REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria

Consultation question 2
Assessment of interdisciplinary research

- Guidance is unclear on how assessment panels will be assembled to guarantee they possess the right expertise to assess multiple disciplines. More clarification is needed on the metrics provided to support panel members in their assessment as well as the recruitment/selection process.

Consultation question 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?

- We believe the criteria listed are necessary, but not sufficient, and some criterion may create confusion. The criterion ‘Significant input into the design, conduct and interpretation of the research’ may create confusion as an indicator of research independence, as some PhD students may be included in this description. Furthermore, it is not clear how having a significant input into the research could be demonstrated.

Consultation question 8
Research Outputs

- We think more clarification is needed on the weighting given to non-publication outputs of research. For example, in translational research, there is a long period for outputs to show an impact or result in publication despite significant progress being made. Potential measurable non-publication outputs include number of translational science training programs held, genomic assays run, the quantity of clinical trial subjects recruited, and the number of grant submissions made. A standardised measurement tool to assess translational research outputs and outcomes (the Translational Research Impact Scale) has been developed by Dembe and colleagues (doi: 10.1177/0163278713506112) and a similar tool could be used as part of the REF.

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

a. We would disagree with the current approach as we believe it discourages intra-institutional collaboration.

b. This approach is not supportive of an interdisciplinary and collaborative research environment, being a particular issue in institutes set up with a specific focus and composed of research groups with different expertise. An example of this is the Institute of Metabolic Science, where different groups have expertise in structural biology, cell biology, or bioinformatics. Supporting intra-institutional collaboration would promote interdisciplinary research and accelerate progress.

Consultation question 12
a. How feasible do you consider to be the approach set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing information on the balance of research activity of different costs within submitting units in UOA 4?
b. Are the examples of high cost and other research activity sufficiently clear to guide classification?
c. Please provide feedback on any specific points in the guidance text as well as the overall clarity of the guidance.

   a. The feasibility of this approach will depend on how clear guidance provided to institutions is on what is considered to be high cost research (see points b and c below).
   b. Providing some examples as guidance may lead to confusion and a situation where any research will be attempted to be submitted as high cost. Clear metrics and more extensive, thorough, and comprehensive guidance detailing all potential high cost research submissions would avoid this issue.
   c. Regarding paragraph 271, is the unit-level environment template available to institutions, and if so what does this entail?