

REF Results: Lessons from REF2014

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REF Results – Learning from REF2014



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I shall discuss:

- Overarching issues and risks
- Overall planning and timetable
- Processing and analysing results
- Leadership and management
- Communicating results

Overarching issues

Some issues that run through all aspects of the process:

- Accuracy
- Integrity
- Institutional interest
- Internal contexts
- External contexts

Institutional REF support teams need to balance all these issues! So you need the following -

- Planning (as full as you can)
- Trained capacity (i.e. people who understand the issues thoroughly and are assigned to support)
- Backing from your management and leadership

Overarching risks

The REF results process has multiple risks, including:

- Inaccurate handling/analysis of results due to gaps in tools and trained support;
- Accidental misinterpretation due to inadequate/outdated understanding of REF;
- Use of results without appropriate integrity, e.g. due to perceived institutional interest or lack of understanding of issues;
- Use of results by those with agendas (could be internal or external);
- Effect on staff morale where results are perceived to be negative;
- Premature or incorrect assumptions about financial implications of results.

Overall planning and timetable

- ‘Results week’ is on a very tight timetable;
- Plan your timetable for results week (and probably the weeks before and after) **now** and review draft timetables with key stakeholders at all levels;
- Include not only the results but also publication of submissions in your plans;
- Make sure key people at all levels/in all areas have capacity reserved, from senior management to systems/web support;
- Build in *trained*, not just nominal, cover (especially necessary in Covid era);
- Offer briefings and training as needed and make sure key people participate;
- Take opportunities to learn how other HEIs are preparing, as a sense-check.

Processing and analysing results

- Make informed but early decisions on the tools/platforms you will use; ensure this follows discussion and is communicated to all key stakeholders;
- Ensure any differences between your tools/aspects of the process are well-understood in advance and that there is an agreed approach to manage them;
- Ensure sufficient trained capacity is in place. Consider assembling/reconvening a team from multiple areas (e.g. Research, Library, IT, Planning) to bring different skills – but early enough to ensure coherence;
- Design in the ability to pitch the analysis to a range of levels. You need both easily extractable summaries and the ability to dig down and flexibly manipulate data.
- Be aware of ‘unofficial’ data analysts who will play with the data both within and beyond your institution..

Leadership and management

- Clarify principles for analysis and communications with your senior management well in advance. Ensure they have taken the tough decisions with sufficient rigour, ideally by reviewing worked scenarios;
- Ensure your senior team are aware of the rules and of ongoing debates, but also emphasise that they need to own their decisions on the approach taken;
- Encourage your senior team to think about worst, best, middling and mixed scenarios etc and agree a consistent approach in advance;
- Ensure your senior team addresses re-use of results in other contexts;
- If you can, ensure there is sufficient trained cover capacity at senior management level.

Example of a management question

- One of your departments wants to use its results to best advantage in its own communications...
- It says that the UoA in which it submitted covers multiple dimensions of a subject area, and the department only works on one of them...
- The Head of Department has recalculated the UoA ranking by excluding all the departments that do other dimensions of the subject area, including only those the HoD regards as direct competitors. They want to advertise the place in this new ranking that has now been calculated...
- What do you (or your senior management) do? Let them go ahead, tell them not to, or some third option?

Communicating results

- Ensure Comms team understand the context, including changes post-REF2014;
- Agree principles in advance and review worked scenarios;
- Prepare communications for a range of audiences, both external and internal;
- Ensure robust accuracy and integrity checks are in place;
- Ensure there is a clear framework/guidance/process for departments/units to do their own local communications (as per previous example);
- Think about which pieces of substantive content/areas of excellence etc you might highlight from your submission, and how;
- Be aware of potential reactions, both inside and outside your institution – think about the broader narrative context.



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Responsible REF results



Dr Elizabeth Gadd, Head of Research Operations
Rose-Marie Barbeau, Research Impact Manager
Kristy Bremner, Research Planning Manager
Laura Tyler, Research Communications Manager

**WORLD
CHANGING
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Research Strategy 2020-2025

Three pillars:

COLLABORATION

WORKING TOGETHER
TO TACKLE BIGGER
CHALLENGES

CREATIVITY

REAFFIRMING
THE CENTRALITY
OF IDEAS

CAREERS

HELPING EACH
OTHER TO
SUCCEED



RESEARCH AND INNOVATION SERVICES

LAB FOR ACADEMIC CULTURE

Research culture @UofG

At Glasgow, our positive research culture promotes a healthy research environment – in the way we evaluate, support and reward quality, how we recognise contributions to a research activity, how we support careers, and how we are building an environment in which individuals collaborate in an atmosphere of openness and trust.

Culture is the foundation of what we do. Therefore, our ambitions for culture are not described separately in this strategy but are embedded across the pillars of the strategy and its underlying actions. Our future work will build on the aligned series of policies and actions to enhance research culture that we began in 2015.

