

19<sup>th</sup> June 2020

BY EMAIL

Nicholson House  
Lime Kiln Close  
Stoke Gifford  
BRISTOL  
BS34 8SR  
Telephone 0117 931 7486  
www.ref.ac.uk  
Email info@ref.ac.uk

Dear Vice-chancellor or Principal,

**Research Excellence Framework 2021: revised submission deadline and the assessment period for impact**

1. I am writing to notify institutions that the revised deadline for submissions to REF 2021 will be midday, 31 March 2021. This deadline will apply for all elements of submissions. With this revised timetable, the results are now expected in April 2022. Additionally, the impact assessment period has been universally extended and case studies may therefore describe specific examples of impact achieved in the period 1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020. The staff census date of 31 July 2020 remains unchanged.
2. Some details about further revisions to the exercise are not yet finalised. This includes any other changes necessary to REF deadlines in view of the four month delay, such as the deadlines for submitting corroborating evidence for impact case studies and redacted versions of impact case studies. It also includes potential further mitigations to account for the effects of COVID-19 on submissions. We intend to engage with the sector and wider partners shortly on these proposed mitigations for impact, outputs and environment. Further information about this is set out below.
3. We intend to finalise any mitigations and notify institutions about the full set of revisions to the exercise by 31 July 2020. This will provide institutions with eight months' notice of the full requirements prior to the submission deadline in March 2021. The date of 31 July 2020 will therefore be the point at which the exercise resumes in full.
4. The decision of the four UK higher education bodies on the timing of the revised submission deadline was informed by responses to a recent survey <https://ref.ac.uk/media/1378/survey-on-initial-views-on-the-ref-timetable-summary-of-responses.pdf> and a preliminary equality impact assessment <https://ref.ac.uk/media/1377/equality-impact-assessment-on-the-revised-ref-timetable.pdf>.
5. In taking these decisions on revisions to REF 2021, the funding bodies have applied the following criteria, in place for revising details of the exercise:
  - a. Ensure robust assessment that carries the confidence of the sector
  - b. Meet the REF principles of equality, equity and transparency
  - c. Minimise additional burden, and seek to reduce it where possible
  - d. Take account of affected areas of submissions.

6. As part of the contingency arrangements for REF 2021, the revised submission deadline of 31 March 2021 will be reviewed by 6 November 2020 or, if sooner, in the event of a further significant and sustained outbreak. This measure has been taken in view of the ongoing uncertainty about the duration and extent of the effect of coronavirus, and seeks to address concerns raised about this in the recent survey. The review will consider the level of disruption being experienced due to COVID-19 and whether further contingency arrangements for the REF may be necessary. The funding bodies have assumed ongoing levels of disruption in the period ahead when weighing up considerations on the timing of the submission deadline, and would not wish to revise it again except in an unexpected or significantly worsened context.

7. To support institutions with contingency planning for the revised submission deadline, the REF team are preparing some guidance material for publication at the recommencement of the exercise in July.

8. With the revised timetable for the exercise in place, we shortly expect to confirm amended timings for the panel nominations process. The REF team will write to nominating bodies next week about this matter, and the amended timings will be widely published.

### **Assessment period for impact**

9. I can also confirm that the funding bodies have agreed a universal extension to the assessment period for impact. Case studies may therefore describe specific examples of impact achieved during the period 1 August 2013 to 31 December 2020. The period for the underpinning research remains as 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2020.

10. The funding bodies noted many opposing arguments and conflicting views in survey responses on the question of extending the impact period. The funding bodies' decision, informed by subsequent advice from the main panels and an expert advisory group, reflects consideration that a universal extension best meets the criteria in place for revising details of the exercise. In particular, that the clarity and simplicity of a universal extension, as opposed to an exceptional approach or case-by-case basis, would offer the more robust and equitable, and less burdensome, approach overall to take account of the effects on impact.

11. Therefore, while the deadline is extended universally, the funding bodies wish to underline that the purpose of the extension is to enable case studies affected by, or focusing on the current response to, COVID-19 to be assessed in REF 2021. For clarity, there is neither the requirement nor the expectation that all case studies report up to the end of the extended assessment period. Institutions should not consider it necessary to amend existing case studies to report up to the end of the period where the case study has not been affected by or focused on COVID-19, and particularly where additional activity or evidence from the extended period would not make a material difference to the case.

### **Further information**

12. As we recently announced <https://www.ref.ac.uk/news/second-webinar-scheduled-on-ref-revisions/>, we will shortly seek views on a set of proposed mitigations to take account of the effects of COVID-19 on REF submissions. We will set out the proposals in a webinar, scheduled for 24 June

2020, and an accompanying short document. Views will be invited via an online survey, with a response deadline of noon, 8 July 2020.

13. Please, do not hesitate to get in touch should you have any queries or concerns that are not addressed by this information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kim Hackett', enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

Dr Kim Hackett  
REF Director