REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria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.

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) and Conference of Heads of Geography Departments in Higher Education

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

c.souch@rgs.org

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

Main Panel C: Social Sciences (Sub-Panels 13-24)

Relevant to all

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 We are seeking views during the consultation on both the draft guidance on submissions and the draft panel criteria and working methods.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 4: Guidance on submissions: Part 2: Submissions

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

2b. Please provide any comments on Part 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)
69-95 - We urge caution in expectations for mapping UoAs to HESA cost centres. In geography, like a number of other subjects, the HESA cost centre data are error-riddled and incomplete. HESA cost centre codes in many departments split human and physical geography depending on teaching assignments, at least historically, and do not map neatly onto a unit of assessment. Staff returned to the Geography (C17) UoA in the last REF would be allocated elsewhere. The resulting misalignment would be counter to the articulated purposes of REF. Using HESA cost centre codes to allocate staff can also mitigate against other efforts to encourage and foster multi and interdisciplinarily e.g. those in large research centres and/or other institutional strategic research initiatives.

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:

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)
Concerns have been expressed by many in the community that decoupling outputs from individual staff might inadvertently have unintended consequences in terms of equality and diversity, in terms of whose outputs are selected and implications for staff subsequently based on this selection/submission. The geography community request guidance to encourage all sub-panels to look carefully across a unit's submission in this context, to ensure claims made about equality and diversity (for example, in the environment section) are consistent with actions (e.g. as reflected by selected outputs). Clarity is also requested about the extent to which data on submissions (gender, career stage etc) will be shared with the panel during the process (or evaluation after).

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

The geography community expressed concerns over the workload and administrative complexity of the proposed approach to output reductions due to special circumstances which overlaps with the established approach of 1-5 outputs per member of submitted staff. A range of concerns are relevant here relating to using 0.5 output reductions as a basis for decision making and then applying rounding; upfront provision of the evidence base at time of submission for all output reductions; etc.

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

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

11b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)
Some in the geography community question the proposed limit on submission of co-authored outputs within the same submission. This, they argue, unfairly disadvantages collaboration within departments/UoAs. They do, though, welcome recognition that some co-authored projects can be more demanding and ambitious than single authored work and thus warrant double-weighting.

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 14: Geography and Environmental Studies

Where relevant, please state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.
The geography community welcomes the broad and inclusive description of the sub-panel UOA 14 and its scope. Given the breadth of UoA 14, we expect (and hope) a significant number of additional sub-panel members will be appointed in 2020 to represent fully the diversity of geography, geographers and institutions that will be participating in REF2021. One minor addition to the description, for completeness, in terms of methods is to add archival (.....; and work that uses a wide range of available methods, from science-based to humanistic and participatory, including numerical, theoretical, experimental, modelling, ARCHIVAL and field-based).

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

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 recognition that interdisciplinary research is research that not only crosses main panel boundaries, but also disciplines within the sub-panels within a main panel. We urge REF2021 to go further though to recognise that interdisciplinary research can also be conducted within a UoA such as Geography and Environmental Studies.

We welcome the statement made, para 117, that there is no advantage or disadvantage of identifying outputs as interdisciplinary.

We note the recognition that institutional structures do not always map neatly onto UoAs. This is frequently the case for a discipline such as Geography. We welcome robust and equitable processes for cross-referrals which we might anticipate between UoA 7 and UoA 14, Geography and Environmental Studies.

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

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)

The community welcome the positive statement that all outputs will be treated equitably.

Double-weighting. The geography community welcomes the opportunity to request that some outputs are double-weighted.

Some in the community expressed their support the statement that there is no presumption that books should be double-weighted. In this context they question, Main Panel C's statement that 'most books … warrant double-weighting' (para 239).

The community also welcome the opportunity to nominate a reserve output in case the sub-panel rejects the request for double-weighting.

Some in the geography community question the proposed limit on submission of co-authored outputs within the same submission. This, they argue, unfairly disadvantages collaboration within departments/UoAs. They do, though, welcome recognition that some co-authored projects can be more demanding and ambitious than single authored work and thus warrant double-weighting.

The geographical community also welcome the decision by Panel C that no additional information be provided on co-authors and urge the panel if they receive publications with author contributions documented (as required now by some journals in our field), this information be ignored.

The community also welcome the decision that the Geography and Environmental Studies sub-panel will not use journal impact factors (para 269), consistent with DORA and Leiden statements.

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

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)

The geography community requests greater clarity about co-production and co-submission of the same impact case study for different departments/for different panels, specifically in terms of the extent to which they can be the same or are expected to differ.

More guidance is also requested on impacts through teaching.

Concerns have also been raised about the burden of having to submit corroborating evidence at the time of the submission.

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

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)

Unit of Assessment environment template: The geography community urge REF2021 to reconsider the environment template and to include a separate section on impact. In its current form it is not as well organised as it could be. For example, the final proposed section combines contributions to the discipline etc along with impact beyond the academy in an unhelpful way. Greater clarity of structure is needed. If restructured it could also be easier to assess.

The geography community request guidance to encourage all sub-panels to look carefully across a unit's submission in the context of equality and diversity, to ensure that claims made about equality and diversity in the environment statement are matched in the submission of outputs.

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

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)

Members of the community have suggested that more details are needed about sub-panel working methods (for example in what order will different components be graded). There is a sense that in the last REF UoAs chose different orders, which caused some difficulties reconciling the grades with cross-referrals.

Also, will the sub-panels bee using a finer grade scale than the integer 0-4 (there's a sense again that last time this differed between UoAs). Clarity on this would help.

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.

8b. Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the main panels. (Indicative 300 word limit)
The credibility of REF depends on equitable practices and behaviours across panels and sub-panels. We urge REF2021 to be as transparent as possible in the approaches and methods used to achieve this outcome.