REF 2014: Briefing for Researcher Developers

Utilising researcher development in REF 2014 submissions

Background
The REF 2014 assessment outcomes will affect the reputation and funding of your submitting units and university.

This briefing has been developed for researcher developers such that they can help those responsible for preparing submissions within their institutions, to maximise the quality of their Environment submission. The guide is written such that researcher developers can have productive conversations with those writing REF 5 template section C on “People” and importantly, supply and distil relevant information for submitting units who may be unfamiliar with much of the evidence that is available. The information is not intended as a definitive guide as each institution will have a particular range of information available, rather to act as a prompt for consideration for those preparing submissions.

A shorter ‘REF 2014: Summary for Submitting Units’ (available on www.vitae.ac.uk/ref) can be used to inform those involved in REF preparation in institutions about how researcher developers and staff developers can provide evidence that might be used for the Environment in REF 2014.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014)
http://www.ref.ac.uk/

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) will assess the quality of research in UK Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and will be completed November 2014. This process covers research activity that has taken place during the period 2008–2013. The primary purpose of the REF 2014 is to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by institutions through a process of expert review.

- The funding bodies intend to use the assessment outcomes to inform the selective allocation of their research funding to HEIs, with effect from 2015-16.
- The assessment provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment.
- The assessment outcomes provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks.

Units preparing submissions
For REF 2014, institutions are invited to make submissions to 36 submitting units which are associated with one of four main panels (A-D). The submissions will be assessed by an expert sub-panel to be established for each unit, working under the guidance of four main panels (A-D) to ensure common procedures and consistent application of the overall assessment standards. Three distinct elements will be assessed for each submission:

1. Quality of research outputs
2. Wider impact of research
3. Vitality and sustainability of the research environment

This briefing is concerned with the third element for which sub-panels will assess the research environment in terms of its ‘vitality and sustainability’, including its contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline or research base. This element will carry a weighting of 15 per cent.
REF Environment

The REF panels will form an Environment sub-profile by assessing the information submitted in REF5 (the Environment template), informed by the data submitted in REF4a/b/c. Each submission must include a single completed Environment template (REF 5). There is no expectation that the Environment element of a submission will relate to a single department.

Guidance on the content and assessment criteria for REF5 is provided in each of the four panels guidance.

What kinds of evidence might be used by submitting units to demonstrate researcher development in the Environment (section C REF 5)?

Submitting units are advised to make reference to central training supplemented by information and evidence at submitting unit level. Below are some areas which researcher developers might use to help support submitting units in putting together their submissions. Recognising that submitting units may not be familiar with some of the evidence it is recommended that researcher developers consider how the evidence below can be used to demonstrate impact and to highlight where particularly good practice is taking place in submitting units.

Early career research staff

All four panels (A – D) identify in the people section (C) a range of activities relating to early career research staff. For the purpose of REF, early career research staff are defined as ‘members of staff who meet the criteria to be selected as Category A or Category C staff on the census date, and who started their careers as independent researchers on or after 1 August 2009’ (para 85 of Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submission).

Panel criteria

In Panel Criteria and Working Methods, each of the four panels clearly sets out the criteria for ‘People’ which includes early career researchers and established academic staff, and postgraduate researchers.

Common to all four panels in the ‘People’ section are:

- Evidence of a commitment to implement the principles of the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers. The Concordat was launched in 2008 and is supported by all major UK research funders and Universities UK. Through the implementation of its principles, it aims to enhance the attractiveness of research careers and thereby sustain research excellence, bringing benefits to the health, economy and well-being in the UK. It is anticipated that much of the activity and collection of evidence of success will be centrally managed through a staff/researcher development and HR function. While some of the central data will be useful for context, much of the information relating to Concordat implementation will need to be re-analysed for submitting unit purposes. In addition submitting units should consider what the evidence says about the support available, for example if trends are evident from survey data (CROS, PIRLS) what does this imply about the extent to which the Concordat principles are being meet and for the vitality and sustainability of the research environment in that submitting unit?
- Evidence of provision of support for research careers. Panel D highlights ‘clear procedures for career progression of staff at all stages of their careers’
- Skills development and career guidance for postgraduate researchers

In addition the following are all mentioned in the REF documentation:

- Evidence of support for equality and diversity
- Integration of early career researchers into the wider research culture
- The availability of career development for researchers at all stages
- The use of coaches and mentors to support researchers and research leaders
- Exchanges between academic and other sectors through recruitment and secondment of staff

Recognition and awards

There are a number of awards and other pathways that recognise the quality of researcher development provision by HEIs. These can be used as evidence of a high standard of support for researchers and a wider commitment to an excellent research environment.

