

20 November 2020

BY EMAIL

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Dear Vice-chancellor or Principal,

### **Research Excellence Framework 2021: Updated invitation to make submissions to the REF**

1. I am writing to set out the revised arrangements for making submissions to the 2021 Research Excellence Framework (REF), following the changes we made to the timetable in light of COVID-19.

2. This letter follows the funding bodies' recent review of the level of disruption being experienced due to COVID-19 and whether further contingency arrangements for the REF may be necessary. I have therefore set out the outcomes from this review, and have annexed further guidance and information for submitting institutions.

#### **Outcomes of the funding bodies' review of contingency arrangements**

3. When the revised submission deadline of 31 March 2021 was confirmed in June 2020, we outlined the funding bodies' commitment to conducting a review of REF contingency arrangements by 6 November 2020, in the context of ongoing uncertainty about the effects of COVID-19. That review has now taken place. The funding bodies reviewed the ongoing level of disruption being experienced and, in particular, noted the range of contingency measures that institutions have been putting in place to support submission and audit preparation for the REF. On the basis of the review, the funding bodies confirm that the revised submission deadline of noon, 31 March 2021 remains in place.

4. The review highlighted a specific issue for HEIs in the collation and prospective delivery of physical outputs, and in the preparation of outputs that need to be scanned for electronic submission. The steps we are taking to help mitigate these issues are as follows:

- a. To support HEIs in submitting electronic versions of outputs, we have extended our guidance on output submission (<https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/submitting-research-outputs/>), and have attached a copy of this at Annex A. This is intended to give greater flexibility to institutions to submit electronic versions, while ensuring the panels will receive all of the necessary information for their assessment.
- b. We continue to expect and are making provision for the delivery of physical outputs from HEIs, and outline further details below (in sub-paragraph 4.c) about how we will

adopt a flexible approach to this. Additionally, informed by advice from the panels, we note that there are some forms of output that may not be able to be fully represented through electronic upload to the submission system. Where possible, these outputs should continue to be submitted as physical outputs.

- c. We will adopt a flexible approach to the delivery of physical outputs to the REF library. This aims to ensure that the panels will receive the outputs in good time for the assessment, while being able to recognise the individual challenges HEIs may be facing. Our first step in this approach will be to develop a provisional delivery schedule for discussion with institutions individually in December. Further steps will be developed as appropriate following these discussions, and the situation will be kept under close review.

5. The funding bodies have also noted the issues reported by HEIs in identifying income-in-kind that has been awarded as part of a partnership or collaboration, and/or identifying partner institutions, in the REF4c data they have been provided with. They have noted the resource involved in seeking to identify this information, particularly in the wider context of the resourcing pressures related to COVID-19. The funding bodies intend to review the issues encountered in preparing REF4c data for any future exercise. To address the identified issues for REF 2021, they have agreed the following updated approach for returning REF4c data:

- a. HEIs may return the full value of REF4c data that has been provided to them by UKRI and the health research funding bodies, without the requirement to:
  - i. calculate the proportions of the income-in-kind that apply to partner institutions
  - ii. inform partner institutions of the proportions
  - iii. deduct the proportions attributed to other HEIs from their own submission.
- b. Where partner HEIs hold records of eligible income-in-kind awarded through a collaborative grant that is not included in the REF4c data provided to them, this may be included in the REF4c return where the HEI can verify this. Where inclusion is likely to exceed the permitted tolerance levels within the submission system, and therefore prevent submission, HEIs should contact [info@ref.ac.uk](mailto:info@ref.ac.uk).
- c. We will brief the main and sub-panels on the identified issues with collaborative grant funding for REF4c data.

6. The funding bodies recognise that the wider context continues to remain uncertain, and note some further specific areas which will be kept under close review as we move towards the submission deadline. These are: effects on submission preparations due to the redirection of clinical and health-related staff to frontline services; the effects of COVID restrictions on the preparation of classified impact case studies that must be drafted and held in specified locations; and the effects of increased measures for universities and/or significantly worsened rates of infection, where this may result in individual HEIs being unable to make the submission deadline.

7. The review considered potential challenges for the assessment phase of the exercise due to COVID-19 and agreed to closely monitor whether additional mitigating support to the panels will be needed, and to develop appropriate contingency arrangements working with the the main and advisory panels. The funding bodies agreed that full face-to-face meetings of panels will not resume until September 2021 at the earliest, given the continued risks and challenges posed by COVID-19.

### **Adjustments to staff data**

8. As set out in the 'Guidance on submissions' (2019/01) and 'Audit guidance' (2019/04), data provided in the HESA staff return will be drawn on both directly in the assessment (in the data included in the standard analyses for panels) and for data verification. We are aware that the increased time between the deadline for submitting the HESA staff return and the REF submission deadline may lead to differences in the data returned to REF for some HEIs, as compared with the HESA return (for example, where mapping of staff to UOAs has changed).

9. To improve the accuracy of data provided to the panels and to reduce the risk of discrepancies between the HESA and REF datasets identified during the audit period, in early February 2021 the REF team will invite HEIs to review the data that Research England will hold from the HESA staff return. This will include seeking confirmation of the total number of Category A eligible staff calculated from the HESA staff return. We will ask HEIs to return any data amendments to us within four weeks. In accordance with the original submission of data, amendments must be capable of verification. The amended data will be used for the purposes of REF; this process will not change institutions' submitted data to HESA.

### **Process for making the submission**

10. Each institution's submission to REF 2021 must be made electronically through the online REF submission system. The deadline for submissions is noon on 31 March 2021.

11. Your institution's submission must be made by one of the authorised submitters that you have nominated and provided us with details for. As confirmed in our 'Advice on contingency planning' (2020/03), we have increased the number of authorised submitters to three. The latest point for amending authorised submitter details before the final submission deadline is 24 March 2021, by contacting [info@ref.ac.uk](mailto:info@ref.ac.uk).

12. Authorised submitters (one of whom may be you) are authorised to make the submission on your behalf, and to confirm the accuracy of the data it contains. They should also be prepared to confirm that in preparing the submission, the institution has applied its code of practice that has been approved by the funding body, and that the funding bodies may use the data for assessment, for subsequent funding calculations and for publication. The terms and conditions to confirm submission to REF 2021 are attached at Annex B. Authorised submitters will need to confirm agreement with these as a condition of making the final submission.

