



What the REF will mean for research staff

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REF – a UK-wide framework for assessing research quality

... maintaining the capacity of higher education to undertake world-leading research across a range of academic disciplines, promoting economic growth and national well-being and the expansion and dissemination of knowledge

*REF Consultation
September 2009/38*

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The purpose of the REF

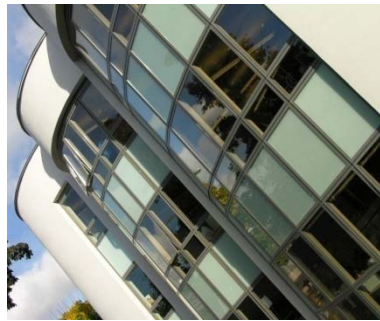
- to secure the continuation of a world-class dynamic and responsive research base in the UK through
 - funding: selective funding allocations informed by quality assessment
 - benchmarking and information: establishing reputational yardsticks
 - accountability: demonstrating that public investment in research is effective and delivers public benefit

Key Aims of the REF

- Produce comprehensive quality assessments
- Drive up quality across the HE research base
- Support innovative and curiosity-driven research
- Encourage effective dissemination and application, and interchange of research staff and ideas
- Reward social and economic benefits built on excellent research
- Support better management and sustainability of the research base

Research excellence

- sustaining the balance between curiosity driven research and work targeted on national priorities
- investing in infrastructure and human capital
- long term commitment of funding
- vibrant postgraduate and postdoctoral communities
- the research excellence framework



REF – key features

- a focus on research excellence, benchmarked against international standards
- recognition for building on excellent research to deliver economic and social benefits
- a vibrant research environment, supporting the continued flow of excellent research and its effective dissemination
- coherent UoAs and fewer of them

REF framework

Outputs (60%)

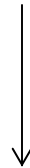
Quality of all types of research



Expert review of selected outputs (informed by citation information in appropriate UoAs)

Impact (25%)

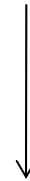
Economic, social, cultural and quality of life benefits



Narrative statement and case studies, supported by indicators

Environment (15%)

Quality and sustainability of the research environment



Narrative supported by indicators

Assessing outputs

- The primary component in the assessment
- Assessed through expert review
- Staff and outputs selected by institutions
- All types of research outputs
- Criteria = 'rigour, originality and significance'
- Sub-profiles

Outputs – what do we want to change?

- Rationalising Cat C staff
- All types of research outputs, where research = ‘a process of investigation leading to new insights effectively shared’
- Explicit about ‘user significance’, supported by statements where appropriate
- Up to 3 or 4 outputs per person?
- More scope to double weight certain output types?
- Sub-profiles: can 4* be more discriminating?
- Formalising the use of citation information

Using citation information

- To be used in UOAs where robust data are available
- Information about:
 - Individual outputs
 - Submissions
 - Whole UOAs
- Their use may vary between panels
- Central guidance to avoid bias or overreliance, and to account for limitations
- Institutional access to data to **inform** selection of outputs

Research Impact

- Our starting point is that an optimal submission should include a portfolio of excellent research **and** build on that excellent research to deliver benefits which contribute to society.
- Contribution must be linked to high quality research
- Assessed at the level of whole units (not individual outputs or researchers)
- Equally demanding standards to the assessment of outputs

Challenges of assessment

- **Time lags** – we will look at impacts that are evident during from REF period (2008-2012), underpinned by research over a longer timeframe
- **Attribution** – case studies to tease out how the research *contributed* to the impacts
- **Limitations of metrics** – expert panels will *assess* rather than *measure* impact; indicators to be used as supporting evidence
- **Corroboration** – scope for third party verification, and expert panels to judge credibility of the evidence

Evidence of contribution

- Submitting units to provide:
 - An ***impact statement*** to describe the breadth of interactions with users and impacts for the unit as a whole
 - a number of ***case studies*** illustrating specific examples of impact
- Both of these to include appropriate indicators drawn from a 'common menu'

Assessment criteria

- Expert panels to assess benefit in terms of their 'reach' and 'significance'
- All panels to include substantial user representation – we suggest user members focus on the impact element, with reviewing outputs as 'optional'
- Impact pilot exercise to test and develop the proposals further
- Comments from consultation events feed into pilot

The proposals are not about

- Quantifying impact
- Focusing narrowly on economic impact
- Assessing impact of every researcher or output
- Trying to predict future impact
- Discouraging curiosity-driven research
- Trading-off impact and excellence

The research environment

- The vitality of the research environment:
 - Prospects for a continuing flow of excellent research and its effective dissemination
 - Contributing to the research base
- **Resourcing**
- **Management**
 - including training and management of researchers
- **Engagement**
 - including some aspects of esteem

UOAs and panels – why the change?

