

Response ID ANON-1JJU-4GB4-B

Submitted to Research Excellence Framework 2028: issues for further consultation following the initial decisions
Submitted on 2023-10-05 20:49:24

Personal Details

1 What is your name?

Name:
Dr Elizabeth I Watkins

2 What is your email address?

Email:
e.i.watkins@leeds.ac.uk

3 What is your organisation/institution?

Organisation/Institution:
British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies

4 Are you answering on behalf of your organisation/institution or as an individual?

Organisation/Institution

Volume Measure

5 What practical challenges may institutions face in implementing these changes?

This is an open text field:

REF 2021/2028 and HESA data:

The BAFTSS Executive Committee is concerned that the proposal to link Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to the REF will occlude the interdisciplinary strength of research in film, television and screen studies. HESA data does not readily capture the diverse work of our subject areas. Work in film, television, screen studies and practice research reaches across REF2021 Units of Assessment including UoA33, UoA34, UoA32, UoA27, UoA25. Thus the scope and quantity of excellent research and innovative practices in film, television and screen is not readily captured in post-REF analytical narratives.

Volume Measure, fixed term contracts and the Concordat to Support Research Integrity:

The reliance on HESA data to calculate volume measure of staff within the REF 2028 assessment period by UK funding bodies could contradict the Concordat to Support Research Integrity (<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-08/Updated%20FINAL-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf> August 2023).

Signatories to the UK Higher Education Institutes (HEI) Concordat to Support Research Integrity include the UKRI, British Academy, Universities UK and Scottish Funding Council. The Concordat includes a commitment to 'support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers' (p.1 point. 3). It is vital that Universities are required to support researchers on fixed term contracts and scholars who are on teaching-only contracts by ensuring that they have access to resources, research time and funding within a supportive environment that is equal to the provision for academic staff who are on open-ended contracts.

Portability of research outputs:

The proposal to remove the link between individual scholars and research outputs is problematic. This compromises the 'portability' of research outputs, which in REF 2021 moved with academics who were employed on Fixed Term Contracts. The BAFTSS EC is concerned that the removal of the portability of research outputs will de-value research staff who are actively seeking future employment. The removal of 'portability' of outputs potentially enables UK HEIs to submit work that has been produced by staff whose contracts of employment do not include a % paid research time (e.g. teaching-only contracts) or equitable access to funding to support its completion.

Thus the BAFTSS Executive Committee consider that the retention of the portability of research outputs is paramount.

6 How might the funding bodies mitigate against these challenges?

This is an open text field:

Ethical requirements and supporting statements:

UK Funding bodies could mitigate against these challenges by strengthening the ethical requirements for UK HEIs in the institutional statement. Further, the disparity between the weighting of the institutional statement (20%) and that of the UoA statement (5%) in the People, Culture and Environment section should be decreased. This enables more detailed narratives that are attentive to the nuanced research interests of our Association subject areas and better capture the scope and interdisciplinarity of film, television, screen studies and practice research.

Increased ethical practice in the support of researchers on fixed term and teaching-only contracts:

The REF2028 assessors could invite independent comment (e.g. on support structures, access to funding and career development at host institutes) from fixed term contract staff. This could be appended to the ethical section of each HEI's statement. HEIs might also be encouraged to request the consent of researchers on fixed term contracts, at the end of their contracts, for the inclusion of work and contribution to research environment for the UK HEI REF 2028 submissions.

7 What would be the impact of these changes on individual researchers and particularly those with protected characteristics or other underrepresented groups?

This is an open text field:

Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity: The REF 2021 Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Report noted that discrepancies on the basis of age, gender, and race persist in the selection of outputs for assessment. Recognition of under-represented groups, whose perspectives strengthen research and innovation across all subject areas, is vital. The REF 2021 EDI Report and the AHRC Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (<https://www.ukri.org/publications/ahrc-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-action-plan/ahrc-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-action-plan-research-and-innovation-by-e> 14 March 2023) indicate that access to funding, supportive inclusive research environments are integral to this.

