FAQs - Coronavirus contingency planning

Why have the funding bodies put the REF on hold?

In pausing the REF, it is the funding bodies’ intention to support institutions in prioritising immediate work relating to COVID-19, and its effects on institutional activity, without concern for the effect on REF preparations. Our expectation is that this will enable institutions to pause REF preparations at this point should they need to, with a view to recommencing when the new submission deadline is confirmed.

When will we know more about the revised timetable for REF 2021?

When we have greater clarity about the period of serious disruption to universities, we will consult on the adapted details of the framework. There will be at least eight months’ notice given of the new submission deadline.

We are aware that the decision to put the REF on hold leaves open a number of questions about the details of the revised framework. While we are not yet in a position to answer many of these questions, we understand that the uncertainty is difficult. We have published further FAQs to provide as much information as possible at this stage.

Why is the census date for staff staying the same? We won't be able to run our processes on staff eligibility as planned.

We currently intend that the staff census date of 31 July 2020 remains unchanged. This is to recognise the significant effort that has been invested so far by institutions in preparations for the current REF cycle, and follows the advice from the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation to universities on supporting their staff. It is not intended, however, that institutions commit staff resource to processes related to staff eligibility in this challenging period. There should be sufficient time for eligibility to be determined retrospectively, in advance of a revised submission deadline.

Will the deadline for outputs, impact and environment change?

Decisions in relation to the other deadlines in the exercise, including the end of the period for impact and outputs, will need to take place in the period ahead and will be subject to wide discussion with the HE sector.

The funding bodies recognise that some of the effects of coronavirus include delays to planned publications, research, PhD completions and impact activity that was originally intended to complete within the current REF timeframes, but which may now not do so. We will be seeking to ensure that these areas affected by, or focusing on the current response to, COVID-19 can be assessed in REF 2021. The details of the process for doing this is not yet in place, and we will develop it in discussion with institutions. This could include, for example, amending deadlines for all, or only the affected, outputs and impact case studies.