



British Academy of Management response to
Consultation on the design of the UK's future research assessment
system by Research England, Scottish Funding Council, HEFCW, and
Department for the Economy, NI

Run by JISC Future Research Assessment Programme

Submitted 5th May 2022

[Added to the 'name of organisation' box] The British Academy of Management is a learned society based in the UK, whose 2000+ members come from 56 countries across the world, but 70% of whom are employed by UK HEIs in Business and Management. This response to the UKRI Future Assessment consultation represents the accumulated observations and comments from round tables held with our members who have personal REF2021 experience. As a consequence, we focus our comments on the particular needs of any future research assessment to support a flourishing HE Business and Management community.

Question 1. In addition to enabling the allocation of research funding and providing accountability for public investment in research, which purposes should a future UK research assessment exercise fulfil? Select all that apply.

- a. Provide benchmarking information
- b. Provide an evidence base to inform strategic national priorities
- c. Provide an evidence base for HEIs and other bodies to inform decisions on resource allocation
- d. Create a performance incentive for HEIs.

Purposes a), b), c), and d) should be reflected by any future research assessment exercise.

Question 2. What, if any, additional purposes should be fulfilled by a future exercise?

Our Business & Management research community recommends future REF exercises include the following purposes:

- **Improving EDIR as part of the Research Environment:** The assessment should promote EDIR (Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Respect) across the sector. We use 'Respect' as a way of shaping how EDI is put into practice for a 'good' research environment. Evidence suggests that the business and management field, across practice, higher education and relevant policymaking, benefits from diversity in decision-making and practice. Additionally, setting a



level playing field for all academics, including Early Career Researchers, will also be critical. Furthermore, it should also be used to collect information on groups that may at present be marginalised within the research community.

- **Improving actions directed at supporting Sustainability:** protecting our planet, ensuring that business and management scholars are supporting this effort, and raising awareness of the significance of this effort, is going to be central to - and part of - our 'inclusive future'. We think that any future research assessment exercise should put sustainability at its heart, alongside EDIR. Developing and offering a sustainability framework ([PRME](#) perhaps?) alongside an EDIR framework (for example as REF2021 did with Athena Swan), could help to make a powerful shift across society, and specifically in business and management society.
Note: The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME): <https://www.unprme.org.uk/> is a United Nations-supported initiative founded in 2007. As a platform to raise the profile of sustainability in schools around the world, PRME equips today's business students with the understanding and ability to deliver change tomorrow.
- **Improving the civic impact of universities (of Business and Management Schools):** Any future exercise could explicitly identify research that has informed/transformed local and regional priorities (linked to the levelling-up agenda), including evidence of engagement with stakeholders through research, engagement and impact activities.
- **Improving Research-led teaching:** Any future assessment exercise could ask for evidence of research-informed teaching and could ask for explicit links with TEF and KEF. More demonstrations of joined-up thinking are needed to deliver the changed world we claim to be aiming for (i.e. more sustainable and inclusive).

Question 3. Could any of the purposes be fulfilled via an alternative route? If yes, please provide further explanation.

The national research assessment exercise is a powerful tool that has raised quality and shifted priorities for HEIs and particularly Business and Management Schools; we are leading the world on the production of impactful research and in evidencing this. If UKRI want to use the research assessment exercise to direct HEI efforts and **collect evidence of research, engagement and impact on strategic national priorities**, it should explicitly develop the assessment framework to support this. Business and Management Schools (as powerful components of larger HEIs) are well placed to deliver on this agenda.

Overlap with other HEI assessment exercises: Careful thought needs to be given how the REF, TEF and KEF speak to each other so that HEI's are pulled in multiple directions, but that the collective delivers in a holistic and powerful single direction, namely *research informed innovation*.

The **administrative burden** for REF2021 was significant. This should be taken into account in developing any alternative approach. Making use of existing data sources and data reported for other purposes should be an important consideration.