The following are examples:

- “HR Excellence in Research” is awarded by the European Commission. HEIs which are committed to implementing the principles of the Concordat are able to gain recognition through the ‘HR Excellence in Research’ process. Over 70 UK institutions have achieved this recognition. Check if your institution has gained recognition and consider its impact on the quality of provision in the submitting unit.
- If your institution has not yet gained this recognition it would be worth checking with HR or staff/researcher development function to identify if a submission is being prepared and at what stage the application is.
- Submitting units might also wish to consider what has been done to implement the 7 principles of the Concordat within the unit. They may, for example, draw attention to any groups or committees formed to review progress against implementation and highlight any information sets used to either identify gaps in provision, or recognise achievements in Concordat implementation since 2008.
- Submitting units at institutions who have published Concordat action plans are encouraged to refer to and highlight any specific strategies to ensure implementation of the principles.
Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is run by the Higher Education Academy. The survey collects feedback from current postgraduate researchers in a systematic and user-friendly way. Results are anonymous, allowing comparison against the sector and within benchmarking clubs, while ensuring that they are used for internal enhancement. There is evidence from case studies across the sector that PRES informs enhancements to the experience of postgraduate researchers. The next Postgraduate Research Experience Survey will run from 5 March to 16 May 2013.

Internal staff surveys that your institution may have deployed could provide data pertaining to researcher development.

Which HR policies or procedures does your institution have in place to enable career development support at all stages in research careers (Panel B)? These may include policies on the use of fixed-term contracts for researchers, promotion policies, flexible working policies, maternity/paternity leave policies etc. teaching opportunities for postgraduate researchers and research staff to develop their teaching skills can be considered, whether through supervision of undergraduate projects, teaching small groups or delivering lectures.

Institutional development provision

Units preparing submissions are advised to contextualise all the evidence used to what is actually happening and the impact this is having at submitting unit level. Due consideration should be given to the range, scope and reach of institutional skills training provision and the extent to which this is utilised within the submitting unit drawing specific attention to areas which complement the implementation of the Concordat principles, the Vitae Researcher Development Framework and career development. In addition submitting units may wish to draw attention to collaborative approaches between HEIs to provide researcher development opportunities, and any evaluation evidence collected that demonstrates the strength, usefulness or impact of such development. Engagement statistics of research staff and postgraduate researchers should also prove useful.

Training needs analysis

Institutions should consider what opportunities exist for researchers to undertake training needs analysis, develop a Professional Development Plan (PDP) and record their training. Some institutions have software that is used for this purpose, may collect data internally, or use the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (RDF) Planner, an easy-to-use web application that enables researchers to work with the comprehensive Vitae Researcher Development Framework to identify their expertise and capabilities, plan their professional development, set professional targets and demonstrate evidence of success. Submitting units may wish to check with their HR departments for evidence of activities, for example up-to-date recruitment and selection guidance available to managers of research staff or support with conducting performance review for researchers.
Researcher mobility and exchange opportunities

One way of enhancing the research environment is through staff and researcher exchange with other organisations both within the UK and internationally. Researcher mobility is a priority issue for the EU and submitting units are encouraged to consider how they provide opportunities for researchers to gain experience in other organisations outside the HEI sector (e.g. industry, voluntary sector, public sector etc). Submitting units may wish to consider what exchange opportunities exist for the academics and researchers working within their institution and what evidence may exist as to how these have enhanced the research environment. This may include internships, placements and secondments as well as aspects of staffing appointments. Some submitting units may be able to provide evidence of collaborations through Doctoral Training Centres for postgraduate researchers or through other collaborative activities.

Employability and destination data

HEIs should consider whether they are able to point to the employability of their research staff and information about where those that have left have gone and what they are doing now. Contact may be through alumni or through other networks. The institution may have HESA data on postgraduate researcher destinations through exit interviews or alumni surveys. Background information with regard to the UK picture, specific disciplines and career destinations is available in the Vitae ‘What do researchers do’ series.

Support for the impact agenda

Evidence might be provided of the institutional support for researchers to help them to understand the impact agenda, build impact into their research and identify and effect impact on research already completed, for example training in writing impact statements and conveying impact through public engagement.