13. Please note that those published parts of submissions that contain factual data and textual information about research activity will be licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC-BY 4.0).

14. When the final submission has been made it will be held at Research England on behalf of the four UK funding bodies. We will send an email to your authorised submitters and to your institutional REF contacts to confirm receipt of the submission.

15. If after submitting, but before the 31 March 2021 deadline, you discover errors in your submission, your authorised submitters will be able to 'unsubmit' in order to correct data errors. We will provide full instructions to authorised submitters and institutional REF contacts on how to submit through the submission system.

16. All submitted information must be capable of verification. The arrangements for audit and verification of submissions are available at:

<http://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/audit-guidance-201904/>

### **Staff circumstances**

17. Following completion of the advance review process for staff circumstances, the REF6 forms will be re-opened for editing in the submission system from next week. These forms will include the outcomes from the advance review process, where applicable, for institutions to apply as required in the final submission. New FAQs are now available in relation to applying new and reviewed reductions. For ease of review, these are collated together and attached at Annex C, along with diagrams summarising the REF6a/b submission processes.

### **Arrangements for providing final copies of codes of practice and equality impact assessments, and the staff circumstances report**

18. As outlined in my previous letter of February 2020 about making submissions, we will require institutions to provide us with the final version of their code of practice, the final version of their equality impact assessment (EIA) on their policy and procedures for submitting to REF 2021, and a report reflecting on their experience of supporting staff with circumstances during the REF submission process. The revised date for providing this information is 30 July 2021.

### **Accessibility**

19. At the end of the exercise, impact case studies, institutional-level environment statements and unit-level environment templates in PDF form will, unless identified as not for publication, be published (with redactions as applied by the Institution) via a public website. These documents need to be accessible, including being readable via the use of assistive devices such as screen readers. We are therefore asking HEIs to follow the guidance in Annex D, which sets out best practice in preparing these documents for publication in a way that meets accessibility requirements.

### **Further information**

20. Guidance is now also available on the REF website, in relation to:

- [Excluding parts of submission from publication](#)
- [The assessment protocol for interdisciplinary-flagged outputs](#)

21. If you have any queries about any of the information contained in this letter please contact [info@ref.ac.uk](mailto:info@ref.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Hackett', written in a cursive style.

Dr Kim Hackett  
REF Director

## **Annex A: Extended guidance on submitting research outputs**

New or extended guidance is indicated by \*. This content is available at:

<https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/submitting-research-outputs/>)

### **Submitting outputs as PDF or via URL**

The REF submission system has the facility for institutions to upload outputs as PDFs, or to provide access to outputs via a URL. This page provides further guidance.

### **Outputs being submitted electronically due to COVID-19 that were previously expected to be submitted physically or scanned\***

Where institutions were intending to submit outputs in physical form, but are now considering submitting electronic versions of these outputs, they should submit the final version of the output, where possible, according to Annex K of the 'Guidance on submissions'. PDFs that have been converted from other formats (such as eBooks) are acceptable, subject to appropriate copyright and licensing permissions, so long as they include all information required by the panels for assessment (see books, monographs and other long-form outputs section below).

Where it is not possible to submit the final version of the output in electronic form, institutions may instead submit a proof, author accepted manuscript, or other equivalent version of the output. In this instance, institutions should ensure that all information required by the panels for assessment is included in the PDF (or URL, where indicated in Annex K of the 'Guidance on submissions'), such as title page, full referencing information and index. In these cases, the submitting institution will need to describe the form of the output that is being submitted in the 'media of output' field in the submission system.

### **Journal articles and conference proceedings**

For all journal articles and conference proceedings (type D and E outputs), the institution must provide Digital Object Identifiers (DOIs) wherever available. This will enable the REF team to access the published outputs directly via the publishers' websites. Research England will store these outputs and make them available to panel members for REF purposes.

There will be some type D and E outputs which it will not be possible for the REF team to access directly, and we will not attempt to source type D and E outputs flagged as 'pending publication'. In these instances the HEI will be required to upload a PDF of the output to the submission system. Reports will be available on the submission system identifying type D and E outputs that the REF team has not been able to source directly, and will therefore need to be uploaded by the HEI.

It is each HEI's responsibility to run the reports regularly and provide PDFs of all submitted type D and E outputs which cannot be sourced by the REF team. The REF team will not be contacting individual HEIs to request these outputs.

### **Books, monographs and other long-form outputs\***

Where institutions are uploading PDFs of books, monographs and other long-form outputs, the entirety of the text (from title page to the end of the index, including full referencing information and any bibliography) should be submitted, including, where applicable, any illustrations, maps, figures or similar images.

To facilitate the electronic submission of long-form outputs, we have increased the file size for output types A and B in the submission system to 500MB. To minimise file sizes while ensuring sufficient quality, we recommend 150dpi for any images included within PDFs. Where institutions have an output that exceeds this file size limit, they should contact [usersupport@ref.ac.uk](mailto:usersupport@ref.ac.uk).

See 'creating PDF outputs' below for further guidance.

### **Chapters in books\***

Where institutions are uploading PDFs of chapters in books where the author of the chapter is also a (co-)editor of the book, the entirety of the text (from title page to the end of the index, including full referencing information and any bibliography) should be submitted, including, where applicable, any illustrations, maps, figures or similar images. To minimise file sizes while ensuring sufficient quality, the REF team recommends 150dpi for any images included within PDFs.

Where the author of the chapter is not also a (co-)editor of the book, HEIs should provide the chapter itself, the contents page of the volume, any referencing information relevant to the chapter (including where this is separate from the chapter in the book), the volume bibliography (where it exists) and any relevant illustrations, images, maps, figures, appendices or other apparatus. Full publication details should also be provided. Where the editor's introduction sets out a case for the relationship of the submitted chapter to the volume this should also be submitted where available.

See 'creating PDF outputs' below for further guidance.

### **Websites and other outputs that can change over time\***

For outputs that are submitted as a URL or DOI, and which can change over time (e.g. websites or databases), the submitting institution should ensure that the URL or DOI resolves to the version of the output that first became publicly available, which must be on or before 31 December 2020 (or, exceptionally, between 1 January 2021 and 31 March 2021 where production of the output was delayed by COVID-19 as permitted under the 'Guidance on revisions' (2020/02)).

There are various options that institutions may use to achieve this requirement, and we do not specify any particular method.