Internationally competitive: many international frameworks to direct impactful research are available. Using these to inform the UKRI assessment processes and frameworks would be helpful



and stands to help UK HEIs as they position themselves as world-leading in relation to rankings (QS, AACSB, PRME etc.). The jobs market for business and management scholars is international and many disciplines have concerns about losing academics to international markets because - internationally - they are only asked to focus on publication (which can take 5-7 years to publish in 4* journals) and not on evidencing real-world impact. Business and Management HEI's need to attract the brightest and the best from an international marketplace and aligning with international frameworks stands to help here.

Question 4. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the purposes of a future research assessment system?

The importance of the research assessment exercise and its intended purposes is acknowledged. We feel that the balance between delivering and putting undue pressures on the system of delivering world-leading teaching, research and impact needs effective support in two key areas:

- **Pressure on ECRs via REF:** Our members tell us that REF2014 and REF2021 have led to the raising of expectations to publish in world-leading journals; for some this has been followed by additional support to help them achieve this and has improved the research environment in their HEI. However, there is concern that many HEIs are not good at supporting the transformation of research into impact, or are not supporting engaged research to the extent that is required to deliver the impact demanded for a good REF return. This, our members feel, has generated significant working pressures on individual academics, especially ECRs who feel these pressures most acutely as they are learning to teach, publish and generate impact at the same time.
- **Supporting Impactful Research:** The British Academy of Management's members come from a number of different disciplines – organisation studies, management studies, marketing, economics, operations management, strategy, information research etc. – which are widely recognised as producing impactful, timely, relevant, contemporary research. The British Academy of Management and the Chartered Association of Business Schools, together with the ESRC, have been working to promote the importance of real-world impact through research for a number of years. Our members agree that any future assessment exercise should take into account the impact of research, but recommend that this should be done over an extended period and that this might have to cross different HEIs if academics move (by changing job or by extending collaboration with others in different HEIs). HEIs should be assessed on how they support the generation of impact as well as the impact they actually deliver. The allocation of research funding stands to play an important role here and a future assessment exercise could evidence the link between funded research and broader socio-economic, real-world impact. This should include funded research from UKRI, the Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) and private or other charitable organisations. 'Blue sky' research should be valued in its own right.

Question 5. To what extent should the funding bodies be guided by the following considerations in developing the next assessment system? Please rank the considerations from 1 (most important) to 9 (least important).



- a. Ability of the system to promote research with wider socio-economic impact – **Rank: 1**
- b. Comparability of assessment outcomes (across institutions, disciplines and/or assessment exercises) **Rank: 5**
- c. Ensuring that the bureaucratic burden of the system is proportionate **Rank: 2**
- d. Impact of the assessment system on local/regional development **Rank: 8**
- e. Impact of the system on research culture **Rank: 3**
- f. Impact of the system on the UK research system's international standing **Rank: 4**
- g. Maintaining continuity with REF 2021 **Rank: 9**
- h. Providing early confirmation of the assessment framework and guidance **Rank: 7**
- i. Robustness of assessment outcomes **Rank: 6**

Question 6. Relating to research culture, to what extent should the funding bodies be guided by the following considerations in developing the next assessment system? Please rank the considerations from 1 (most important) to 6 (least important).

- a. Impact of the assessment system on research careers: **Rank: 2**
- b. Impact of the assessment system on equality, diversity and inclusion: **Rank: 1**
- c. Ability of the assessment system to promote collaboration (across institutions, sectors and/or nations) **Rank: 3**
- d. Impact of the system on inter- and transdisciplinary research **Rank: 4**
- e. Impact of the system on open research **Rank: 6**
- f. Impact of the system on research integrity **Rank: 5**

Question 7. What, if any, further considerations should influence the development of a future assessment system? Please set out the considerations and indicate where they should be located in the list of priorities.

Manage the administrative burden and its cost. The reputational and financial consequence of REF2021 means that many HEIs have invested very significant resources in planning, preparing, evidencing and auditing their submission.

