



CREST / GuildHE's response to HEFCE's consultation on main and subpanel guidance for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014

5 October 2011

GuildHE and the Consortium for Research Excellence, Support and Training (CREST) recognise the important role that the Research Excellence Framework (REF), through the work of participating HEIs, researchers, main- and sub-panel members, will play in providing evidence to Government and stakeholders about the islands of excellent research driving innovation in the sector – particularly those existing in small, specialist and regional HEIs.

General issues: Across the main panels, consistency is preferable in that this will help HEIs to manage the already substantial institutional and departmental resources required to prepare REF submissions. This situation is compounded in small and specialist HEIs who wish to participate in the REF. This is the case with respect to the double-weighting of outputs; the approach of Main Panel D, giving HEIs the option of entering a 4th alternate output if the double weighting is not accepted, is preferable. Considering that the issue of determining whether the reach and quality of an output meets the double-weighting criteria will be an indicator of the panels' ability to strike appropriate balances between quantitative and qualitative assessments within the Framework, the onus should not be on the HEI to make this decision for some panels but not for others. That said, GuildHE is pleased with the discretion shown for 'emerging' disciplines: for example allowing for submission of data on registered vs. completed PGRs where appropriate.

Equality provisions: It is important that clear guidance with respect to issues of equality be confirmed as soon as possible. A consistent approach across main panels – for example, the reduction by one research output per pregnancy / maternity leave – would help HEIs and researchers prepare their submissions and manage their outputs in good time.

UOAs and boundary statements: GuildHE applaud the REF's intention to encourage and recognise collaborative and interdisciplinary research outputs, particularly in light of the Diamond report and the recognised value of cross-sectoral partnerships. However, further information on how cross-referrals will be handled (for example, what information will be included with respect to information about research environments and impact) is required.

Outputs: It is still not clear how the main and sub-panel guidance on outputs afford for the recognition of exceptional translational research outputs. This remains a challenge for the panels

and the REF in general; the inclusion of impact may help to alleviate this to an extent, but the metrics remain an issue, particularly in non-STEM disciplines.

Impact: We would like to reaffirm our support for the inclusion of impact in REF 2014, particularly in light of the important work many HEIs have undertaken in partnership with SMEs and communities to stimulate economic growth. This is and will become increasingly central to GuildHE Members' institutions as discussions around and policies associated with the Wilson report are clarified with respect to research and innovation. Given the current HE landscape, and the particular pressures on funding for translation research, maintaining an ongoing dialogue, with best practice and guidance from main and subpanels, about how to evidence engagement beyond academia through the templates and case studies is key, particularly given that this is the first time impact will be explicitly assessed. The new forms of data central to the quality of impact submissions and assessments will require revisiting by the sub-panels as disciplines continue to define how evidence (data, narrative, etc.) is best articulated.

Environment: We would like assurance that, with respect to the environment criteria, panels will use data (for example, research income) within the carefully considered context of what is required by specific disciplines. The scale of research activity relative to the size of the institution should be considered in order to ensure that outputs are assessed fairly and consistently. This will help to ensure the REF's recognition of and continued support for the UK HE research sector's efforts to produce quality outputs that engage with and benefit stakeholders, within diverse environments.

