

## Sector impact assessment

<b>Name of policy/initiative/project:</b>	<b>Research Excellence Framework</b>
1. What are the aims of this policy/initiative/project?	<p>The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It will replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The REF will be undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• inform the selective allocation of research funding to HEIs</li> <li>• provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks</li> <li>• provide accountability for public investment in research and demonstrate its benefits.</li> </ul> <p>Through the REF, the UK funding bodies aim to develop and sustain a dynamic and internationally competitive research sector that makes a major contribution to economic prosperity, national wellbeing and the expansion and dissemination of knowledge.</p>
2. At what stage of the development process is this assessment being undertaken?	The REF is a programme of work that is due to complete at the end of 2014. This assessment is being undertaken following the key policy decisions being taken. It will be revised after operational guidance has been issued.
3. Do existing data sources enable us to provide evidence of impact? If not, how should we best gather evidence?	Yes. We are able to draw upon several sources of information from the RAE and will continue to put monitoring processes in place.
<b>Regulatory impact assessment</b>	
4. Will this policy/initiative/project require higher education institutions to perform or commission more work than we already expect from them?	<p>The RAE was a significant amount of work for both HEIs and the funding bodies, but the ratio of costs to funding demonstrates this was proportionate to the rewards of undertaking it. Despite the changes being implemented in this new system of assessment, we expect the costs to funding ratio of the REF will be similarly proportionate and reasonable.</p> <p>The main new element we are introducing is the assessment of impact. This will require additional work, but again consider that this will be a reasonable level of burden given the additional benefits it will provide (see below).</p> <p>The use of citation information in the assessment may be a further new aspect to the exercise. However, we are proceeding with caution and remain committed to reviewing the costs-benefits analysis of including this aspect.</p> <p>We will also be introducing reductions in burden elsewhere in the assessment. This will be broadly through measures to improve consistency with fewer panels and less differentiation of rules between them; and maximising data alignment by using HESA data as far as possible.</p>
5. If so, are the benefits of delivery sufficient to outweigh this regulatory	The RAE has proved itself to be a fair, transparent, efficient, targeted way of allocating scarce funds and we

<p>impact? Describe these benefits.</p>	<p>expect this to continue with the REF. It is valued by the sector and the wider public as providing reputational and benchmarking indicators, as well as management information. It also provides valuable information to inform policy development by the funding bodies and Government.</p> <p>Evaluations have demonstrated that the exercise drives up the quality of research, and the inclusion of impact will give encouragement towards achieving the widest benefits beyond the academy, while providing public accountability for investment. These benefits are recognised by other countries, who look to the UK when considering how to allocate their own research funding.</p>
<p>6. Please explain with supporting evidence how you have arrived at this judgement.</p>	<p>The last RAE was found to cost just 0.5 per cent of the total funds allocated for research in England. We commissioned independent consultants to assess the accountability burden of RAE 2008<sup>1</sup> and have used this information in planning the REF.</p> <p>In evaluating impact, we have been informed by an independent consultant's report<sup>2</sup> on feedback from institutions that participated in the impact pilot exercise. The majority of participating institutions found the costs of the exercise reasonable.</p> <p>The lessons learned report<sup>3</sup> following the bibliometrics pilot has informed our consideration of using citation information.</p> <p>By adopting such processes, we have been able to demonstrate how we have listened to the sector's concerns about regulatory burden, considered the cost of the various elements of the REF and responded to the issues arising in the design of the REF.</p>
<p><b>Equality and diversity</b></p>	
<p>7. Which of the various groups protected by equality legislation are likely to be affected by this policy/initiative/project, and how?</p>	<p>All groups protected by equality legislation are likely to be affected in some way by the REF if they are active researchers. They may be affected by selection (or not) for an institution's submission or to a REF panel. This could potentially have implications for career progression.</p>

<sup>1</sup> [‘RAE 2008 Accountability Review’](#) (A report to HEFCE by PA Consulting, May 2009)

<sup>2</sup> ‘REF Research Impact Pilot Exercise Lessons-learned Project: Feedback on Pilot Submissions’ (report to HEFCE by Technopolis, November 2010)

<sup>3</sup> [‘Identification and dissemination of lessons learned by institutions participating in the Research Excellence Framework \(REF\) bibliometrics pilot: Results of the Round Two Consultation’](#)

(report to HEFCE by Technopolis, September 2009)