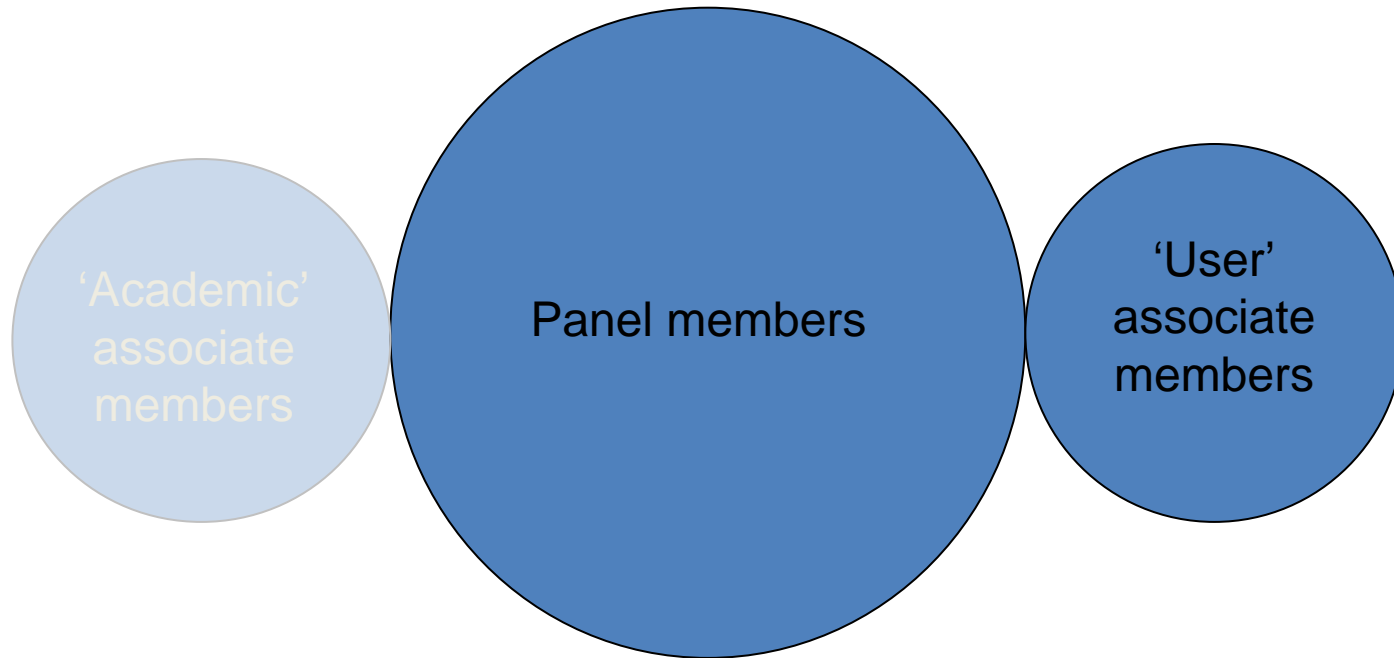
A coherent discipline-based structure that:

- Produces sufficiently granular outcomes for funding, information and benchmarking
- Enhances consistency
- Reduces fluidity of UOA boundaries
- Reduces burden on institutions
- Evens-out the workload for panelists
- Supports interdisciplinary research
- Ensures that submitted material is assessed by people with suitable expertise