Examples of methods that institutions may wish to consider include:

- Creating a copy of the website on the same, or a different, web server. Where the website serves dynamic content from a database, the website should use its own copy of the database, and neither the web nor database content should be updated after the stated point in time.
- Placing a copy on a media storage device, for example USB, and returning it as a physical output.

These examples are not exhaustive, and HEIs are free to use other methods so long as they achieve the aim of demonstrating that the submitted version of the output was fixed at a point in time.

HEIs will need to maintain proof of the date at which the item became publicly available and of its content at that date, and should be able to make such evidence available for audit if requested to do so.

Where the HEI presents the point in time copy as a URL, it must be made available in such a way as not to require the input of a login and/or password and should preserve the anonymity of the reviewer.

HEIs may wish to link to media hosted on third-party sites where such media are normally streamed, rather than made available as a file download. HEIs are permitted to do this, but should only do so where:

- The media type is video or audio
- It is impractical to host it on their own site
- The third-party site carries evidence of the last date when the video was uploaded/updated, or the HEI is able to evidence this
- The third-party site can be accessed without requiring a login account
- Access will preserve the anonymity of the reviewer.

### **Other output types**

Output types other than D and E will not be accessed by Research England and must be provided in electronic format by HEIs or sent to the warehouse. In addition to journal articles and conference proceedings that the REF team cannot source, HEIs are encouraged to upload other types of outputs as PDFs to the REF submission system, or provide access to the output via a URL as applicable to the output type. The table in annex K of the Guidance on submissions indicates which output types can be provided in these formats. Where there is a choice between providing an output in physical or electronic format, an electronic copy should be provided wherever the output is already available in this format. Where the output can be converted or scanned into a PDF of sufficient quality, within the file size limit, it should be provided in this way as described below.

### **Creating PDF outputs\***

Where the output is not already available as a PDF, a PDF of sufficient quality should be created while minimising the file size as far as practicable. A PDF of 'sufficient quality' means that it will be easily readable whether viewed on screen or printed, and provides an accurate representation of the output.

To minimise file sizes, the output should be converted directly to PDF if possible, rather than scanned. If this is not possible, the output should be scanned avoiding high resolution and colour as far as possible while ensuring the PDF is of sufficient quality.

Where it is not possible to produce a PDF copy of the final version of the output in either of these ways, institutions may instead submit a proof, author accepted manuscript, or other equivalent version of the output as described above under 'Outputs being submitted electronically due to COVID-19 that were previously expected to be submitted physically or scanned'.

For all output types excluding types A and B, a PDF output cannot be uploaded to the submission system if the file size exceeds 100MB (and we anticipate that most PDF files will be significantly smaller than this). If a PDF of sufficient quality cannot be produced within this file

size limit, the HEI should submit the output in physical form instead, either in hard copy or in digital form (on CD, DVD or a USB). For output types A and B, the maximum file size for a PDF is 500MB. Where institutions have an output that exceeds the applicable file size limit, they should contact [usersupport@ref.ac.uk](mailto:usersupport@ref.ac.uk).

Note that all outputs submitted as PDFs will be available for panel members to view electronically; however, individual panel members may choose to print the PDF to view as a hard copy, and this may be in black-and-white. This should be considered when producing PDFs.

Only one PDF may be uploaded for each output being submitted.

### **When to upload PDF outputs**

HEIs should regularly run reports on type D and E outputs, and upload any such outputs that the REF team is unable to source, as well as any other outputs to be submitted as PDFs, as soon as practical throughout the submission phase. HEIs should not wait until the end of the submission period to upload large numbers of PDFs as this may cause strain on the submission system. Should the submissions system be adversely affected we may implement a queuing system for HEIs to upload outputs.

We expect to be able to start retrieving outputs from the majority of publishers by January 2021. From this date, where the REF team has been unable to source the type D and E outputs within **three weeks** of the HEI listing the output on the submission system, the HEI should upload the output. This applies up to February 2021. For any type D and E outputs added to the submission during March 2021 that the REF team are unable to source within **one working day**, the HEI should assume the REF team will not be able to source these outputs and must upload the PDFs themselves.

All PDF outputs must be uploaded by the submission deadline on 31 March 2021.

### **Depositing physical outputs**

All outputs included in a submission that are not sourced by the REF team or provided electronically to the submission system must be provided as physical outputs for assessment. Physical outputs may be submitted in hardcopy form, in digital or other media on CD, DVD or USB, or as a combination of these.

Outputs deposited in digital or other media on CD, DVD or USB must be in commonly accessible formats. HEIs should ensure that digital files and media are free from viruses, worms, trojans and other digital threats.

Artefacts, devices, products and items of great rarity or value should not be deposited. A representation of the output and sufficient information about the research it embodies should be provided to enable the panel to assess it, without providing the item itself. However, institutions should be prepared to make the item available should panel members request to view it. In these instances the REF team will make the necessary arrangements with the institution.

Each physical output must be deposited as a separate item or package (whether in hardcopy, on CD, DVD, or USB or a combination of these). Multiple outputs must not be provided on a single CD, DVD or USB.

Where the same physical output, of any type, is attributed to two staff members in the same unit of assessment, the institution need only supply it once. If the institution submits the same

physical output more than once in different units of assessments, a separate copy must be supplied for each unit of assessment, individually labelled.

Where reserve outputs have been identified for double-weighted outputs, these should also be deposited.

Further information will be provided in due course on labelling, packaging and delivery of outputs.

### **Uploading Corroborating Evidence**

Corroborating evidence for Impact case studies needs to be uploaded by 1 June 2021. HEIs will be able to upload corroborating evidence before the REF submission deadline of noon on 31 March 2021, and the facility to do so will remain open until noon on 1 June 2021.

The corroborating evidence must be uploaded as a ZIP file. The ZIP file should contain one or more documents in PDF format. No other document formats should be included in the ZIP file. The ZIP file must be no larger than 100MB.

Each item of corroborating evidence should be appropriately titled and numbered according to section 5 of the impact case study template, to indicate the relationship to the specific claims made in the impact case study. Where the evidence can be freely accessed online, a URL can be provided either directly in section 5 of the REF3 template, or embedded in a PDF document and submitted as part of the corroborating evidence.

PDFs that will be uploaded as corroborating evidence should be of sufficient quality, and should where possible be created according to the same methods as for PDF copies of outputs - see [Creating PDF outputs](#).

