

Notes arising from UoA33 subject association meetings

Robert Adlington and Kate Dorney (chair and deputy chair, sub-panel 33)

Sector crisis

Widespread anxiety about impact of REF outcomes on jobs, departments and disciplines.

How can SPRE be navigated when there is such structural volatility in institutions?

Clear guidance requested for 'aggregate' or 'composite' units (areas previously submitted separately but now being combined into a single submission), especially in relation to research environment.

Widespread view that the new portability restrictions exacerbate employment crisis for EC and fixed-term researchers.

Robert and Kate responses:

- The crisis in our sector, and its impact upon UoA33 subjects, is being vigorously communicated to the REF team and will inform the remaining policy development.
- Aggregate submissions are widely expected across Main Panel D. Systems will be in place to equitably assess these, and to ensure that elements of the submission land with the right assessors.
- We will convey to the REF team the need for clarity around expectations for the SPRE-UL component for 'aggregate' or 'composite' units.
- We will continue to highlight the negative impacts on careers of the new approach to portability.

Practice research

Clarity requested on guidance for submission formats/options.

How can institutions be given confidence to double-weight practice outputs?

Request for additional support from PRAG-UK and related bodies.

Additional guidance requested on long-form/extended process for practice outputs.

How can REF recognise and accommodate the varying resources of HEIs for preparing practice outputs for submission?

Clarity on options for submission of practice outputs (live URL, acceptable format for digital files, limitations on what a panel will be able to access) requested at earliest stage.

A template for practice research outputs, making clear what information is needed, could level the ground between HEIs.

Guidance is needed on expectations in relation to coauthored practice outputs and how to evidence diverse research contributions.

How to navigate date that an output is 'effectively shared' for iterative practice projects?

Robert and Kate responses:

- The 2021 guidance on options for submitting practice research were widely found to be helpful, and we will convey this to the working group developing this part of the 2029 guidance.
- We welcome suggestions from the community on additional guidance that would be helpful.
- We will emphasise with the working group the need for added guidance that builds confidence to double-weight practice outputs and make claims of long-form/extended process.
- We will argue for flexibility regarding the electronic submission of practice outputs, and reassurance that substantial resource is not required for the presentation of practice outputs.
- We will liaise with PRAG and other groups representing practice research to explore means to support institutions in preparing their submissions.

Interdisciplinary research and UoA boundaries

How to approach option to submit outputs to more than one UoA? What are the limits?

How broad will the UoA descriptors be?

Unfairness of single-UoA institutions being unable to submit outputs to multiple sub-panels.

Robert and Kate responses:

- The established mechanisms of cross-referral and joint assessment (between more than one sub-panel) will ensure that all research finds the right assessors.
- We expect the UoA33 descriptor to be very similar to last time; sub-panels within Main Panel D are working together to ensure that the overlaps between UoAs are fully recognised.
- We share the concern about the potential inequities of the policy allowing multiple submissions of single-authored outputs, and have represented this concern to the REF team.

Engagement and impact

Clarity sought on how to interpret 'body of work' – in what circumstances can this involve grouping several research projects?

Robert and Kate responses:

- We will request that greater clarity is provided on the definition of 'body of work' for impact case studies.

Contracts and outputs

In what circumstances could an exception be requested for submitting outputs by teaching-only or emeritus staff?

What justifications are needed to return outputs sole-authored by research-enabling staff (e.g. in terms of job descriptions)?

Robert and Kate responses:

- We will request that additional information on these questions is provided in the final guidance.

Open Access

Concern that institutional responsibility in relation to Open Access should not be limited to compliance with UKRI or REF policies, given the huge financial implications.

Robert and Kate responses:

- We will convey this point to the working group developing the relevant bit of the SPRE guidance.

New elements of REF2029

Wide concern on implications of 60:40 split for SPRE, especially if it brings a negative consequence for the scores of small and vulnerable units.

Concern that single-UoA institutions will need to split a unitary research culture between two templates that will be scored separately.

Wide concern on implications of removal of portability for early-career and fixed-term staff.

Plea for Plain English in the guidance documents.

Concern about potential use of AI.

Robert and Kate responses:

- All of these concerns have been vigorously expressed to the REF team by Main Panel D. We will continue to represent these concerns.
- There will be no use of AI in REF assessment. Guidance on the use of REF in submissions is being finalised.