

REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria

Page 2: Respondent details

Q1. Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of:

Subject association or learned society

Q2. Please provide the name of your organisation.

Society for French Studies

Q3. If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

judith.still@nottingham.ac.uk

Q4. If your response is in relation to specific main panels, please indicate which one(s):

Main Panel D: Arts and Humanities (Sub-Panels 25-34)

Relevant to all

Q5. We are seeking views during the consultation on both the draft guidance on submissions and the draft panel criteria and working methods. Please select the documents for which you would like to provide a response:

Both documents

Page 3: Guidance on submissions: Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework

Q6. 1a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework':

Neither agree nor disagree

1b. Please provide any comments on Part 1. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Both documents in their entirety would be clearer if they were shorter and there was less repetition within and between them. Does para 49 include material from the Environment statement where staff who are not submitted might be referenced for their contribution?

Page 4: Guidance on submissions: Part 2: Submissions

Q7. 2a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 2: Submissions':

Neither agree nor disagree

2b. Please provide any comments on Part 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The definition of interdisciplinary work in the document does not appear to demand collaboration from 2 or more academics representing distinct disciplines - but may include single-author outputs which bring together 2 or more disciplines. French Studies considers itself a discipline which encompasses a very significant amount of interdisciplinary work (and previous panels have made a statement to that effect). Much of the work submitted may be both drawing on language/cultural expertise and another field (history, politics, art, music, architecture, psychoanalysis etc.) It is not clear to us what the benefits would be of identifying a high proportion or indeed any outputs as 'interdisciplinary' at the point of submission. In the past we would have assumed that panel members might be able to deal with some interdisciplinary work (depending on their areas of specialisation) or could decide to cross-refer. Interdisciplinary work seems to be treated in the document as a thing in itself - while for us it would depend on which disciplines were coming together whether or not there was an issue to be resolved. IDAP seems quite opaque.

Page 5: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff details (REF1a/b)

Q8. 3a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details':

Neither agree nor disagree

3b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 1. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Para 121c the case where only one post is included in the FTE (i.e. only one individual is returned) but outputs for two individuals can be returned seems strange.

Q9. 4. Possible indicators of research independence are set out at paragraph 130, including a reference to a list of independent fellowships. This list is intended to guide institutions on determining independence for staff holding fellowships from major research funders. The list is not intended to be comprehensive. Do you have any comments on the clarity, usefulness, or coverage of this list? (Indicative 300 word limit)

This seems OK

Q10. 5a. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

Yes

Q11. 6a. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

No

Page 6: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff circumstances (paragraphs 149 to 193)

Q12. 7a. The proposed approach for taking account of circumstances will achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021:

Disagree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The proposed tariff may cause as many problems as it solves - it will be fair for some and not for others e.g. the equivalence between discrete periods of maternity leave on the one hand (involving childbirth and possibly breastfeeding), however long, and paternity or adoption leave (potentially only 4 months in length) on the other hand seems to fly in the face of statistical evidence on the very different impacts of maternity and paternity on careers in our field. The issue of tying reductions - frequently less than one output per circumstance - to individuals as opposed to the decoupled pool may be messy. The new system where there could be a hierarchy of 1-5 in terms of how many outputs an individual has submitted (with institutions selecting on the basis of perceived quality), with resultant impact on employability, promotion etc may or may not be mitigated by this tariff. Will institutions be concerned that a smaller pool affects research power (league tables)? If so they may seek to manage without seeking reductions - increasing the impact of the 1-5 hierarchy.

Q13. 7b. The potential advantages of the proposed approach outweigh the potential drawbacks identified:

Disagree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)

see above

Q14. 7c. Please provide any further comments on these proposals, including any suggestions for clarifying or refining the guidance. (Indicative 300 word limit)

see above

Output selection is already a huge burden on UoAs, usually falling mostly on senior staff experienced in research assessment - but not necessarily in the fine details of equality and diversity. Many of the training packages (e.g. in unconscious bias) are lamentable.

Circumstances have to be submitted about 9 months before the deadline for outputs to be in the public domain - it is not clear what the expectation is should a serious circumstance arrive after March 2020.

Page 7: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs (REF2)

Q15. 8a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs' is clear:

Neither agree nor disagree

8b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

para 219 nb not all journals routinely inform authors when the final version of record is made available on their website. para 226b and 245b - how do these relate to each other? does the later para cancel out the earlier one? The lack of clarity on open access should be remedied. para 263 the problem here could be the definition of 'a single discipline' (easier in some areas than others) - open to interpretation - Modern Language Studies would argue that different disciplines can exist within one institutional unit and one UoA - and some individuals have had training in distinct disciplines. That expertise may or may not be represented on a REF panel - particularly in the light of the very significant reduction in memberships relative to the old RAE panels. The issue is what the usefulness would be of flagging any output as interdisciplinary - not clear.

Q17. 10a. Paragraph 206.b sets out the funding bodies' intention to make ineligible the outputs of former staff who have been made redundant (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy). Do you agree with this proposal?

