

REF consultation questions

The primary purpose of the REF is to inform the allocation of quality-related research funding (QR).

1.
 - What changes to existing processes could more efficiently or more accurately assess the outputs, impacts and contexts of research in order to allocate QR?
 - Should the definition of impact be broadened or refined?
 - Is there scope for more or different use of metrics in any areas?
2.
 - If REF is mainly a tool to allocate QR at institutional level, what is the benefit of organising an exercise over as many Units of Assessment as in REF 2014, or in having returns linking outputs to particular investigators?
 - Would there be advantages in reporting on some dimensions of the REF (e.g. impact and/or environment) at a more aggregate or institutional level?

While the primary purpose of REF is QR resource allocation, data collected through the REF and results of REF assessments can also inform disciplinary, institutional and UK-wide decision making.

3.
 - What use is made of the information gathered through REF in decision making and strategic planning in your organisation?
 - What information could be more useful?
 - Does REF information duplicate or take priority over other management information?
4.
 - What data should REF collect to be of greater support to Government and research funders in driving research excellence and productivity?

The incentive effects of the REF shape academic behaviour, such as through the introduction of the impact criteria.

5.
 - How might the REF be further refined or used by Government to incentivise constructive and creative behaviours such as promoting interdisciplinary research, collaboration between universities, and/or collaboration between universities and other public or private sector bodies?

Previous studies have focused on the costs of REF with respect to the time and resources needed for the submission and assessment processes. The Review is also interested in views and any associated evidence that the REF influences, positively or negatively, the research and career choices of individuals, or the development of academic disciplines. It is also interested in views on how it might encourage institutions to 'game-play' and thereby limit the aggregate value of the exercise.

6.
 - In your view how does the REF process influence, positively or negatively, the choices of individual researchers and / or higher education institutions?
 - What are the reasons for this and what are the effects?

- How do such effects of the REF compare with effects of other drivers in the system (e.g. success for individuals in international career markets, or for universities in global rankings)?
- What suggestions would you have to restrict gaming the system?

7.

- In your view how does the REF process influence the development of academic disciplines or impact upon other areas of scholarly activity relative to other factors?
- What changes would create or sustain positive influences in the future?

Much of REF focuses on the retrospective analysis of success achieved by institutions either through output or impact. Yet the resources provided anticipate continued success based on that track record. Are there means of better addressing forward-looking institutional plans and priorities, and how these might feed in to national policy?

8.

- How can the REF better address the future plans of institutions and how they will utilise QR funding obtained through the exercise?

The Review is keen to hear of creative ideas and insights and to be open in its approach.

9.

- Are there additional issues you would like to bring to the attention of the Review?