

UKAPA draft response: REF2028 People, Culture and Environment [2 pages max]

Consultation comments must be sent via the feedback form [located in the initial decisions doc]

As a learned society, UKAPA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the REF2028 and in particular this important change to the environment theme and we value the principles of co-production that are at the heart of the consultation process.

Overall, we welcome the proposed expansion of the REF environment theme to include greater attention to people and culture as the foundations of research excellence. We agree that people and research cultures are indeed the driving force behind a more positive and productive environment that can promote research excellence, and the 25% weighting for this category is a clear signal of this importance.

From our disciplinary stance, we would welcome the opportunity to showcase research with wider social impacts as an indication of an inclusive research culture driven by research excellence that is comprised of a range of projects and outputs. In our field, collaborative research in commonplace across different career stages, between traditional academic disciplines, and with stakeholders in civil society and policy processes, and having the opportunity to better demonstrate the collaborative culture is welcomed and valued by UKAPA.

Whilst we recognise that 'broader contributions to the advancement of the discipline' is a positive step, we would like to see REF guidance clearly acknowledging that smaller disciplines will be treated equitably. As you may know research into the public sector and subsequent outputs are often spread across multiple disciplines and REF units of assessment. A disciplinary level focus is crucial to reveal the distinct practices and foci between research fields. From our perspective, contributions to the discipline may include a wide range of non-text outputs such as participation in governance bodies of learned societies, hosting academic conferences, contributions to public and political debate, editing relevant academic journals, attending relevant academic conferences and, indeed, responding to consultations. For many disciplines, such as ours, these outputs are crucial to our ability to connect with policymakers and citizens, and to develop research that has real public value. Furthermore, in emphasising 'people' we welcome the recognition staff moving between industry and academia have often been overlooked in previous REF cycles. Academics that have come from a practitioner background often make excellent research contributions within our discipline.

We also appreciate that the research culture statements developed by the Royal Society, and the Concordats and Agreement review will be of real value when developing the metrics/data/indicators for this theme. However, we emphasise the need to examine how the core principles from these statements translate into practice at the institutional and disciplinary level.

Our main area of concern is around the measurement of culture. In terms of what is measured, we would welcome some quantifiable EDI measures and other key indicators of a 'good' research culture and environment. This is a particular challenge because of the intersectionality of diversity. We also feel that consideration should be given to the potential to cross-check claims made by institutions and disciplines against the submitted outputs. For example, if a claim is made for an interdisciplinary, collegiate environment yet the outputs are submitted from a small number of staff within the same discipline, that may be a point of concern.

With regard to the introduction of a more tightly defined questionnaire, we appreciate the emphasis on reducing the administrative burden on institutions and colleagues, although we have some concerns about this approach to data collection. Here we emphasise the need to capture the detail

and complexity of 'culture' and 'environment' as a lived experience, often best understood through more qualitative approaches, which is in line with DORA principles. In designing both the quantitative and qualitative measures, we would welcome the opportunity for ongoing consultation. The assessment of PCE at both an institutional and disciplinary level seems sensible. However, this may be more contentious within institutions, particularly those that make returns across several Units of Assessment. We believe that to adopt this approach, two questionnaire templates will be required to capture the granular experiences within distinct Units and disciplines.

Furthermore, the plans to create '...a framework relating to research culture that will define core data and evidence requirements, while offering some flexibility for HEIs to tailor submissions to their own circumstances and priorities' is a risky proposal. In taking this proposal forward, there should be assurances that data collection will be driven by a sampling strategy where possible, and this should form part of the ongoing consultative work. To collect core data whilst asking for bespoke submissions involves both institutions and Units in too much data collection.

Commented [AC1]: We need to also capture that PA is often spread across multiple disciplines and units - how will this be reflected in the PCE

Commented [RG2R1]: Agreed - a; though large numbers feels a bit strong.