BAFTSS recognises that these issues disproportionately impact on Early Career Researchers, Mid-Career Researchers on fixed term contracts, fractional contracts, and teaching- focussed contracts. Scholars on such contracts are highly skilled, yet sometimes find themselves ineligible for grant applications, without contracted research hours, or funding to visit archives or attend conferences. BAFTSS offers support for scholars working to pursue their research in these circumstances, through funding schemes and its research networks.

We are concerned that the proposed changes to the REF2028, such as the use of a volume measure to calculate the average FTE of eligible staff in the assessment period, would allow HEIs to submit outputs produced by these scholars.

Output Submission

8 What would be the impact of these changes on individual researchers and particularly those with protected characteristics or other underrepresented groups?

This is an open text field:

REF2021 EDI Report (<https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1863/ref-edap-final-report-2022-final11.pdf>), which operated across all panels, identified discrepancies in the selection of outputs for inclusion in REF2021. The report found that: 'the only consistently reported findings related to sex. Around half of the institutions carried out an analysis comparing their submitted population with their eligible population. Of these, the vast majority reported an under-representation of female staff having four or five outputs allocated to them' (REF2021 EDI report, p.23. point 41). The report recognises that the selection of outputs is highly problematic in its tendency to 'reinforce gender imbalances' (REF2021 EDI report, p.23) similar to that of ECRs and mid-career researchers on fixed term and fractional contracts.

The report also recognises the value of REF equality-related training, which BAFTSS supports as a way to further develop inclusive and supportive research cultures, environments and assessment frameworks in HEIs.

The following changes, which have been proposed for the REF 2028 are problematic, because they potentially allow HEIs to invest time, funding and support exclusively in a comparatively small number of academics:

- the introduction of a volume measure based on the average number of Full Time Employed staff during the REF2028 assessment period, to calculate the number outputs required.
- disconnecting individual researchers from research outputs, which removes the 'portability' of research outputs that had. moved from one HEI to another with the researcher/author/practitioner for REF 2021.
- the proposed decrease in impact case studies.

The proposed changes potentially disincentivise HEIs from employing researchers on Fixed Term Contracts and offering research support for continuing and professional development.

We ask that the ethical requirements for HEIs in the Institutional statements and in the People, Environment, Culture sections are strengthened. We also question whether the subject-level evidence-based statement and People, Culture, Environment profile will be sufficient to allow rigorous assessment of a HEI's commitment to Equality Diversity Inclusivity, Early Career Researchers, fixed term contract researchers, and scholars on teaching-focussed contracts?

9 What impact would these changes have on institutions in preparing output submissions? For example, what may be the unintended consequences of allowing the submission of outputs produced by those on non-academic or teaching-only contracts?

This is an open text field:

The Concordat to Support Research Integrity

(<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-08/Updated%20FINAL-the-concordat-to-support-research-integrity.pdf> August 2023).

states that there is a direct link between the transparency of institutional infrastructures and ethical research practice. However, the shift away from a staff census date and toward a volume measure of staff retains the potential for discrepancies in Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity. This is problematic. An additional unintended consequence of this could be the fragmentation of research environments, cultures by devaluing Early Career Researchers, Mid-Career Researchers on fractional and Fixed Term Contracts on the basis of their contractual status. We are concerned that the changes proposed for REF 2028, may disincentivise the provision of research time and funding for researchers who are employed on teaching-only contracts. For example, the

REF2028 may reduce the visibility of teaching-only staff, who are expected to offer research-led teaching without contracted research hours, and scholars who are on 'non-academic' and fixed term contracts. We ask that HEI ethical statements are required to attend to the support given to all staff and visiting scholars regardless of their contractual status. This would better recognise and increase the visibility of work by ECRs, Mid-Career Researchers on Fixed Term, Fractional and Teaching-only Contracts, and Visiting Scholars as integral to the research environment and culture of each University.