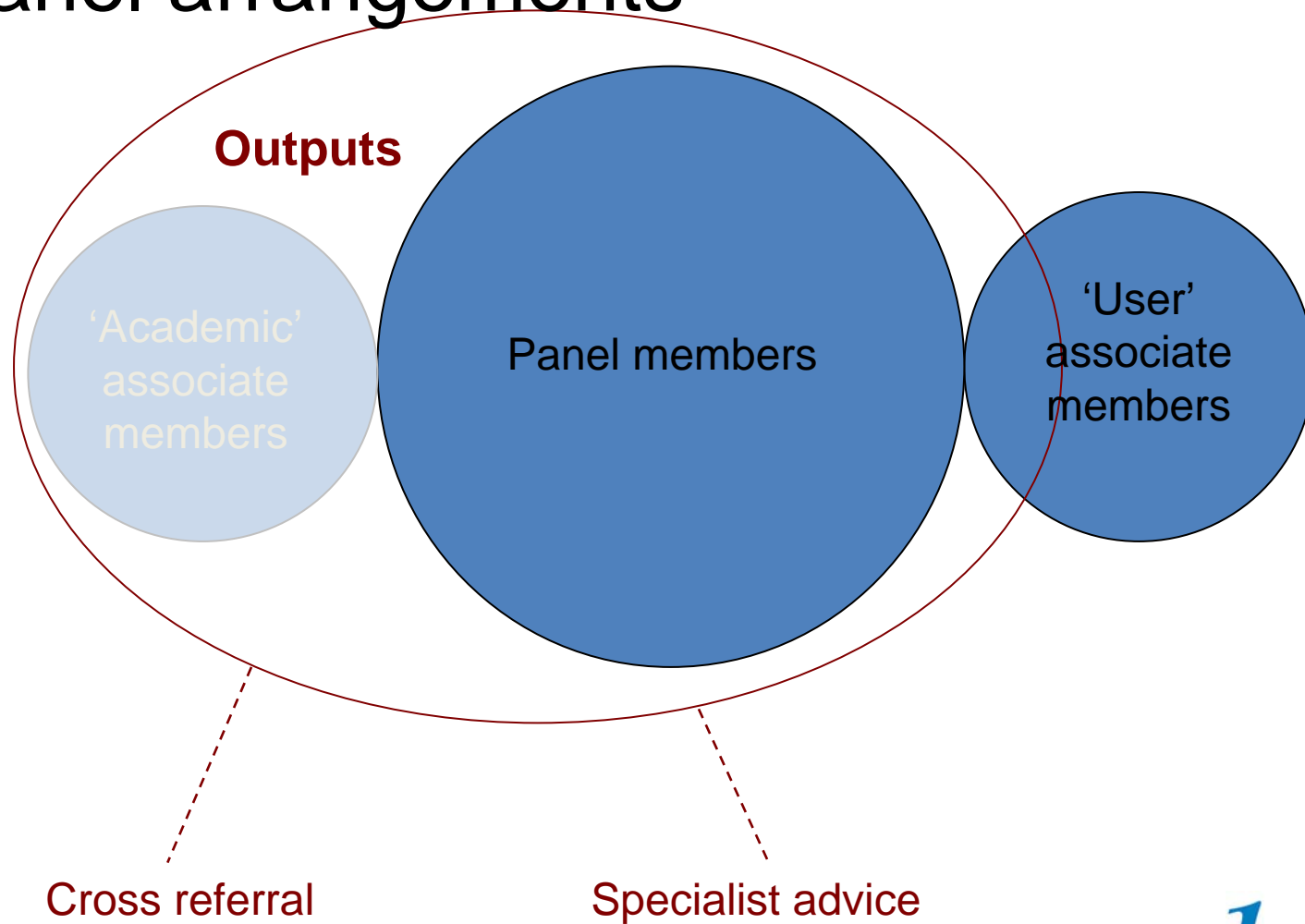
Panels – what we propose

- Fewer UOAs – have we combined them appropriately?
- Broad main panels
- Standardised criteria, guidance and weightings - varying between panels only where justified by discipline differences
- Providing benchmarking information to panels
- Changes to the membership and management of panels (including greater ‘user’ input)