Yes

10b. Please provide any further comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

It would indeed be perverse to allow submission of REF items where there has been compulsory redundancy. What would the case be if a member of staff were dismissed?

Q18. 11a. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of co-authored outputs only once within the same submission?

No

11b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

It seems strange to discourage collaboration between colleagues in this way. Will 100% of the output be assessed if it is returned against only one name? For example a recent co-authored book in our field included some edited material, some chapters by one author only, some by the other author, and some chapters by both - it is unclear how that should be handled.

Page 9: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 3: Impact (REF3)

Q22. 13a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact' is clear:

Neither agree nor disagree

13b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 3. (Indicative 300 word limit)

para 326 Corroborating contacts only for those who can communicate in English - and yet there are specialist advisers (para 325) with relevant language skills - this undermines the possibility of international impact outside UK.

Page 10: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Sections 4-5: Environment data and environment (REF4a/b/c-REF5a/b)

Q23. 14a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data' is clear:

Neither agree nor disagree

Q24. 15a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment' is clear:

Neither agree nor disagree

Page 11: Guidance on Submissions: further comments

Q25. 16. Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A-M. (Indicative 500 word limit)

Both draft documents would be clearer if they were shorter and there was less repetition between and within documents.

Page 12: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 2: Unit of assessment descriptors

Q26. 1. Do the UOA descriptors provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

All

UOA 25: Area Studies

UOA 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics

Where relevant, please state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

In particular 25 and 26 but some comments more relevant generally. There is some overlap between these panels, and some Schools or Departments of Modern Languages include small elements of languages and cultures (e.g. Mandarin or Arabic) which are not included in 26 (where most ML will return) - which may mean individuals are not returned as the number of staff is too small to warrant a separate return to 25. Assume descriptors for 25 and 26 should be similar - some odd differences e.g. 25 'ground-breaking or novel approaches' highlighted. Both unsurprisingly emphasise interdisciplinarity - is the expectation that many outputs submitted to these are therefore flagged as interdisciplinary - or rather the opposite as the interdisciplinarity is effectively taken for granted?

Page 13: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 1: Submissions

Q27. 2a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q28. 2b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q29. 2c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Main panel D pedagogic research normally returned to sub-panel's discipline area - language teaching in languages such as Arabic or Mandarin - will this be returned to 25?

Page 14: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 2: Outputs

Q30. 3a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q31. 3b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q32. 3c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs', in particular on:- the proposed criteria for double-weighting outputs in Main Panels C and D, and on whether requests to double-weight books should automatically be accepted- whether Annex C 'Main Panel D – outputs types and submission guidance' is helpful and clear - where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Main panel D - para 197 b interdisciplinary rigour - seems to treat interdisciplinary research as research on interdisciplinarity which is surely not the same thing??

Welcome the addition of Translation - but concerned that additional information to elucidate research content is not more strongly encouraged

Consider co-authored work should have option to be returned by both co-authors within one UoA.

In some cases co-authored work is far from equally divided and it seems a shame that there is no possibility of recognising this.

Lack of clarity on edited books (collections of articles, special issues of journals) - presumably where editor has written Introduction and an article the volume can be returned as a whole although it may be hard to make case for major research input into editing other people's articles.

Worried that the idea that some books are self-evidently to be double-weighted, but others might be in danger of being rejected for double-weighting unless additional comment persuades otherwise may cause some confusion.

Page 15: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 3: Impact

Q33. 4a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q34. 4b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q35. 4c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Panel D

Public engagement - the role of public engagement has not been made any clearer - the use of the term 'engagement' in Annex A is not enlightening.

Page 16: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 4: Environment

Q36. 5a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q37. 5b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q38. 5c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment', in particular on:- whether the difference in section weightings across main panels is sufficiently justified by disciplinary difference (paragraphs 322 and 323)- whether the list of quantitative indicators provided at www.ref.ac.uk is clear and helpful- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Yes the difference in weightings is justified insofar as research income, infrastructure and high-cost facilities are less essential for carrying out research in arts and humanities.
para 337 contribution from unit to open access debates etc. - this is not very clear as a criterion and may lead to surprising anomalies
para 351 may penalise larger units - a clear list of bullet-points may well be more effective as a way of communicating a large amount of information than a narrative

Page 17: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 4: Panel procedures

Q39. 6a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q40. 6b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Neither agree nor disagree

Page 18: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 5: Panel working methods

Q42. 7a. a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q43. 7b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q44. 7c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 5: Panel working methods', in particular on: - where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (Indicative 300 word limit)

para 375 'where described above'; it would be helpful to specify in which para this is described. Assessing interdisciplinary research (paras 3879ff.) - so much is said about this across the 2 consultation documents that it ends up by being far more worrying than previous assurances (e.g. in subpanels 25 and 26) that the subpanels understand the interdisciplinarity common in their subject area. Are the interdisciplinary advisers colleagues who have trained or have qualifications in more than one discipline? Or colleagues who have experience in collaboration with subject specialists from other disciplines (necessarily far removed from their own or possibly adjacent to their own)?

Page 19: Overall panel criteria and working methods

Q45. 8a. Overall, the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels.

Neither agree nor disagree