10 Should outputs sole-authored by postgraduate research students be eligible for submission? If so, should this include PhD theses?

This is an open text field:

The primary focus of doctoral study in BAFTSS subject areas of film, television and screen studies, is the completion of a doctoral thesis or meeting the requirements of a Practice Research PhD.

BAFTSS recognises that a significant number of PhD projects are self-funded by Postgraduate Researchers. We are concerned that the inclusion of doctoral theses in the REF2028 could:

- enable HEIs to submit work for which they have offered little financial support.
- exacerbate the effects of the recently announced cuts to AHRC funding to PhD studentships. The cuts to AHRC funding would reduce 425 yearly fully-funded studentships to 300 by the academic year 2029-30 and negatively impact on the opportunities available for students from working class backgrounds.
- fragment doctoral cohorts into a hierarchy of PGRs who are self-funded and those who have financial and research support from research councils.

The BAFTSS Executive Committee is potentially open to the opportunity for journal articles written by Postgraduate Researchers to be included in the REF2028. However, we do have serious concerns about this proposal. We recognise that the eligibility of PGR work for the REF2028 presents a complex set of ethical issues around the provision of a supportive environment for all PGRs. Areas of concern include:

- the additional pressure on PGRs to publish.
- the impact of the future decrease in research funding from Research Councils and host HEIs on the provision of support for PGRs.
- we believe that the independent and informed consent of PGRs for the potential inclusion of their journal articles in the REF 2028 is vital.
- the retention of the portability of research outputs for REF 2028 is paramount as PGRs potentially move into academic employment at a different HEI.

As such, the BAFTSS Executive Committee urge further discussion before any decision is taken regarding the inclusion of journal articles that have been authored or co-authored by PGRs in the REF2028.

11 What would be appropriate indicators of a demonstrable and substantive link to the submitting institution?

This is an open text field:

The REF 2028 submissions can include any member of staff who has been employed on 0.2% FTE contract for 6months or more during the REF 2028 assessment period. We note that this is intended to facilitate the movement of individuals who have specialist knowledge, experience and skills between industry and academia. In this respect, we note that the REF 2028 does not have a staff census date, but will use an average FTE staff to calculate the volume measure at each HEI.

However, this change is problematic as it allows HEIs to break the link between individuals and the content of the submission. We are extremely concerned that severing the link between individuals and research outputs will negatively impact on Early Career Researchers, Mid-Career researchers on fixed-term contracts who continue to seek employment, and scholars who seek to move from teaching-only contracts to Research-and-Teaching contracts. For example, we were alarmed to read in the Times Higher Education supplement that in the year prior to REF2021 some UK universities reclassified more than two-thirds of their staff to alter eligibility numbers (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/some-uk-universities-saw-teaching-contract-jump-ref-loomed> April 2021).

12 Do the proposed arrangements for co-authored outputs strike the right balance between supporting collaboration and ensuring that assessment focuses on the work of the unit?

This is an open text field:

The BAFTSS Executive Committee notes that REF2028 guidance appears to omit the exception that was made for Main Panel D in the REF2021. The REF2021 guidance enabled outputs, co-authored by two or more researchers within the same unit, to be submitted more than once to the same UoA. Collaborative publications (e.g. edited collections, journal articles, monographs) and practice research works form an important part of interdisciplinary research in film, television and screen studies. We ask that the exception made in REF2021 guidance is retained.

13 Are there any further considerations around co-authored outputs that need be taken into account?

open text box:

N/A

Impact Case Studies

14 What will be the impact of reducing the minimum number to one?

This is an open text field:

We are concerned that reducing the minimum requirement for Impact and Engagement Case Studies to one item risks the redirection of research resources (e.g. funding, time, administrative support) toward a small number of select academics. We ask that the REF requires HEIs to evidence that they abide by an ethical agreement to support all staff and visiting scholars equitably. This ethical agreement should be accompanied by an evidence-based statement of ethical and transparent research practices in the Institutional statements and evidence-based statement from each academic discipline.