Make impact cases mobile and cross-institutional. Impact cases are often associated with a group of people and/or a particular place. People from bigger business and management schools had to submit a high number of impact cases. The BAM community have argued that there is a structural problem with the current way that impact cases are assessed, encouraging competition between HEIs instead of collaboration. Any future REF should encourage cross-HEI collaboration. Further, the



form of assessment should reflect how these forms of collaboration best translate to the demands of other assessment frameworks such as DORA.

HEI Environment Statement. BAM members feel that expanding the HEI Environment Statement might offer a means of driving improvements in support and enabling systems for cross-institutional collaborations both internally and externally, e.g. inter-departmental/faculty teamwork, cross-institutional research, and the development of knowledge exchange, partnerships etc. with non-HEI organisations. This will be central for driving research that can deliver real-world socio-economic change.

Support international standing and job market. Recognising that we are competing in an international research excellence landscape will help us recruit, retain and nurture the very best research and researchers. Aspects of research assessment that recognise and reward this would be helpful to supporting the development of our research environment and the quality of our research and its impacts.

Transparency. Our business and management community called for more transparency into the assessment process and to the attribution of grades for outputs, impact cases and environment statements. There is currently a strong feeling that the REF “black boxes” the process, providing no information on how the panel has scored the different elements. Greater transparency here would provide HEIs and business and management schools with greater opportunities to improve. Transparency could play an important role in helping HEIs develop and make transparent their own trajectory and pathways to action.

Question 8. How can a future UK research assessment system best support a positive research culture?

A future UK research assessment system stands to support positive research cultures by recognising and rewarding key areas:

- EDIR (Equality Diversity Inclusion and Respect)
- Collaboration within & between HEIs
- Sustainable futures research (plus necessary interdisciplinarity to support this)
- Powerful collective outputs rather than turning researchers into ‘star’ researchers; by recognising teams that combine capabilities of authoring world-leading journal papers with those able to generate engagement & impact and those able to secure funding & co-ordinate complex projects, and by bringing together bodies of work done by individuals that may not have worked together but represent, as a collective, core expertise within one HEI, positive practices could be further recognised and rewarded
- Early career researchers (ECRs): the special circumstances process put extra requirements for action on ECRs, which were unnecessary and could discriminate against HEIs with large numbers of ECRs. With the Chartered Association of Business Schools, our members raised concerns that the ‘cut off’ point for REF created a



watershed moment every 7-8 years, generating serious challenges for PhD candidates and ECRs.

BAM has significant research in this area and publishes a series of books on the impact of research including:

- On EDIR: Sliwa, M and Kellard, N (2021), *The Research Impact Agenda* (1st ed) Routledge. In relation to REF, the impactfulness of research and the performativity of REF impact cases (ie what having to prepare REF impact cases makes people do):
 - Ch 4 'The influence of the impact agenda on organisational inequalities' discusses, the impact of the REF impact agenda on **ECRs, women academics and other minority group members**.
 - Ch 5 'The (un)intended consequences of impact: university, society, and economy' discusses how HEIs end up 'chasing' impact case studies rather than concentrating on their positive impacts on local communities and economy that are not defined as part of the REF impact agenda; how faculty become more overworked and unable to attain wellbeing as they are subject to multiple assessments, including REF impact measurement; how impact assessment further solidifies universities' league table positions & why this is problematic
 - Ch 6 'Putting impact to work' explores possible ways forward for the REF impact agenda and provide a range of recommendations for policymakers and other stakeholders.
- On delivering impact, MacIntosh, R, Mason, K, Beech, N, & Bartunek, JM (2021) *Delivering Impact in Management Research: When Does it Really Happen?* (1st ed) Routledge, Chs 3 & 6 discuss the performativity of management theories and frameworks change practice, including the REF framework.

Some of the insights in these chapters will help significantly in developing any future REF aimed at addressing EDIR. We can send these to you.

