

SEN09D028

Title: REF: Eligibility And Update
Author: Professor Trevor Davies, Ian McCormick
Date: 8 June 2010
Circulation: Senate – 16 June 2010
Agenda: SEN09A003
Status: Draft
Version: Ver 1

Issue

The definition of staff eligibility in the REF is of central importance for the University's reputation and position in league tables. The eligible pool forms the baseline of any 'research intensity' measures. HEFCE did not use intensity as a measure of research quality in RAE2008 and had a broad definition of eligibility which included teaching only staff. Although HEFCE did not ask for this information to be returned, HESA subsequently did for equal opportunities monitoring, which allowed third parties to make assumptions about research intensity. This situation also created challenges for UEA as we improve our SSRs and the student experience. The University lobbied hard to avoid a similar issue over 'eligibility' in the REF.

A delay on the REF is expected until at least autumn 2013 which has been reinforced by commentary since the election. HEFCE did issue some initial feedback in March on the REF consultation exercise last year. In this, the definition of eligibility is noted as "research or research and teaching" which is the position the University wanted.

Recommendation

For the time being plan internally on the basis the REF submission date will be autumn 2013. Assume the eligible pool for REF will be ATR staff only while maintaining formal and informal lobbying on this point wherever possible. Keep a close watching brief on HEFCE communications.

Timing of decisions

Definitive guidance from HEFCE is due in autumn 2010 which should coincide with the first clear snapshot of research intensity at the University.

Further Information

A summary of other key points raised in the latest HEFCE communication:

- Research only staff, ie. RAs, are eligible by exception
- Maximum 4 outputs per submitted member of staff will be allowed, with consideration of double weighting for large outputs and fewer outputs for early stage careers.
- Panels will be invited to decide whether citation data be used for their area, although HEFCE may veto this element overall on a cost basis
- HEFCE has a preference for HESA data, meaning the link between PGRs and income with submitted staff would be broken. This also means that we are not able to retrospectively reclassify these indicators

- Multiple submissions may be allowed in exceptional cases, but only with permission from HEFCE and possibly only for the output element

Interviews have been held for Chairs designate of the Main Panels, but not the sub-panels as their exact structure is still not confirmed.

Background, Discussion and consultation

There is currently some planning uncertainty in the REF: on its original timescale, HEFCE is not due to publish definitive guidance until autumn 2010; Impact pilots (in which UEA took part) have only recently finished and results appear inconclusive; comments from new government ministers suggest at very least a delay in the REF and/or a more fundamental re-think.

Given this uncertainty, the University's Research Executive has agreed a plan for 2010, with the intention to develop a full strategic plan up to submission once definitive guidance has been produced by HEFCE.

Based on the experience in RAE2008, a much more integrated approach will be adopted to ensure collective buy-in and delivery of the REF strategic plan. We will pursue a series of "mock reviews" for outputs (with external assessors), impact and indicators (data), the first round being completed in 2010.

The university has put a number of procedures in place to maximise 3*/4* quality performances which are overseen by the PVC-Research and the Deans of the Faculties. The mainstay of this is that each ATR member of staff completes an annual research plan which requires the approval of the Head of School.