<p>8. What evidence have you used to ascertain whether there will be an impact (or not) on these groups?</p>	<p>Research on RAE2008<sup>4</sup> has indicated differences in rates of staff selection that have persisted from RAE2001. However, there were difficulties with the underlying data used in monitoring staff selection in the RAE by HEIs. We do not know the full extent of the impact on LGBT groups or religious groups due to a lack of data. Our forthcoming report on citations analysis also shows similar differences in this data. Although the primary responsibility for adopting fair equality practices lies with HEIs, we are in the process of considering what mitigating actions we can take, should we proceed with using this information.</p>
<p>9. Which negative impacts have been identified during the development of this policy/project/initiative, and what actions have been taken to mitigate the effect?</p>	<p>Our research concludes that there are differences in selection rates by gender, ethnicity (specifically staff in the black ethnic group), age and disability status. We have engaged in a dialogue with equality and diversity colleagues in HEFCE and at the ECU to identify and take mitigating actions. We have also drawn the issues arising to the attention of the HEFCE Board, which is content with the action we are taking in response. Details of our actions are provided below.</p>
<p>10. What actions will be taken to ensure that this policy/project/initiative promotes both equality and diversity?</p>	<p>Equalities measures were taken in the RAE and these have been evaluated. Research undertaken by the ECU<sup>5</sup> found that codes of practice written by HEIs to support equality and diversity needed strengthening. For the REF, we have therefore set up an Equality and Diversity Advisory Group to advise on the development of guidance on equality and diversity issues and on special circumstances. The group will develop best practice guidance for institutional codes of practice, develop clear and consistent processes for individual staff circumstances, and will proactively disseminate this information to the sector. We are also improving the quality of data used to monitor selection, and have strengthened our criteria and guidance for panel selection.</p> <p>Alongside the REF, HEFCE continues to support diversity in research careers through ongoing projects funded through the LGM Fund (for example, women in academic medicine, academic career workload management) and through VITAE, the body which helps researchers develop their careers. Funding has just been agreed for them to streamline equality and diversity into all of their programmes and to raise awareness of the importance of this issue.</p>

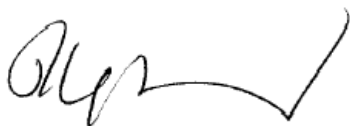
<sup>4</sup> [‘Selection of staff for inclusion in RAE2008’](#) (HEFCE 2009/34)

<sup>5</sup> Impact of the process to promote equality and diversity in the Research Assessment Exercise 2008 (Equality Challenge Unit, 2009)

<b>Sustainable development</b>	
11. What are the likely impacts of this policy/ initiative/project on sustainable development? How have you arrived at this judgement?	<p>The high value of research (including blue-skies and applied research) to the sustainability of the UK economy is well understood and appreciated. The REF is used to identify the research of the highest quality and benefit to the environment, society and the economy, broadly defined. The introduction of impact assessment into the REF will, therefore, explicitly reward research that has sustainability benefits.</p> <p>The REF also impacts positively upon the sustainability of the research base in seeking information on provision for postgraduate and early career researchers.</p>
12. Which negative impacts have been identified during the development of this policy/project/initiative, and what actions have been taken to mitigate the effect?	<p>Those identified are associated with the processes required to undertake the REF, including travel and documentation. The processes necessitate large amounts of travel (some international) by panel members and, while efforts are made to work electronically (for example, as with the submissions process), may require large amounts of printed material. As far as we are able to ensure this, this material is printed double-sided on recycled paper and recycled. We will also encourage panellists to travel sustainably where possible. The majority of REF publications will be made publicly available in web-only format. The administrative web system in development will transfer significant correspondence and paperwork to a web-based format.</p>
13. What actions will be taken to ensure that this policy/project/initiative promotes sustainable development?	<p>The inclusion of environmental, social, cultural and sustainability impacts, and the measures in the research environment element of the REF, promote sustainable development.</p>
<b>Privacy impact assessments</b>	
14. Will you be using information or data about individuals?	Yes
15. Will you be combining or matching data about individuals with data from other sources?	Yes
16. Will you be sharing data about individuals with third parties (such as consultants, other funding bodies)?	Yes

**Certification by Director**

This is a fair assessment of the impact of this policy/initiative/project on the higher education sector, taking into account the regulatory burden imposed. The policy/initiative/project has been appropriately designed to meet our equality, regulatory and privacy obligations as well as promote equality and diversity and sustainable development. This assessment is ready for publication.



**Signed**

**Date** 11 February 2011