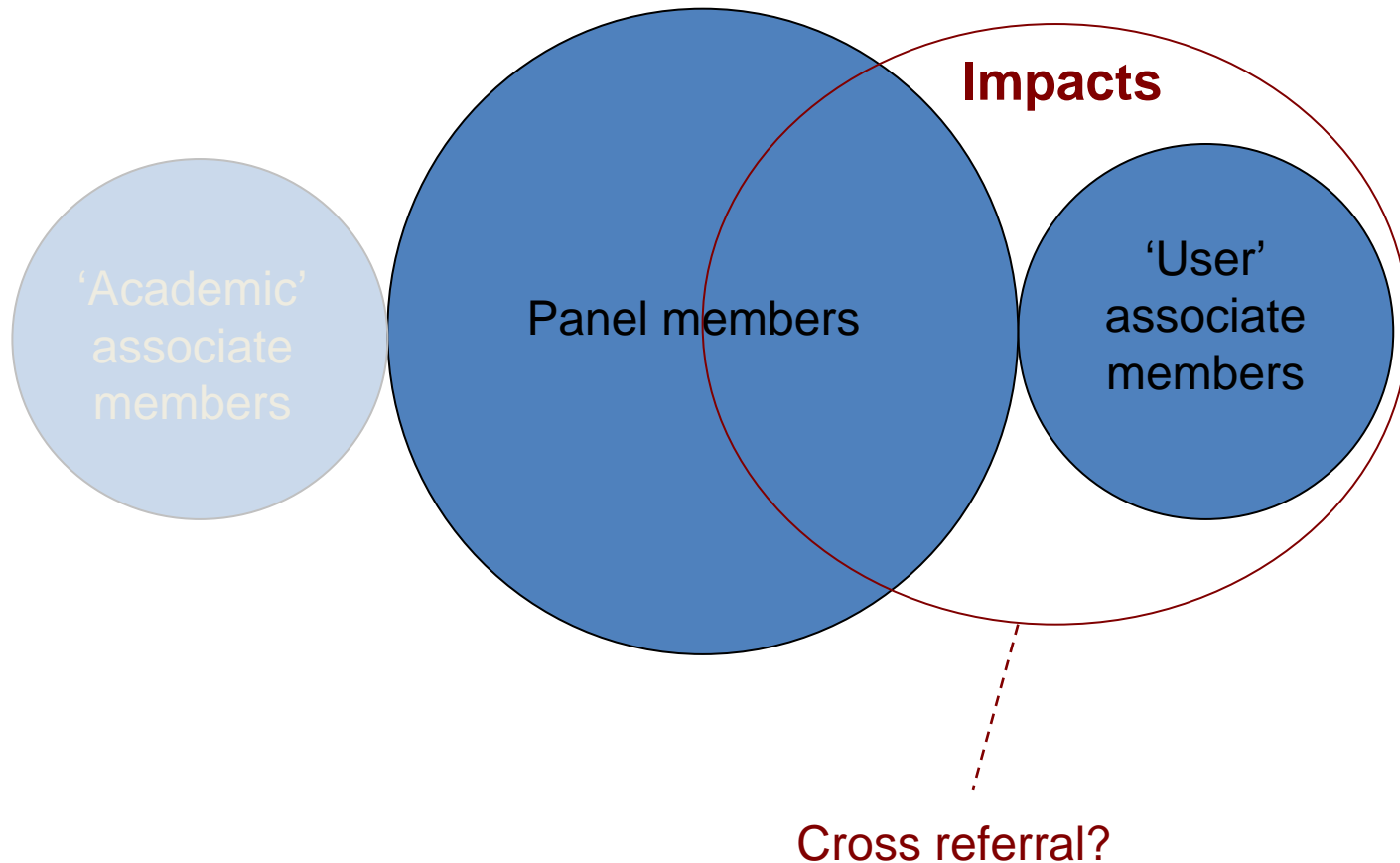
Panel arrangements



Panel arrangements



Panel arrangements



User membership

Businesses

Industry associations

Professional/practitioner bodies

Government departments

Public service providers

Regulatory bodies

Service user representatives

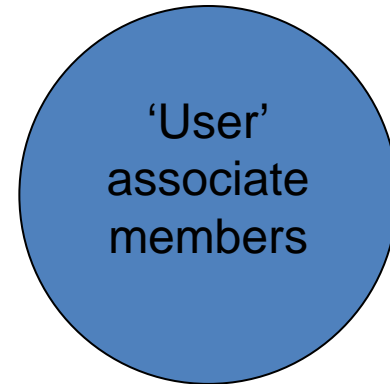
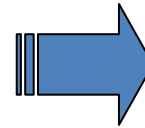
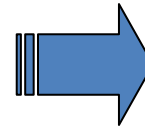
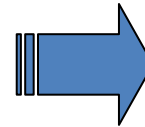
NGOs

Charities

Civic and social organisations

Cultural organisations

UK, overseas and international



Equalities and diversity

- Building on measures taken in the RAE
- Codes of practice and supporting effective implementation within HEIs
- Individual staff circumstances
- A central equalities group?
- What are the equalities implications of:
 - using citation information?
 - assessing impact?

Reducing burden

- RAE accountability burden ~ 0.5% of annual QR funding
- Fewer units of assessment operating more consistently across the exercise
- Simplified categories of eligible staff
- Alignment of data requirements
- Generic templates for impact and environment
- Reducing panel workload

What does this mean for researchers?

Some things will be the same:

- Assessment of bodies of research activity to inform the funding of whole institutions
- Primary evidence is the selected outputs of researchers chosen for submission by their HEI
- Selected outputs judged against unchanged criteria of originality, rigour and significance
- Level playing field for all types of output

What does this mean for researchers ?

Some things will be enhanced or different:

- New assessment element looking at the impact of bodies of research activity over a period
- Systematic use of bibliometric data in some disciplines
- Confirmation of equal treatment for interdisciplinary research
- Fewer larger UoAs and consistency of approach - less tactical choice on which UoA to submit in.

What does this mean for researchers ?

Some things will be enhanced or different (2):

- Simplified categories of eligible staff
- Reduced emphasis on esteem indicators
- Looking again at equalities issues – including new arrangements for special circumstances
- Researcher mobility encouraged
- 3 outputs and/or double weighting?

Any questions?

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