

The table below contains our chief recommendations to the consultation on the second Research Excellence Framework. Our full response is available at www.unialliance.ac.uk.

Recommendations in REF consultation	University Alliance position
<p>Question 7: Use of HESA cost centres to map research-active staff to Units of Assessment</p> <p>Institutions should not choose which Units of Assessment they make a submission to. All research-active staff would be associated with UOAs based on the mapping of HESA cost centres.</p>	<p>The use of HESA cost centre data to allocate staff to Units of Assessment is unworkable as there is little affiliation between the two. It will lead to research centres having their staff and outputs scattered across multiple UoAs and is likely to discourage interdisciplinary research. Institutions should continue to determine the UoA to which a researcher is allocated and present the information for audit on the REF census date.</p>
<p>Question 8: The use of HESA data to determine which staff are returned to the REF</p> <p>For institutions that choose to participate in the REF, all research-active staff should be included. The proposed definition of 'research-active' staff is staff returned to the HESA Staff Collection with an activity code of 'academic professional' and an academic employment function of either 'research only' or 'teaching and research'</p>	<p>Using HESA activity codes to determine which staff are returned to the REF is a blunt instrument. Not everyone with research in their contract is expected to produce outputs for the REF or spends enough time on research to be considered a significant researcher.</p> <p>The proposal will result in overworked panels looking intensively at inappropriate outputs that institutions never wanted to submit and an obfuscated picture of research excellence.</p> <p>Rather than having staff chosen automatically through HESA, institutions should identify individuals with "significant responsibility to undertake research" in accordance with the Stern Review and present the data for audit on the REF census date. The process should be underpinned by a strengthened Code of Practice and must be amenable to audit through random sampling and other methods.</p>
<p>Question 9: Output range per FTE submitted</p> <p>The proposed output range is 0-6 publications with an average of two per full-time equivalent (FTE) researcher returned in a Unit of Assessment.</p>	<p>Setting a minimum of one output per FTE is only justifiable if a significance test is used to determine which staff should be returned to the REF. An upper limit of four outputs, instead of the proposed six, would result in the inclusion of outputs from a broader base of researchers and stop 'superstars' being disproportionately represented.</p>

<p>Question 10: Ending portability of outputs</p> <p>In previous exercises, research outputs were linked to submitted staff, and could be returned for assessment by the institution currently employing individuals regardless of where they were employed when the output was produced. The Stern Review recommends that outputs should be submitted only by the institution where the output was demonstrably generated.</p>	<p>Non-portability has some advantages but is difficult to implement. It could also have adverse effects on certain groups such as early career researchers while incentivising staff to hold back research from publication. Except for allowing portability for some or all researchers, it is not obvious how these effects could be mitigated.</p>
<p>Question 38: Institutional-level assessment</p> <p>All institutions submitting to the REF should be required to submit some institutional-level impact case studies which arise from multi- and interdisciplinary and collaborative work. Each institution should be required to submit an institutional-level environment statement which complements the statement provided at submission level.</p>	<p>Institutional-level impact lacks an agreed definition and it is not clear how or whether comparisons should be drawn between different types and sizes of institution. Conceptually, it is easier to understand institutional impact as the aggregate of an institution’s research impact but this is already assessable at the unit-level – where assessment should remain.</p> <p>We can see merit in a broader view of research environment but only if used to determine whether an institution’s facilities are fit for purpose rather than better than those of another. As with institutional-level impact, inviting such comparisons is an unjust way of assessing different types of institution.</p> <p>Rather than creating a separate sub-profile for institutional-level environment, a new field should be introduced at the unit level which enables participants to reference an institutional environment strategy. Institutions will be assessed on the coherence of their unit-level environment statements in relation to a broader strategic statement that carries no separate weighting.</p>