Equality and diversity

Each institution had to submit its code of practice to the REF team by 31 July 2012 and the funding bodies will publish all codes of practice alongside REF submissions at the conclusion of the exercise.

Evidence of how the submitting unit supports equality and diversity could include examples such as:

- flexible working
- study leave, extended leave and maternity/paternity/carer’s leave
- opportunities for part-time staff
- arrangements for staff who are returning to a research career after a career break
- arrangements for those seconded from outside higher education
- how staff from a wide cross-section of society can engage in research
- equal pay audit
- achievement of Athena Swan Charter status
- analysis of heidi equality data
- evidence of the use of the ‘Every Researcher Counts’ resources targeted to principal investigators as well as stakeholder briefings mapping equality and diversity to actions relevant to all principles of the Concordat

Additional activities that submitting units preparing submissions may wish to consider

While the range of possible evidence that may enhance a submitting unit return is very broad, the following are examples of some reasonably common activities across UK institutions where evidence may be found.

- Research Staff Associations and grass roots led researcher forum. The UK Research Staff Association have recently published a publication on the benefits of research associations.
- Researcher led initiatives: Your institution may have a fund available or otherwise support researchers to bid for funding to support their own professional development project.
- Postgraduate researchers’ transitions: Your institution may conduct analysis of alumni destinations of postgraduate researchers or research staff. Is there data available at central or submitting unit level to complement the national ‘What do researchers do?’ information and data?
- Use of ‘Early Career Researcher’ champions: Your institution may have evidence of researchers who are now academic staff or who have won fellowships.
- The Vitae ‘Preparing for the Research Excellence Framework: Researcher development, the environment and future impact’ workshop on supporting REF highlighted that those submitting Environment data might consider:
  - translating the Concordat and survey information down to submitting unit level
  - the need to make each submitting unit submission different and reflective of what has happened in those departments
  - the balance of institutional information and submitting unit level information/evidence
Essential Resources


Panel criteria and working methods: (this details what each submission should include) [http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2012-01/](http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2012-01/)

Panel membership: [http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/panelmembership/](http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/panelmembership/)

PRES 2013: [http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres](http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/pres)
CROS 2013: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/cros](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/cros)
PIRLS 2013: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/pirls](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/pirls)

RDF Planner: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/rdfplanner)

What do researchers do?: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/wdrd)

Every Researcher Counts project: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/everyresearchercounts](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/everyresearchercounts)

UK Research Staff Association: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/ukrsa](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/ukrsa)

Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/concordat)

Further information on REF for researcher developers: [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/ref](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/ref)

About this briefing

This briefing draws on a workshop presented at the Vitae ‘Preparing for the Research Excellence Framework: Researcher development, the environment and future impact’ conference in Manchester July 2012 by members of the Vitae Research Staff Advisory Group (ResDAG), Karen Clegg, University of York and Rob Daley, Herriot-Watt University. The Conference, attended by senior managers, researcher developers and REF managers explored how staff involved in researcher development can best support their institution in returning the environment criteria in the upcoming REF assessment and in developing impactful researchers of the future. Further details and a full record of the conference including slides and podcasts of key note presentations and workshops is available here.

The briefing was discussed by participants at the workshop ‘Researcher development contribution to institutional REF submissions’ at the Vitae Policy Forum 2013, an invitation-only event for pro-vice-chancellors or equivalent senior staff who could speak on behalf of the institution. [http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2013](http://www.vitae.ac.uk/policyforum2013).

The briefing has been written by Karen Clegg and Rob Daley, with input from Alison Mitchell and Ellen Pearce at Vitae.

An additional ‘REF 2014: Summary for Submitting Units’ has been written with additional input from Rosie Beales (RCUK), member of Vitae Research Staff Advisory Group (ResDAG), to inform those involved in REF preparation in institutions on how researcher and staff developers can help provide evidence for the Environment in REF 2014.

Environment template (REF5)

REF Environment Assessment weighting

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<th>Panel A</th>
<th>Panel B</th>
<th>Panel C</th>
<th>Panel D</th>
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<tr>
<td>a. Overview</td>
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<td>Not assessed</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Research strategy</td>
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<td>25%</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. People (staffing strategy and staff development; and research students)</td>
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<td>30%</td>
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<td>d. Income, infrastructure and facilities</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Collaboration and contribution to the discipline or research base</td>
<td>25%</td>
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