

23 September 2021

BY EMAIL

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Dear Vice-Chancellor or Principal,

1. I am writing to provide details of the arrangements for publishing the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results. No response is required to this letter.

Content and timing of publication

2. On 12th May 2022, the REF team on behalf of the four UK higher education funding bodies will publish the results of REF 2021. The date of publication has been adjusted from the [Guidance on revisions to REF 2021](#) July 2020 document to account for the pre-election period during April and at the start of May 2022.

3. Publication will include the overall quality profile awarded to each submission, by unit of assessment (UOA). The overall quality profiles will show the proportions of research activity judged to meet each of four starred quality levels, in steps of one per cent.

4. Alongside the overall quality profile, we will also publish on 12th May 2022 the output, impact and environment sub-profiles that were combined to produce the overall quality profile for each submission rounded to one decimal place, the full-time equivalent (FTE) number of Category A submitted staff and the proportion of Category A eligible staff included in each submission will be published.

5. The results for joint submissions will be listed separately against each institution involved in the submission. The FTE figure will reflect the FTE of staff submitted by that HEI, or agreed percentage split where this was indicated by the submitting institutions.

6. We will not publish sub-profiles for any submission where the headcount of Category A submitted staff is three or fewer, because of the inferences that could be drawn about the quality of the published output of individual researchers in very small submissions. With the exception of submissions with three or fewer submitted staff, we will publish the impact sub-profiles for all submissions, regardless of the number of case studies which were submitted.

7. We are currently undertaking user research to establish the user requirements and information design for publishing the above results. We will use the outcomes of this research to finalise details about the format and presentation of the outcomes. I will write to institutions to confirm these details in December 2021.

Release of embargoed results

8. On the morning of 9th May 2022, the REF team will release individual institutions' results to the head of each HEI, in confidence and under embargo until 12th May. The embargoed results released on 9th May will contain the same data as the wider publication: the overall quality profile, the three sub-profiles, the FTE number of Category A staff and the proportion of Category A eligible staff, for each submission made by that institution. We will advise HEIs in due course on how we will disseminate these confidential results.

9. To assist institutions in interpreting their own results, on 9th May we will also provide summary data for each UOA. While the detailed contents of the summaries will be confirmed with the wider decisions about the format and presentation of the outcomes (as described in paragraph 7), they are likely to include such data as the average profiles for all submissions in the UOA (mean average, weighted for staff volume). The UOA summary data will also be published on 12th May.

10. On the morning of 10th May 2022, the REF team will provide HEIs with all results, under embargo. The results will be released under embargo to the press on 11th May.

11. By March 2022 we intend to provide institutions with an example of the format in which the embargoed results will be provided.

Confidential feedback on submissions

12. In June 2022, the REF team will provide written confidential feedback to the head of each HEI. This will comprise, for each submission, concise feedback summarising the reason for the quality profiles awarded, with reference to the published assessment criteria. In the case of joint submissions, we will provide this feedback confidentially to the heads of all institutions involved. Concise feedback will also be provided to the institution on its individual staff circumstances, at institutional level.

Publication of other REF material

13. In summer 2022, we will publish the submissions on the REF website. The funding bodies will also publish the impact case studies as a searchable database. For each submission we will publish: details of submitted outputs; the submitted case studies; and the submitted environment data and institutional and unit-level templates in accordance with the information set out in the 'Guidance on submissions' (REF 2019/01) and 'Guidance on revisions to REF 2021' (REF 2020/02). The list of submitted staff and information on the attribution of outputs to individual staff members will not be published. Any personal data contained in the outputs (and additional information) themselves, the impact case studies and environment statements will not be removed before publication. HEIs have had the opportunity to provide redacted versions of case studies and environment templates for the purpose of publication.

14. As set out in the terms and conditions for submissions to REF 2021, 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).

15. Any adjustments made to submissions as a result of audit will be reflected in the published submissions. We are keeping HEIs' audit contacts informed of all such data adjustments. The submission system will remain available for institutions to access their submissions in a read-only format, until the submissions are published in summer 2022. Data adjustments made as a result of audit are visible on the submission system.

16. In summer 2022 we will also publish the following:

- a. A report by each main panel confirming its working methods and providing an overview of its observations about the state of research (strengths, weaknesses, vitality of activity and scope of impacts achieved) in the areas falling within its remit. These reports will include a section provided by each sub-panel.
- b. A report by the REF Equality and Diversity Panel (EDAP). The report will provide details of EDAP's work and observations about implementing equality measures in the REF.
- c. A report by the REF Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP), detailing its working methods and observations about implementing measures to support the submission and assessment of interdisciplinary research in the REF.
- d. A report by the Institutional-level Environment Pilot Panel (ILEPP), setting out an evaluative summary of the panel's work and formal recommendations to the funding bodies. We will also provide confidential feedback from the pilot panel to each HEI. This will not include a quality profile but will provide a narrative commentary by the pilot panel on the institution's submission. The outcomes from the pilot assessment will not be included in the REF 2021 outcomes.
- e. Minutes of the sub-panel and main panel meetings for the assessment phase of the REF. These will include a record of panel discussions, meeting structures and processes, and details of who attended.
- f. A report by the REF Director, detailing how the process was managed in operational terms.

Further information

17. As noted in paragraph 7, the REF team will provide a further update to HEIs when final decisions in relation to publication format and presentation of the outcomes have been confirmed.

18. Please do not hesitate to contact the REF team if you have any enquiries about the information set out in this letter, by email to info@ref.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Kim Hackett
REF Director

Annex A: Table of key milestones

Date	Publication item
March 2022	Example format of results sent to HEIs
9 May	Individual institutions' results to heads of each HEI, under embargo
10 May	All results to HEIs, under embargo
11 May	All results to the press, under embargo
12 May	REF 2021 results published on REF website
June 2022	Written confidential feedback to heads of each HEI
Summer 2022	Submissions and impact case studies published on REF website
Summer 2022	Publication of reports by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">a. Main REF panelsb. REF Equality and Diversity Panel (EDAP)c. REF Interdisciplinary Research Advisory Panel (IDAP)d. Institutional-level Environment Pilot Panel (ILEPP) e. Minutes of sub-panel and main panel meetingsf. REF Director report