## **Annex B: Terms and conditions to confirm submission to REF 2021**

Only the authorised submitters, as designated by the head of institution, are permitted to submit the institution's REF submission to UKRI.

Selecting the 'Submit to REF 2021' button will submit your institution's complete submission to the REF. The deadline for submission is **31 March 2021 at 12 noon BST**. Up until this deadline an authorised submitter can 'unsubmit' the institution's REF submission, but it must be re-submitted by the deadline.

For submissions made before the deadline the REF team will send an email to the authorised submitters, the institutional REF contact and the designated REF technical contact to confirm receipt of your submission to the REF.

### **Submission confirmation**

1. As a designated authorised submitter, you confirm that you have the authority, on behalf of the institution ('the Institution'), to make submissions to the Research Excellence Framework ('REF') operated by Research England, the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland, and the Scottish Funding Council (together 'the UK higher education funding bodies').
2. You confirm on behalf of the head of institution, that the personal data in requests for output reductions have been submitted in compliance with current data protection legislation – **General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679** and the **Data Protection Act 2018** and has appropriate consents and notices in place to enable lawful transfer of such Personal Data to UKRI for the duration and purposes of the REF submission.

### **Code of practice**

3. You confirm, on behalf of the head of institution, that the Institution has applied its REF 2021 code of practice on submitting staff and outputs in its REF submission.
4. You confirm, on behalf of the head of institution, that the Institution has applied its REF 2021 code of practice in the processes followed in applying staff circumstances reductions.

### **Confidentiality arrangements**

5. Confidential information means all confidential information (however recorded or preserved) disclosed by the institution to UKRI in connection with the institution's REF submission.
6. The Institution notes the following confidentiality arrangements made by the UK higher education funding bodies:
  - a. Information contained in REF submissions will be treated as confidential until the full assessment exercise is complete;
  - b. During the assessment process the submitted data will be released only according to the terms described under 'use of data', below.

Full details of the confidentiality arrangements are set out in paragraphs 98-100 of the 'Guidance on submissions' (REF2019/01).

7. These confidentiality obligations do not apply to information that is: already widely known to others; has already been placed in the public domain or made available following a court order or other regulatory or statutory requirement.
8. The Institution confirms that any submitted research outputs identified as 'confidential report' (output type O) in the submission have been included with the permission of the owner of the report.

### **Publication of data**

9. The Institution acknowledges that, subject to the requirements of data protection legislation, and unless marked as confidential or redacted by the institution, the information contained in REF submissions will be published by the UK higher education funding bodies following the end of the assessment process. Information that will not be published includes: staff names, contractual details and other sensitive information returned in form REF1; all information provided on individual staff circumstances (see also paragraph 11 below); information about research outputs listed as category O ('confidential report'); corroborating evidence for impact case studies; and any other information that the institution has specifically marked as confidential or will redact (by 1 June 2021) for specific reasons, such as commercial sensitivity or security.
10. The Institution acknowledges that impact case studies, institutional-level environment statements and unit-level environment templates in PDF form will be made available to panel members and assessors via a secure intranet and will, unless identified as not for publication, be published (with redactions as applied by the Institution) at the end of the exercise via a public website. The Institution acknowledges that such documents are therefore subject to the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. The Institution acknowledges that guidance has been made available for the preparation of documents to help them meet the requirements of the Regulations, and that it has taken due regard of the guidance provided.
11. The Institution acknowledges that, aggregated information about reduction requests will be published by the UK higher education funding bodies following the end of the assessment process. This will be aggregated at sector level such that no individual or organisation can be identified. In accordance with data protection legislation, personal (including special category) data will not be published. The information contained within REF6a/b forms will not be published.

### **Use of data**

12. The Institution notes that the information presented to panels will contain all the information which is now being submitted except dates of birth, HESA staff identifiers, and information in REF6 about staff circumstances which will be seen only by the REF team, the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel and main panel chairs. Case studies will not be made available to individual panel members identified specifically by the HEI as having a conflict of interest.
13. The Institution acknowledges that, apart from the data mentioned in paragraph 12, all information contained in this REF submission will be provided to the relevant panel

members, assessors, the panel secretariat, and the REF team, to enable them to carry out the assessment. Information contained in form REF2 (outputs) and copies of submitted research outputs may also be provided to specialist advisors.

14. Prior to its publication, submitted data held by the UK higher education funding bodies may be made available, in whole or in part, under the terms of an appropriate agreement, to selected third parties for further research. If such material is to be shared more widely it will be aggregated at sector level such that no individual or organisation can be identified.
15. The Institution will provide, at the request of the REF team, copies of research outputs or other supporting materials as specified by the panels.
16. It is acknowledged that the data provided in the submission, especially in relation to category A submitted staff, may be used later by the UK higher education funding bodies to calculate allocations of funding for research.

### **Copyright and re-use of REF material**

17. The Institution confirms that each research output that is included in the submission in digital format is either licensed to be used by the REF under the terms of an agreement that exists between UKRI and the Copyright Licensing Agency (available at [https://ref.ac.uk/media/1215/he\\_20191003\\_ref-2021-agreement.pdf](https://ref.ac.uk/media/1215/he_20191003_ref-2021-agreement.pdf)), or that UKRI is permitted to distribute copies of the output to panel members for the purpose of peer review until the end of the assessment period.
18. The Institution hereby grants to each of the UK higher education funding bodies individual, non-exclusive, perpetual and irrevocable licences to make use of, release and publish all of its submission data, except for those data identified in paragraph 9 as not for publication, under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International licence (CC-BY 4.0), the terms of which are available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/legalcode> .
  - a. Such data shall include narrative documents including impact case studies; the institutional-level environment statement; and the unit-level environment templates.
  - b. The licences include the submitted metadata about research outputs, but not the outputs themselves.

The Institution confirms that any such act to make use of, release or publish any part of the submission data, except for those data identified in paragraph 9 as not for publication, by any of the UK higher education funding bodies will not infringe the copyright (or any other intellectual property right) or other right of any third party.

19. The funding bodies will refer any other requests they receive for the re-use of copyrighted material to the relevant copyright owner.

### **Digital security**

20. The Institution shall make best endeavours to ensure that any digital file included in their submission, whether uploaded to the submissions system, linked via a URL or

delivered on physical media, is free from viruses, worms, trojans and other digital threats.