In general, HEIs would benefit if a less competitive, more generative ethos could be developed in relation to the research environment. REF could produce a best practice guide and/or provide detailed feedback on the relative strengths/weaknesses of research culture at institutional and UoA levels. This would provide actionable knowledge for institutions, providing useful illustrations of what a good research culture looks like.

Our community raised concerns that the Stern Review didn't stop game playing. E.g. as many HEIs included external faculty on their REF returns in 2021 as in 2014.

Question 9. Which of the following elements should be recognised and rewarded as components of research excellence in a future assessment exercise?

- a. Research inputs (e.g. research income, internal investment in research and in researchers)
- Response: weight moderately**



- b. Research process (e.g. open research practices, collaboration, following high ethical standards) **Response:** weight moderately
- c. Outputs (e.g. journal articles, monographs, patents, software, performances, exhibitions, datasets) **Response:** weight moderately
- d. Academic impact (contribution to the wider academic community through e.g. journal editorship, mentoring, activities that move the discipline forward) **Response:** weight moderately
- e. Engagement beyond academia **Response:** weight heavily
- f. Societal and economic impact **Response:** weight heavily
- g. Other (please specify). **Response:** Capacity building; weight heavily

Question 10. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the components of research excellence?

Any components of research excellence should be incrementally adjusted to reduce the burden associated with developing returns to a future assessment exercise.

Impact should increase in importance, growing its existing weighting. There should be recognition that social and economic impacts are difficult to measure within social science research.

The extant heavy weightings for outputs can result in perverse incentives, where finding the 'right' projects to achieve peer-reviewed publication in high citation outlets takes precedent over an institution devoting attention to improving their research environment.

Question 11. Are the current REF assessment criteria for outputs clear and appropriate?

- a. Originality **Response:** Yes
- b. Significance **Response:** Yes
- c. Rigour **Response:** Yes

Question 12. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the criteria for assessing outputs?

More guidance could be provided as to the interpretation of the criteria – specifically in relation to different types of HEI (e.g. research intensive; teaching intensive). We would like feedback/confirmation of the ratings of individual outputs. We recognise the overwhelming tendency for HEIs to return traditional, peer-reviewed journal articles; making visible the assessment of monographs or other forms of output would help to develop the diversity of novel, quality outputs our community needs in order to support real world impact and socio-economic change.

Impact Cases should be portable as they require sustained work and develop over longer time periods. HEIs could be rewarded for cross-institutional impact cases. This will help to encourage HEIs



to collectively pursue Grand Challenge type research projects, bringing together expertise and experience across HEIs. We concur with the Chartered ABS here.

Introduce Engagement Cases. HEIs are doing really important work to engage different stakeholder groups and these are not recognised by REF, despite their importance. We agree with Chartered ABS that recognising engagement as a critical part of research activity would be very powerful in developing both impactful research and dynamic research environments that are both participative and collaborative. The way impact cases are reported and assessed at the moment creates a divide within faculties, generating two career paths: engagement and research. We think that only 10% of faculty are seriously working on impact cases for the future with the remainder concentrating on publishing in world-leading journals (which often takes 5 years or more in business and management). Rather than decoupling research from impact and forcing researchers to choose a career pathway, future research exercises could recognise this by looking for evidence of engagement as well as impact.

Reflect on how impact is measured. If the aim is to encourage Business Schools to do engaged research which creates change outside academia, it seems inappropriate to focus on a very small number of highly developed impact cases. This approach leads to a two-tier model. Could the REF development team look at engagement more generally - and engagement which leads to change - to encourage Business Schools to build this into what they do, rather than pushing Schools to buy in a few people to do impact cases? Impact and engagement are valuable to the HE sector, to research development, and could therefore be recognised through a wider set of measures rather than relying on a small set of measures that are incredibly time intensive (and costly) to use.

Provide clarity of assessment for Institutional environment statements. Clarity and predictability of assessment criteria seem to be essential for any form of institutional assessment. Those developing the criteria for future assessment exercises should ask if the measures of quality selected are going to get us to a position where we can substantially address grand challenges. National and international collaboration should be recognised and rewarded.