15 What will be the impact of revising the thresholds between case study requirements?

This is an open text field:

The Engagement and Impact element, which is to make up 25% of the submission with an additional 20% weighting given to the structured supporting statement, is preferable to the use of metrics for our subject areas.

16 To what extent do you support weighting the impact statement on a sliding scale in proportion to the number of case studies submitted?

This is an open text field:

If the option of the minimum requirement of 1 Impact Case Study is used, that case study and its structured statement would attract a higher percentage weighting. This option, although intended to appeal to smaller groups submitting to UoAs, could present a higher risk than the submission of more than 2 or 3 impact case studies, each attracting a small fraction of the overall weighting for Impact and Engagement. The option to submit a mitigating statement in the REF submission should be offered.

Unit of Assessment

17 If the UOA structure is relevant to you/your organisation, please indicate clearly any changes that you propose to the UOA structure and provide your rationale and any evidence to support your proposal.

This is an open text field:

BAFTSS notes that HESA data does not readily or adequately capture the diverse, interdisciplinary and often collaborative research undertaken across its subjects areas represented by the Association. Thus, we are concerned that connecting the REF 2028 to HESA data might not recognised or make visible the diversity and quantity of research in film, television and screen studies that reaches the highest standards of excellence. For example, HEFCE's Response to a joint statement by the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies and the Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association regarding the REF 2021 open consultations noted the 'differences in the rich and diverse histories and traditions of each association' and that there would be research outputs submitted across numerous UoAs. HEFCE's Response can be read here <https://www.meccsa.org.uk/news/joint-statement-from-baftss-and-meccsa-on-ref2021/>.

For example, BAFTSS includes scholars with research interests in film studies, film history, television studies, aesthetic and textual analyses of film, immersive media, digital media, archival research, film philosophy, modern languages, cultural studies, cultural theory, creative and cultural industries, practice research, gender and sexuality, popular culture and area studies. This evidences the interdisciplinary strength of our subject areas and connections that are integral to innovation, impact and engagement. The REF Panel D Overview Report (<https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1855/mp-d-overview-report-final.pdf>) notes a significant number of outputs submitted to UoA33 and UoA34 were in film, television and screen studies.

It is problematic to link REF2028 to HESA data because there are submissions in film, television and screen studies across numerous UoAs. These include:

UoA 25 Area Studies.

UoA 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics.

UoA 27 English Language and Literature.

UoA 33 Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies.

UoA 34 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management.

It is vital that the REF2028 finds a way to recognise film, television, screen studies across UoAs so that HEI decisions, future funding and post-REF analytical narratives make the breadth and value of work in our Association subject areas visible. In this respect, the British Association of Film, Television and Screen Studies asks that 'Television Studies' is named in UoA 33. We ask that HEFCE's recognition that there are significant research outputs in film, television and screen studies submitted across numerous UoAs is noted by the REF 2028 planning as this diversity and interdisciplinarity is integral to innovative research in our subject areas.

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

18 What is your view on the proposed measures to take into account the impact of the Covid pandemic?

This is an open text field:

We agree with the proposal to retain the institutional level Covid statement as an acknowledgement that its impact continues on the research environments and people's careers. However, we ask for clarification regarding how this statement will be evaluated or contribute to the REF assessment.

19 What other measures should the funding bodies consider to take into account the impact of the Covid pandemic?

This is an open text field:

N/A

Cymraeg in HEFCW

20 What positive or adverse effects will the proposals have on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

This is an open text field:

Research outputs that are written in Welsh, or any of the other official languages recognised across the UK, should be submissible and assessed as part of the REF2028 in the language that they were produced.

21 Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

This is an open text field:

REF Assessment panel staff working in the Welsh Language may encounter additional workload. BAFTSS asks that REF 2028 assessors are given time and support for what may be a disproportionately higher workload.