**Confirmation of submission**

21. The Institution declares that all information contained in this submission is, to the best of its knowledge, correct, complete and not misleading and acknowledges that all aspects of REF data may be subject to audit and verification by the REF team.
22. It is noted that authorised submitters and the designated REF technical contact will receive an email confirming that the submission process has been completed.

**Proper law**

23. Any dispute or claim arising out of or in connection with these terms and conditions, or its subject matter or formation shall be governed by and construed in accordance with the laws of England and Wales and subject to the exclusive jurisdiction of the Courts of England and Wales.

## **Annex C: REF6 FAQs**

### **Existing FAQs (6 October 2020)**

#### **Can we apply new staff circumstances reductions at the submission deadline?**

Yes. New staff circumstances can be applied at the submission deadline in March 2021. These circumstances will be reviewed by EDAP during the assessment phase. The outcomes of EDAP's review will feed directly into the assessment process, so feedback will not be provided back to HEIs.

#### **When submitting individual circumstances for a staff member as part of a unit reduction (REF6b), how should we combine defined circumstances with circumstances requiring a judgement?**

All circumstances for that staff member should be included collectively as 'requiring judgement'. The HEI will need to determine the total reduction to be applied on the basis of all applicable circumstances. Circumstance(s) with a defined reduction in outputs should be included in this calculation according to the tariffs set out in Annex L of the 'Guidance on submissions'. For circumstances requiring a judgement, the institution will need to make a judgement about the effect in terms of the equivalent period of time absent, and include these in the calculation in accordance with Table L2 in Annex L of the 'Guidance on submissions'.

For example, where a staff member has had one period of qualifying family-related leave, and a subsequent period of ill health equivalent to a 28-month period of absence, a reduction of 1.5 outputs should be applied (0.5 reduction for the family-related leave; 1 reduction for the 28-month period equivalent to absence).

When combining circumstances, only one circumstance should be taken into account for any period of time during which they took place simultaneously.

#### **Do we apply staff circumstances reductions to the number of outputs required for the unit before or after rounding?**

The total output requirement for a unit will be calculated by subtracting the rounded total of staff circumstances reductions from the initial rounded output requirement (equal to 2.5 times the combined FTE of Category A submitted staff included in the submission).

For example, in a unit of 9 FTE the initial output requirement would be 22.5 outputs, which is rounded to 23 outputs. If the unit applies staff circumstances reductions of 4.5, this is rounded to 5 outputs. The total output requirement for the unit would therefore be  $23 - 5 = 18$  outputs.

#### **In a unit where we have had a REF6a request recommended, but do not have a REF6b Unit reduction request recommended, can we still reduce the total output pool by 1?**

Yes, where a REF6a request has been recommended the relevant individual may be returned with no outputs attributed to them in the submission system, and the total outputs required by the unit will be reduced by 1.

## **New FAQs (20 November 2020)**

### **How do we apply new REF6 reductions?**

The REF6 forms have now been unlocked for editing and new reductions can be applied in the submission system directly (using the REF6a/b forms), or via the import function. See the submission system 'User guide' and FAQs for further detail.

### **Can the 15% threshold mentioned in EDAP's report be used routinely by HEIs in determining whether to apply new REF6 unit reductions? If so, does this relate to the headcount or FTE?**

The report is intended to guide and help HEIs in preparing final submissions, and the broad rules of thumb should give greater confidence to HEIs in applying new unit reductions. EDAP will apply the same process and considerations in reviewing reductions newly applied, as it did to those submitted in advance. It is important to note, as stated in EDAP's report, that the rules of thumb were developed through calibration and assessment and were used primarily for sense-checking consistency between assessments, rather than driving initial decision making. Recommended unit rationale statements did, and where being newly applied will also need to, contain clear information on why the HEI considered the effect to be disproportionate and how it determined this, as outlined in EDAP's report.

The percentages referred to in the rules of thumb relate to the headcount of staff in the submitting unit. Where a unit's FTE was significantly lower than its headcount, EDAP also took this into consideration when making its judgements.

### **Where we are applying a REF6a reduction will we also need to include the staff member in a unit reduction (REF6b), or will this happen automatically?**

REF6a circumstances will not be included in the REF6b reduction automatically. Where applying a unit reduction, HEIs will need to include in REF6b the details of any staff members for whom a REF6a reduction is also being applied in that unit. Any individual REF6b reductions (of up to 1.5 outputs) will be in addition to the reduction of one output for a REF6a case.

### **What happens if a new unit reduction or REF6a / REF6b individual staff reduction is not approved?**

Where staff circumstances reductions are not approved, and/or where an individual's circumstances in REF6a/b cannot be verified, any 'missing' outputs will be graded as 'unclassified'.

### **Can we submit reserve outputs for a REF6a / REF6b reduction in case it is not approved at the submission deadline?**

No, HEIs may not submit reserve outputs for staff circumstances reductions. Allowing reserve outputs would diminish the case for circumstances either having significantly constrained an individual's ability to produce the minimum of one output (REF6a) or having had a disproportionate effect on the size of the unit's overall output pool (REF6b).

**Will EDAP provide feedback on new unit reduction requests submitted in March 2021?**

Any new reductions applied at the submission deadline will be considered during the assessment year. The outcomes of EDAP's review will feed directly into the assessment process, so feedback will not be provided back to HEIs.

**Will previous requests recommended by EDAP be automatically added in our submission?**

No. HEIs will need either to 'apply' or 'not apply' all advance REF6 requests submitted in March 2020 (either directly in the submissions system or via the import function).

**Do we have to apply an advance unit reduction request that has been recommended by EDAP?**

No, reductions are optional to apply at the point of submission, and may be amended, added to or not applied prior to submission.

**We need to make changes to a 'recommended' request that was submitted in March 2020. Can we edit it?**

Yes, either directly in the submission system or via the import function. In applying advance requests at the submission deadline, institutions **must** ensure the submitted information accurately reflects the circumstances pertaining to submitted staff.

**What happens if we make changes to a 'recommended' unit reduction request? Is it treated as a new case? Could it subsequently be rejected?**

Where a 'recommended' unit reduction is applied (including where it is edited), EDAP will not routinely reassess the case for the unit reduction. HEIs must ensure that the information submitted in the unit rationale statement is accurate and verifiable in the event of audit.

EDAP will review any new or amended underpinning circumstances (where 'amending' increases a staff member's previous reduction) that are applied as part of the unit reduction.

