

## Higher Education Wales response to consultation on Research Excellence Framework

### Respondent's details

<b>Are you responding:</b> (Delete one)	On behalf of an organisation
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### Introductory Comments

This response has been drawn together following consultation with HEW members, the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Wales. HEW is a National Council of Universities UK. The response will report on areas of common concern from within the Welsh HE sector

We welcome the aim stated in the consultation that the REF should provide a unified UK-wide framework for research quality assessment while recognising that decisions on funding allocations will be taken by each funding body for its own country. Paragraph 12 of the REF consultation acknowledges that in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) requires HEIs to increasingly align their activities with its key policy directions and ambitions for economic growth.

The Welsh Assembly Government higher education strategy and plan for Wales, *For Our Future*, published in November 2009 reinforces this message and highlights the value it places on research. The document states that, "We wish to see strategic funding targeted on areas of existing strength and national priorities. Our aim will be to grow the Welsh research base where we are best placed to do so." The WAG produced a Science Policy for Wales in 2007 and is committed to the establishment of a Science Academy. The national priorities for research match funding which reflected the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects were announced in April 2009. These were:

- Digital economy
- Low carbon economy (including climate change mitigation/adaptation issues)
- Health and biosciences
- Advanced engineering and manufacturing

Strong indications were received following the 2008 RAE that on a number of panels research which informed the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) and sponsored bodies was not judged by the same quality criteria as work done for the UK government. It is important that research work undertaken for the devolved administrations, in our case informing WAG policy should have parity of esteem with work informing UK national policy. It is crucial that there is clear guidance to

panels and research users on the credibility of this work.

**Consultation question 1:** Do you agree with the proposed key features of the REF? If not, explain why.

HEW generally agrees with the proposed key features of the REF. The responses to the specific questions below highlight those areas where we have concerns.

**Consultation question 2:** What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing outputs? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

There is strong agreement that the tried and tested procedure that institutions should select staff and outputs for assessment should continue. A clearer definition of staff eligibility is welcomed.

**Consultation question 3:** What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing impact? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

The rationale for including the impact of research is understood. The Welsh Assembly Government feels that excellence in research has a vital role to play in both delivering social justice and economic prosperity. Comments on the weighting of impact are outlined below.

**Consultation question 4:** Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to assessing research environment?

Please note the comments made by individual Welsh HEIs on this issue.

**Consultation question 5:** Do you agree with our proposals for combining and weighting the output, impact and environment sub-profiles? If not please propose an alternative and explain why this is preferable.

HEW supports the combination of the three sub-profiles into an overall excellence profile and agrees that the assessment of the excellence of research outputs should remain the primary focus of the research exercise. The rationale for including the impact of research is understood. However, since the proposals relating to the assessment of impact need further development and the methodology will remain largely untried and untested, it is felt that the proposed weighting of 25% for impact is too high. The weighting of impact should be reduced and be no more than 20% or below.

**Consultation question 6:** What comments do you have on the panel configuration proposed at Annex E? Where suggesting alternative options for specific UOAs, please provide the reasons for this.

Measures to improve consistency and fairness of assessment are welcomed. However, please note the comments made by individual Welsh HEIs on this issue.

**Consultation question 7:** Do you agree with the proposed approach to ensuring consistency between panels?

Please see the comments outlined in the introductory comments above.

**Consultation question 8:** Do you have any suggested additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies? (If suggesting additional bodies, please provide their names and addresses and indicate how they are qualified to make nominations.)

We have no additional comments to make at this stage.

**Consultation question 9:** Do you agree that our proposed approach will ensure that interdisciplinary research is assessed on an equal footing with other types of research? Are there further measures we should consider to ensure that this is the case and that our approach is well understood?

In the 2008 RAE, Celtic Studies had a separate unit of assessment. However, since Celtic studies is covered within the European Languages and Studies REF Unit of assessment we are concerned that since the panel will have a wide remit they will not have the linguistic ability or sensitivity to the cultural significance within Wales to assess it fairly. It is requested to have a fluent Welsh speaker on the panel or at the least advice should be sought from a Welsh speaker.

**Consultation question 10:** Do you agree that our proposals for encouraging and supporting researcher mobility will have a positive effect; and are there other measures that should be taken within the REF to this end?

Please note the comments made by individual Welsh HEIs and UUK on this issue.

**Consultation question 11:** Are there any further ways in which we could improve the measures to promote equalities and diversity?

The REF will need to keep in mind the equal legal status of English and Welsh languages in Wales and for the need to take into account the use of a minority language in the assessment of outputs and impact of research.

**Consultation question 12:** Do you have any comments about the proposed timetable?

There are major concerns about the proposed timetable. This is because the impact pilot is not scheduled to conclude until 2010. The timeframe does not allow sufficient time to develop, test and validate the approach to impact. The majority of Welsh HEIs strongly encourage HEFCE to delay the REF for a year.

**Consultation question 13:** Are there any further areas in which we could reduce burden, without compromising the robustness of the process?

Please note the comments made by individual Welsh HEIs on this issue.

**Consultation question 14:** Do you have any other comments on the proposals?

The main comments are outlined above.