Introduce themes. BAM community members suggested that future assessment exercises could include assessment based on high quality impactful research targeted at globally influential and locally relevant themes. Themes could be connected with the UKRI roadmap and national priorities. This could help HEIs develop their individual identities as well as their UoA and institutional strategies.

UoA assessment for Business and Management. With up to 95% of income in business and management Schools typically coming from teaching, REF has been crucial in keeping our Schools focused on research and in securing research resources from the centre of our HEIs to support further investment in our research activities. UoA assessment of business and management and of economics is critical and we hope this will continue. B&M researchers are at a structural disadvantage in comparison with other disciplines. Without the REF we wouldn't get funding for our research. QR money is absolutely critical for our field (as shown in the Chartered ABS Research Funding report [<https://cabs-199e2.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Chartered-ABS->]



Research-Income-Report-2021-Final-WEB.pdf]; and the British Academy's review of the business and management field [<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/business-and-management-provision-in-uk-higher-education/>]).

Question 13. Are the current REF assessment criteria for impact clear and appropriate?

- a. Reach **Response:** Yes
- b. Significance **Response:** Yes

Question 14. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the criteria for assessing impact?

The guidance could reinforce the view that local impacts are important and valuable provide some clarification that 'reach' does not necessarily need to have a geographical imperative

The REF criteria for assessing impact are considered by some to be unnecessarily restrictive. Broadening them could encourage the research of, and engagement with, sectors and organisations that are less familiar or well known.

The tracking and evidencing of impact by institutions is difficult, expensive and resource/time intensive. Many institutions have recruited teams of Impact Development Managers whose entire workload consists of this activity. Consideration should be given to the time, effort and challenges associated with documenting and evidencing impact, particularly in larger UoA submissions where significant numbers of cases are curated over an extended period.

Question 15. Are the current REF assessment criteria for environment clear and appropriate?

- a. Vitality **Response:** Yes
- b. Sustainability **Response:** Yes

Question 16. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the criteria for assessing environment?

Equality and diversity are clearly framed in the Environment statement criteria, but future assessment exercises should pay particular attention to actions being taken to support under-representation of women, other under-represented groups in academia, and the intersectional aspects of the characteristics being monitored.

Some BAM members felt that the environment statement assessment was based almost entirely on storytelling skills, making this a very subjective process. There is a lot of variability in the environments of UoAs and this is not always well reflected in assessment.

Question 17. When considering the frequency of a future exercise, should the funding bodies prioritise:

- a. stability
- b. currency of information



- c. both a. and b.
- d. neither a. nor b.
- e. Don't know.

Response: c. both a. and b.

Question 18. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the prioritisation of stability vs. currency of information?

The British Academy of Management's research into EDIR in Business and Management Schools [<https://www.bam.ac.uk/about-bam/strategy-2024/strategic-projects/equality-diversity-inclusion-and-respect.html>] reveals that there is still significant work to be done to put in place best practices and offer equal opportunities. REF has helped but could help more with this. Being clear about how the prioritisation of stability versus currency incentivises or disincentivises the scope to experiment, take risks, and be innovative in research would help. The need for currency of information should of course be balanced against the administrative burden that collecting more frequent data would place on providers.

Question 19. Should a future exercise take place on a rolling basis?

Response: No.

Question 20. Do you have any further comments to make regarding conducting future research assessment exercises on a rolling basis?

Our community had a mixed response to this question. Some thought a rolling assessment could help sustain efforts to develop and deliver best practice. Others were concerned that a rolling assessment would further increase the administrative burden and cost on HEIs. Overall, we think that the disadvantages of a rolling assessment outweigh the advantages.

Question 21. At what level of granularity should research be assessed in future exercises?