**We submitted an advance unit reduction request that was 'not recommended' by EDAP, but now have additional staff circumstances to account for. Can we choose to apply this reduction at the submission deadline?**

Yes, HEIs may still apply a unit reduction that was 'not recommended' (for example, where additional staff have subsequently declared circumstances, or where the overall impact is greater than was originally described in the unit rationale statement). In these cases, additional evidence would be expected to clearly demonstrate the disproportionate effect of the underpinning circumstances on the unit as a whole. These cases will be reviewed again by EDAP.

**One of our Cat A submitted staff members had a REF6a request 'recommended' while at a previous institution. Can we apply the reduction in our submission?**

Yes. Where a REF6a request was 'recommended', and before or on 31 July 2020 the staff member changed institution (or will now be submitted in a different UOA), the reduction may be applied by the new unit (whether in the same or a different HEI). The REF6a reduction will need to be created and applied as new, but HEIs should note in the supporting information text that the

case was previously reviewed and recommended. The HESA ID for the staff member will need to match the HESA ID returned previously. The applied reduction will not be reviewed again by EDAP. However, the information included will be subject to audit, so the submitting HEI will need to assure itself of the accuracy of the submitted information.

#### **How will the rounding be applied?**

Rounding will be automatically applied in the output count of the submission system.

#### **How and when will REF6a / 6b reductions be audited?**

The audit process will focus on verifying the information submitted in REF6a/b, both in advance requests as applied at the submission deadline, and in any new or additional reductions applied. The REF team will audit a sample of cases, with selection in the first instance based on advice from EDAP. This will be supplemented, where necessary, by random audit by the REF team, to ensure a reasonable spread across UOAs and HEIs. The audit period for staff circumstances will be between May and October 2021.

More detail on audit and appropriate forms of evidence is in the 'Audit guidance' (2019/04).

### **Submission system FAQs**

#### **Can we import our data to apply our reviewed reductions?**

Yes, the submission system will accept REF6 imports as normal. To apply reviewed reductions, ensure the REF6 records for the relevant staff members are included in your import. Where there is a reviewed reduction available for staff members included in this import, it will be applied to your submission. The application is regardless of the outcome of the EDAP review. To 'not apply' a reviewed reduction using import you will need to remove the REF6 record(s) you wish to 'not apply' from the import file and perform a 'replace' import. The reviewed reduction will then be 'not applied' to your submission. Data will not be deleted, and the reviewed reduction can be applied again.

#### **Our unit reduction data is stored in our CRIS system. How do we apply the reductions from the CRIS system?**

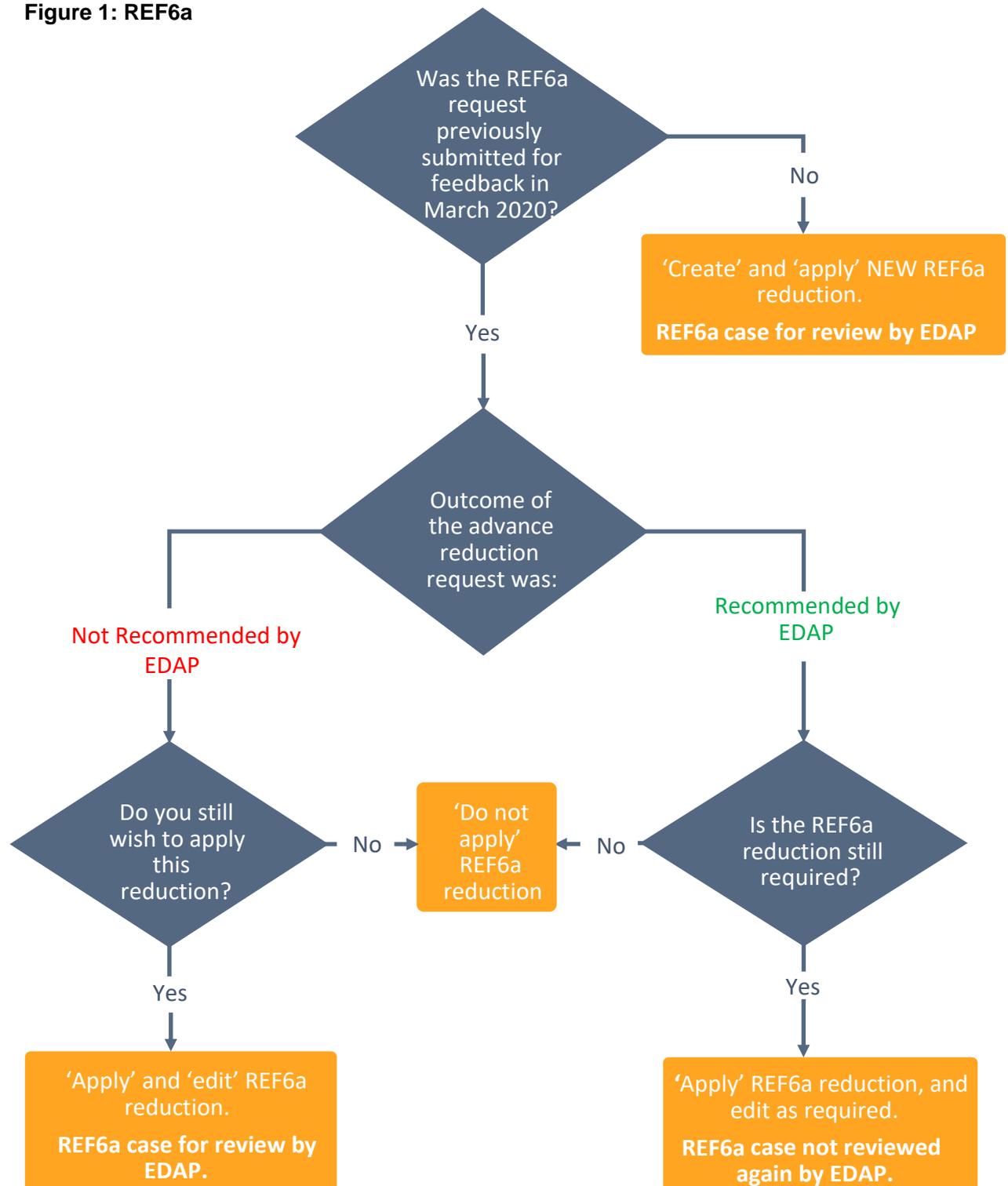
As per the import function, loading existing REF6 reviewed reduction data from the CRIS system into the submission system will apply any reductions that have been reviewed by EDAP. REF6 data can be amended in the CRIS system and pushed through to the submission system and the updates will be made to the applied reviewed reductions. The EDAP recommendation is stored in the submission system against each reviewed reduction.

