1. The Future Research Assessment Programme carried out by the Funding Bodies will include significant programmes of work which evaluate the current REF 2021 exercise, and forwardlooking work investigating possible different approaches to the evaluation of UK higher education research performance which can encourage and strengthen the emphasis on delivering excellent research and impact, support a positive research culture, while simplifying and reducing the administrative burden on the HE sector. The evaluation work will focus on the current exercise, but lessons learned will help to drive thinking on the development of future exercises.
2. The programme should ensure that a future process identifies and supports excellent research across the UK, including dynamic changes in research quality and emerging areas of research excellence and secures the confidence of the HE sector, government and the wider public.
3. Noting that the REF is UK-wide and jointly owned by the UK HE Funding bodies, the Review should recognise the priorities of all UK nations, and especially acknowledge that the highlevel objectives for the research assessment exercise may have differing weightings for the different funding bodies. The key open questions that will inform the terms of reference include:
 - a. Do the current objectives of national research evaluation still remain fit-for-purpose? Are there additional objectives that need to be considered?
 - b. Have the changes implemented following the 2016 review of the REF achieved their desired outcomes? Have there been any negative unintended consequences of the reforms?
 - c. What are the benefits and negative implications of moving from discipline-oriented research assessment (usually evaluating individual 'departments') to an evaluation organized at the level of the institution?
 - d. How can the assessment system contribute to a positive research culture that enables talented, diverse people and teams to thrive?
 - e. How can unnecessary bureaucracy be reduced to allow institutions to focus resources on research and its impact on society and the economy?
 - f. How can the system better recognise diversity in approaches to research, rewarding a broad range of outputs and impacts, within and across disciplines?
 - g. How often should the national assessment be conducted? What are the potential approaches for providing interim information on changing research quality between assessment?
 - h. What role might new technologies and approaches to research assessment play in reducing the costs while maintaining the quality and integrity of the assessment?
 - i. What can we learn from global practice on national research assessment

Review approach and working methods

4. In order to address these and other questions the scope of the review currently includes four strands of work. These four strands of work will inform one another, for example lessons learned from the evaluation of the current exercise will inform the development of future research assessment exercises, and similarly consultation with the sector and other stakeholders will provide evidence and other input into all other strands of work.
 - a. Learning the lessons from REF 2021. Evaluation package, including ongoing work, independent analyses and consultation with stakeholders.
 - b. Understanding international practice in national research assessment. What is done elsewhere, what works well? How the does UK system look from the outside?
 - c. Developing alternative models and enhanced approaches to research assessment. What are the alternatives including radical change and more evolutionary options?
 - d. Listening to views, concerns and perspectives on national research evaluation from a range of stakeholders. How are the different approaches received? What will the consequences be for the UK research system?

Programme Board Membership

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