Supplementary questions on the second Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Council for Allied Health Professions Research

September 2017

Introduction

The Council for Allied Health Professions Research (CAHPR) is the representative voice of the 12 AHP professions on research matters. Our member organisations include:

• British and Irish Orthoptic Society

• British Association of Art Therapists

• British Association of Drama Therapists

• British Association for Music Therapy

• British Association of Prosthetists and Orthotists

• British Dietetic Association

• College of Paramedics

• College of Podiatry

• Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

• Royal College of Occupational Therapists

• Royal College of Speech & Language Therapists

• Society and College of Radiographers

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HEFCE REF consultation - Questions on staff and output portability

The following feedback was given on the details required to finalise the outlined alternative approach to identifying staff who have a significant responsibility for research, and proposed alternative approaches to output portability.

Identifying staff with a significant responsibility for research

1.   As set out in HEFCE Circular letter 33/2017, many respondents to the consultation raised concern about the proposed approach to use contract status alone as the basis for identifying staff with significant responsibility for research. We are therefore engaging in further dialogue with the sector to finalise the details of an alternative approach whereby HEIs, working with their staff and with guidelines, identify who is in scope.

2.   The alternative approach sets out four criteria that collectively identify staff in scope for inclusion. Staff:

- have an academic employment function of 'research only' or 'teaching and research'
- are independent researchers
- hold minimum employment of 0.2 full-time equivalent
- have a substantive connection to the submitting institution.

3.   Institutions may put in place processes to determine whether staff who meet these criteria do or do not have a significant responsibility for research. We are interested in views on any additional guidance that would be necessary to enable institutions to develop these processes. For example, are there generic key attributes that could identify staff with significant responsibility for research?

We would see the following as being broad characteristics to capture:

- Have research experience

- Hold key roles in research projects

- Be actively participating in knowledge translation

In terms of identifying staff with significant responsibility for research, we would see that a useful indicator would be staff for whom 0.2fte or more of their time was apportioned to research activity and planning.

This measure could potentially be managed through HESA's proposed introduction of four new sub-levels of teaching and research coding – i) teaching and REF research, ii) teaching and knowledge exchange/enterprise activity, iii) teaching and practice, and iv) teaching and scholarship – and requiring all HEIs to code each member of their academic staff to one of these.

4.   For clarity, research assistants will not be considered to meet the above criteria unless, exceptionally and demonstrably, they are deemed to be independent researchers.

5.   In response to consultation feedback, we will work with the main panels to provide further guidance appropriate to the discipline areas on the definition of an 'independent researcher'. This will build on a generic definition, developed from that used in REF 2014 (undertaking 'independent research, leading or acting as principal investigator or equivalent on a research

grant or significant piece of research work'.)[1] We are interested in views on whether there are further characteristics of independent researchers, common across the main panels, that could be incorporated into the generic guidance.

> We see the proposed characteristics as being acceptable.
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> We also recognise that, within large research programmes that use a range of methodological approaches, a range of key researchers are often needed to lead on different components.
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> Therefore, they could each be defined as principal investigators for the discrete elements of the research programme. We would anticipate that this trend could increase with an increasing (and welcome) emphasis on multi-disciplinary research activity.

6.   We are also interested in any additional views or comments on the details of this approach, to support the funding bodies in finalising their decisions in this area.

> As a body that represents professions/disciplines that have a growing research culture, we see it as essential that due attention is placed on supporting and enabling new researcher development, rather than simply a focus on world-leading research (since this has the potential not to enable capacity-building and future growth and outputs).
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> We also ask that the impact of the decision made is kept under review; e.g. in terms of the trends in submission (whether across types of HEI and across disciplines), such that significant differences can be picked up. We particularly note that it is acknowledged that practice-based disciplines (e.g. those attached to particular professions) tend to have different levels of research activity compared with less vocational ones. Given the disciplines we represent, we have a particular interest in, and potential concern about, the impact of how 'significant research' is defined, and its potential impact on future research capacity, activity and outputs for our professions' growth.

Output portability

7.   We have presented two options for putting in place transitionary arrangements relating to output portability, to ensure the originating institution receives credit for outputs while also seeking to address concerns raised in the consultation about researcher mobility and the practical implementation of the proposal. These options are briefly summarised as:

    a.   The simplified model, whereby outputs would be eligible for return by the originating institution (i.e. the institution where the research output was demonstrably generated and at which the member of staff was employed) *as well as* by the newly employing institution.

    b.   The hybrid approach, with a deadline (to be determined), after which a limited number of outputs would transfer with staff, with eligibility otherwise linked to the originating institution. (This would mean operating two rules for portability in this exercise: the outputs of staff employed before the specified date falling under the 2014 rules of full portability; outputs from staff employed after this date would fall under the new rules.)

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[1] Assessment framework and guidance on submissions' (REF 02.2011, www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2011-02/), paragraph 85b.

8.   While both options seek to address the aims set out in the Stern review and the issues raised in consultation responses, the potential complexity and burden indicated in paragraph 7b needs to be considered against the less precise approach offered in paragraph 7a. We are interested in views on which of these options is preferable, and the rationale for this preference.

We see that the proposal in 9a appears to be the most practical and pragmatic option. At the same time, it runs the risk that it will encourage lots of staff transfers from one HEI to another, and compound issues of the double-counting of research outputs.

We can see that a hybrid model, as suggested in 9b, could be more accurate. At the same time, it would be burdensome to administer and for HEIs to ensure compliance. It would also be likely to risk encouraging tactical staff recruitment by a particular deadline, as defined by the REF-defined cut-off point, and therefore not remove the 'game-playing' it would be designed to address.

As an approach for the next REF exercise, we therefore see the simplified model in 9a as preferable. We also see that it is in line with the existing arrangements for how outputs are already counted in the case of research that is co-authored by staff from different HEIs and by staff submitted to different UoAs in the same institutions. It would therefore be consistent with existing practice.

Implementation of the adopted approach will need to be kept under careful review through implementation of the next REF review process. For example, this may highlight trends within and across sub-panels that will require careful consideration, including to ensure that the conclusions of the exercise are not distorted, inflated and devalued (e.g. in disciplines where/institutions for which the stakes might be particularly high).

9.   With reference to your preferred option, what are the challenges relating to implementation that need to be taken into account in developing the approach?

Please see our response to question 10.