#### **Can we export our reductions data?**

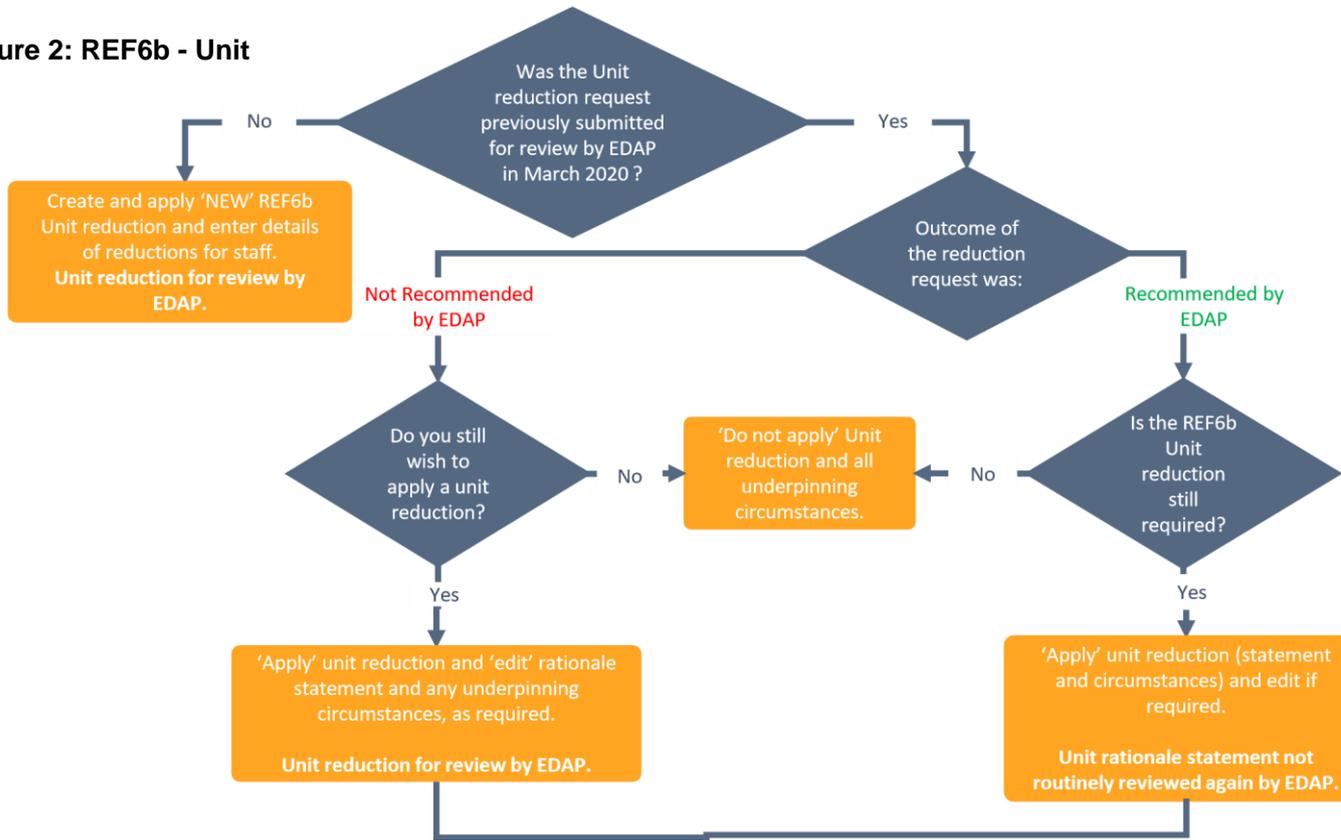
Yes, any applied reductions in a submission can be exported. The import / export formats have not been changed. EDAP recommendations and any reviewed reductions that are 'not applied' will not be exported.