- a. Individual
- b. Unit of Assessment based on disciplinary areas
- c. Unit of Assessment based on self-defined research themes
- d. Institution
- e. Combination of b. and d.
- f. Combination of c. and d.
- g. Other (please specify)

Response: e. Combination of b. and d. (at the level of the UoA and the Institution)

Question 22. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the granularity of assessment in a future research assessment exercise?

The combined level of Unit of Assessment (disciplinary areas) and institution are helpful to developing a good research environment within which business and management scholars can thrive



and engage in complex interdisciplinary research. We would have concerns that assessing just at the institution level may obscure pockets of excellence in important disciplinary areas. Equally, assessing at the level of the individual researcher could have a negative impact on a collaborative research environment. Our claim is that both UoA and Institutional assessment are more likely to generate diverse and inclusive systems of action, that are best positioned to deliver interdisciplinary research to deliver real impact in relation to complex and wicked problems and global grand challenges.

Interdisciplinary research should be recognised and rewarded by any future research assessment exercise. Our community raised concerns that the identifiers of interdisciplinary research did not really work, and that in business and management research quality measures such as the Chartered ABS journal list work against the submission and recognition of interdisciplinary work involving business and management scholarship.

Question 23. To what extent and for what purpose(s) should quantitative indicators be used in future assessment exercises?

- a. Move to an entirely metrics-based assessment
- b. Replace peer review with standardised metrics for:
 - i. Outputs
 - ii. Impact
 - iii. Environment
- c. Use standardised metrics to inform peer review of:
 - i. Outputs
 - ii. Impact
 - iii. Environment
- d. Should not be used at all.

Other (please specify)

Other (please specify). Standardised metrics should inform peer review, not replace it. Our community raised serious and significant concerns about relying on quantitative indicators including game playing, inconsistencies across business and management disciplines and their lack of integrity and ability to shape best practice in relation to the development of effective, collaborative research environments. Our community argued strongly for a balance to be struck between quantitative assessment and peer review. We suggest that efforts are made to ensure that any new form of assessment does not re-assess editorial decisions made in peer-review processes that have taken place as much as 7 years earlier.

Question 24. Do you have any further comments to make regarding the use of metrics in a future research assessment exercise?

Our community thinks that metrics/quantitative indicators could help inform the assessment process but must not replace or dilute peer review. We suggest that assessment could focus on the most influential or impactful research within a UoA - impacting theoretical development, society,



environment and economy, and multidisciplinary research, for example. This focus might reduce the overall reading burden for panels and reduce the workload associated with preparing a return.

Question 25. How might a future UK research assessment exercise ensure that the bureaucratic burden on individuals and institutions is proportionate?

To reduce the administrative burden of research assessment UKRI could:

- Make better use of technology to streamline the process, providing a platform for real-time uploading of material. We recommend that if this does become the case, submitting institutions retain the ability to edit any documents uploaded prior to the final submission deadline.
- A common technology platform and templates across UK funding bodies would help to standardise formats, making cross comparison easier and assessment less burdensome.
- Simplify the rules of submission: remove technocratic rules required for outputs, staff, and impact. Abandon targets for outputs per individual staff member and switch to outputs based on a collective team.
- Publish rules and guidelines early: this will give HEIs the best chance of developing best practice towards the government's desired outcomes.
- Avoid duplication: there is concern within our community that things are being measured multiple times – including across REF, TEF, KEF and HEIF, and we agree with the Chartered ABS here.
- Include assessments of teaching in REF: HEIs are research-led institutions, yet REF offers no opportunity to show how HEIs use their impactful research in shaping curricula and to support education and learning. Many faculties have their staff on teaching and scholarship contracts and this informs research in many ways, including the development of pedagogy. Our community has concerns about the artificial separation between those on teaching and scholarship contracts (T&S) and those on teaching and research contracts (T&R). This dichotomy imposes artificial divisions of what we are doing to develop knowledge and put it into action; it also affects what counts in these different career paths. We would urge the developers of any future research assessment exercise to ensure that the assessment process does not undermine the broader business and management environment.