## REF6 flowcharts

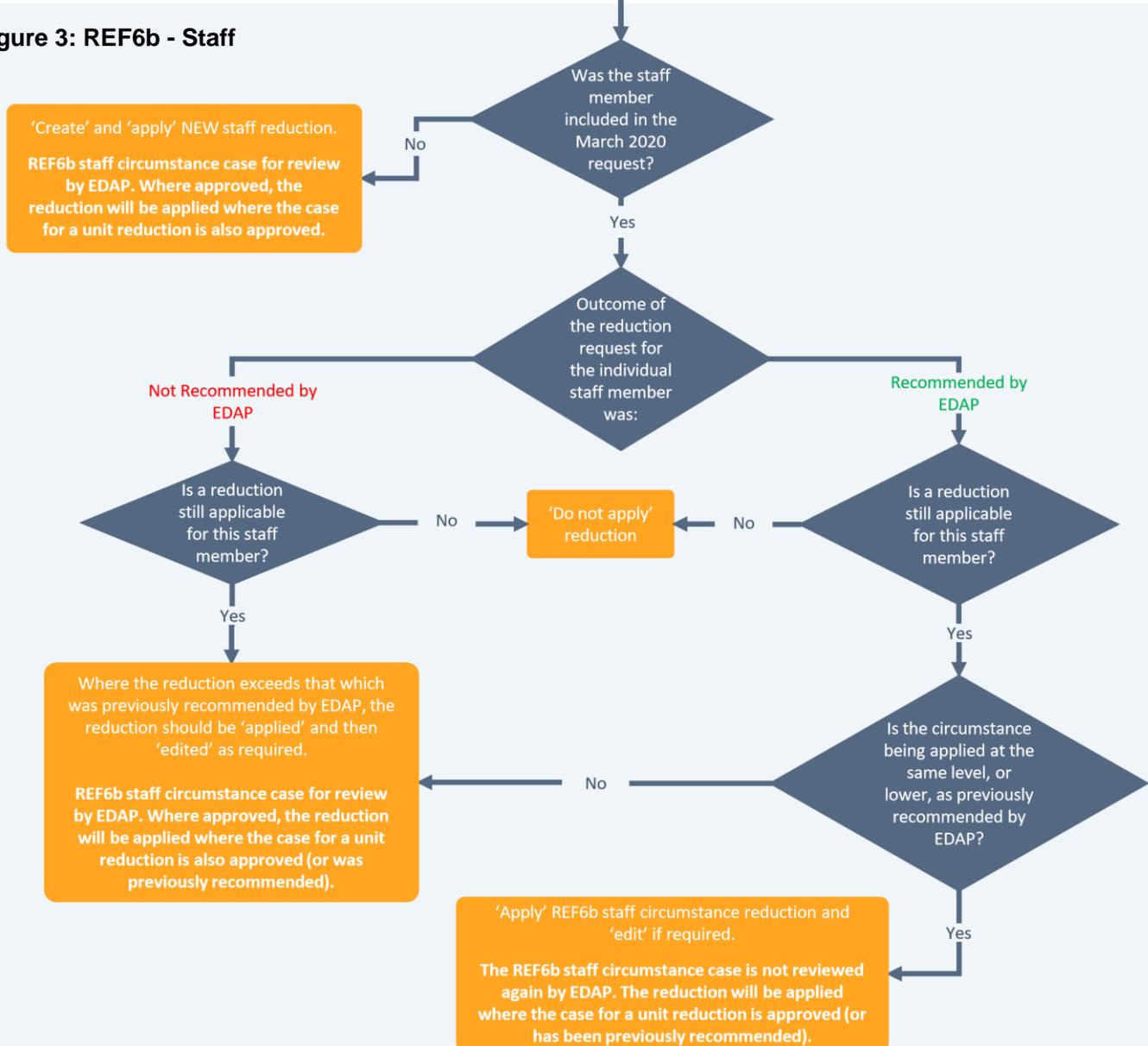
Figure 1: REF6a



**Figure 2: REF6b - Unit**



**Figure 3: REF6b - Staff**



## Annex D: Preparing PDF Documents for Publication at the end of REF 2021

### Scope

1. At the end of REF 2021, a number of HEI-submitted PDF files will be published by the REF team. These will include all (optionally redacted) versions of the following documents submitted by each HEI:

- a. Impact Case Studies (except where marked as 'not for publication')
- b. The institutional-level environment statement
- c. Unit-level environment templates

2. PDFs that are published on a website should meet accessibility requirements, including being readable via the use of assistive devices such as screen readers. HEIs should follow this guidance when preparing these documents from the completed Word templates that have been provided on <https://ref.ac.uk/guidance/submission-system-data-requirements/>. Additionally, where possible, HEIs that are preparing their own PDF copies of outputs to submit electronically should also follow this guidance.

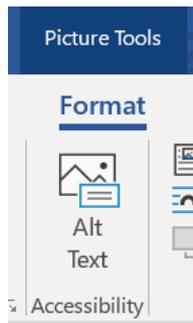
### Requirements

3. When preparing their impact case studies, institutional-level environment statement and unit-level environment templates, HEIs should use the templates provided. HEIs should ensure that they use the templates that were published on <https://ref.ac.uk/guidance/submission-system-data-requirements/> on 18 November 2020, as these contain the correct document heading styles.

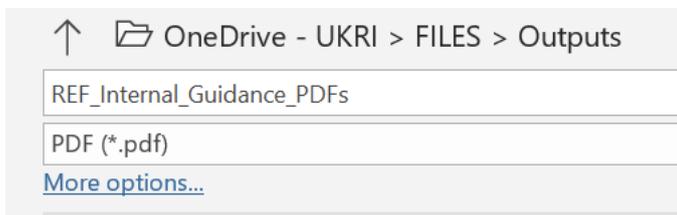
4. For Microsoft Word documents to be converted to accessible PDFs, they need to satisfy the following requirements:

- a. Document headings and other style elements should be done in Word using the Styles function, not by using font/size/bold/colour functions. (It is still acceptable to use inline formatting, such as underlining these words.)
- b. All images must have 'alt text'. This is text that screen readers will use to read out a description of the image to a visually-impaired user. To add 'alt text' to an image, simply right-click it and select **Edit Alt Text...**

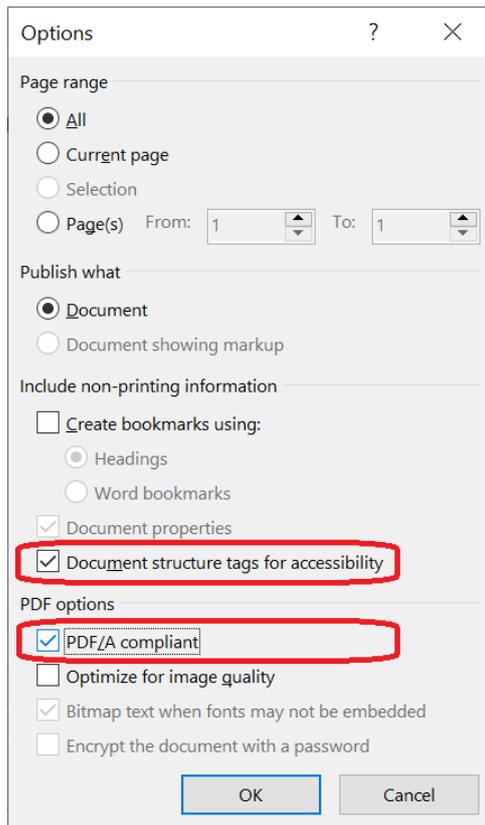
You can also add/edit the 'alt text' by selecting the picture, and on the **Format** menu (in the ribbon) clicking the **Alt Text** button, which looks like this:



5. When including tables, try to ensure that these are as readable as possible – for example, ensure that all tables have clear header rows. Where you use tables that break across more than one page, please ensure that the table header row is repeated at the top of each page.
6. To ensure that PDF files generated from Microsoft Word are accessible, it is important to satisfy the following requirements:
  - a. When the PDF file is generated, the exported document needs to contain Document structure tags for accessibility (more on this below)
  - b. When the PDF file is generated, the exported document needs to be in the PDF/A format
7. When exporting to PDF from Word (and other office programs), either use the **Export** option, or select **Save a Copy** and make sure you select the **More options...** link:



8. Then, click the **[Options...]** button in the file chooser. It will display the following screen:



9. In this screen, make sure the following two options are to be ticked:
  - a. Document structure tags for accessibility
  - b. PDF/A compliant
  
10. Then click **[OK]** and continue to save the file as normal.

### Further information

11. 0117 450 1724, [info@ref.ac.uk](mailto:info@ref.ac.uk).