We established the Lab for Academic Culture in 2020, with the aim to enhance academic research and teaching culture both by implementing local initiatives and shaping sector policies.

The Lab for Academic Culture focuses on three core activities:

- **Contributing to the sector:** The Lab will facilitate discussion with key parties, including research organisations, funders, professional bodies, learned societies, and representatives from academia, to debate the important issues and identify policies and actions that can move the sector forward.



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The origins

← → ↻ 🏠 🔒 <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/using-ref-results-responsibly/> 📖 ⭐



ELIZABETH GADD | COMMENT | 27/09/21

WONKHE **Using REF results responsibly**

Elizabeth Gadd applies the same standards to REF as we do to research, and hopes for an end to meaningless claims of world-leading excellence.



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Principles for responsible analysis and sharing

- . **Mission focused**
- . **Contextualised**
- . **Collegiality over superiority**



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Stakeholder survey

- Seeking views on:
 - The data stakeholders need to understand our results
 - The messages stakeholders wish to send and to whom



1. What do you think our priorities should be when communicating our REF results?

[More Details](#)

■ Primary Objective ■ Secondary Objective ■ Not an Objective

Focusing on the real-world impact of research

Focusing on the research environment and culture at UofG

Demonstrating how our research aligns to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Demonstrating our civic contribution (locally and globally)

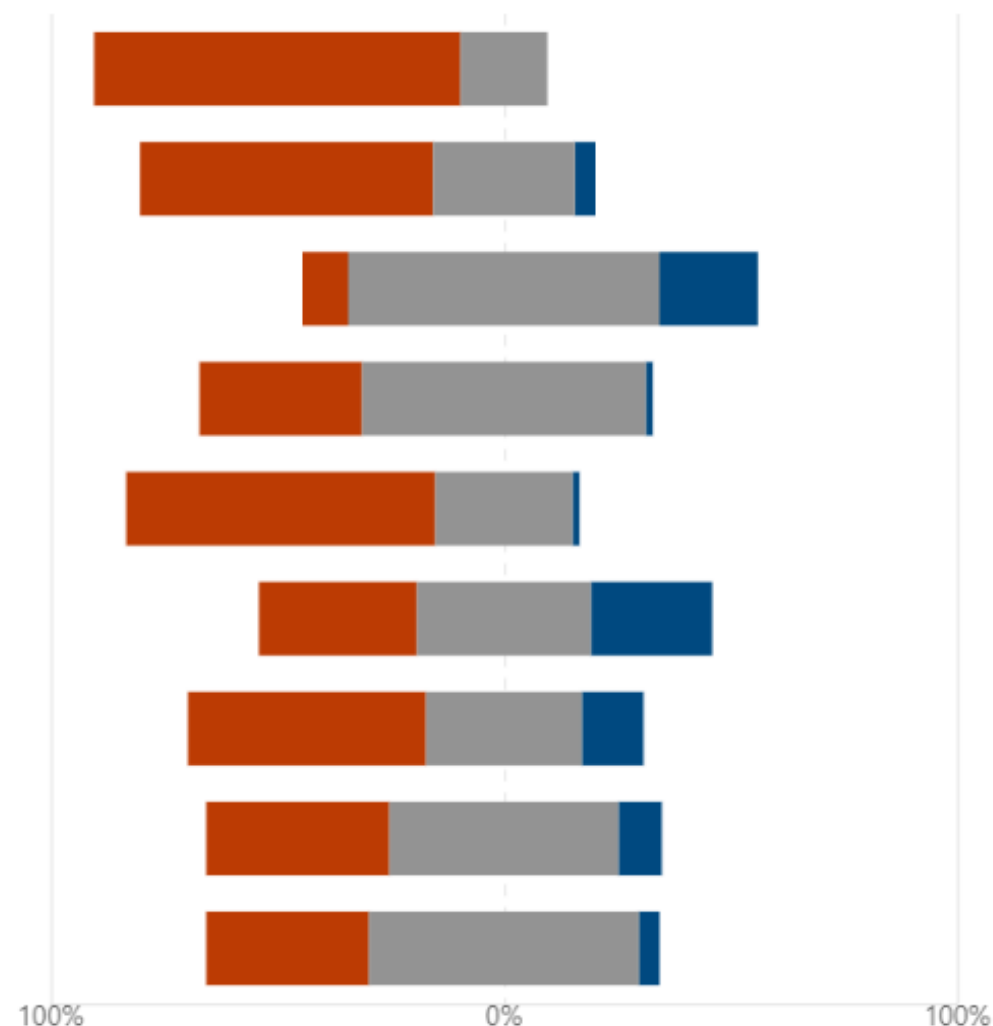
Demonstrating our disciplinary research strengths

Demonstrating UofG values

Providing a vision for the future of research at UofG

Showcasing international collaborations and their impact

Showcasing partnerships with external bodies (industry, charities, etc)





What do UofG's REF communications need to achieve? (Sample comments)

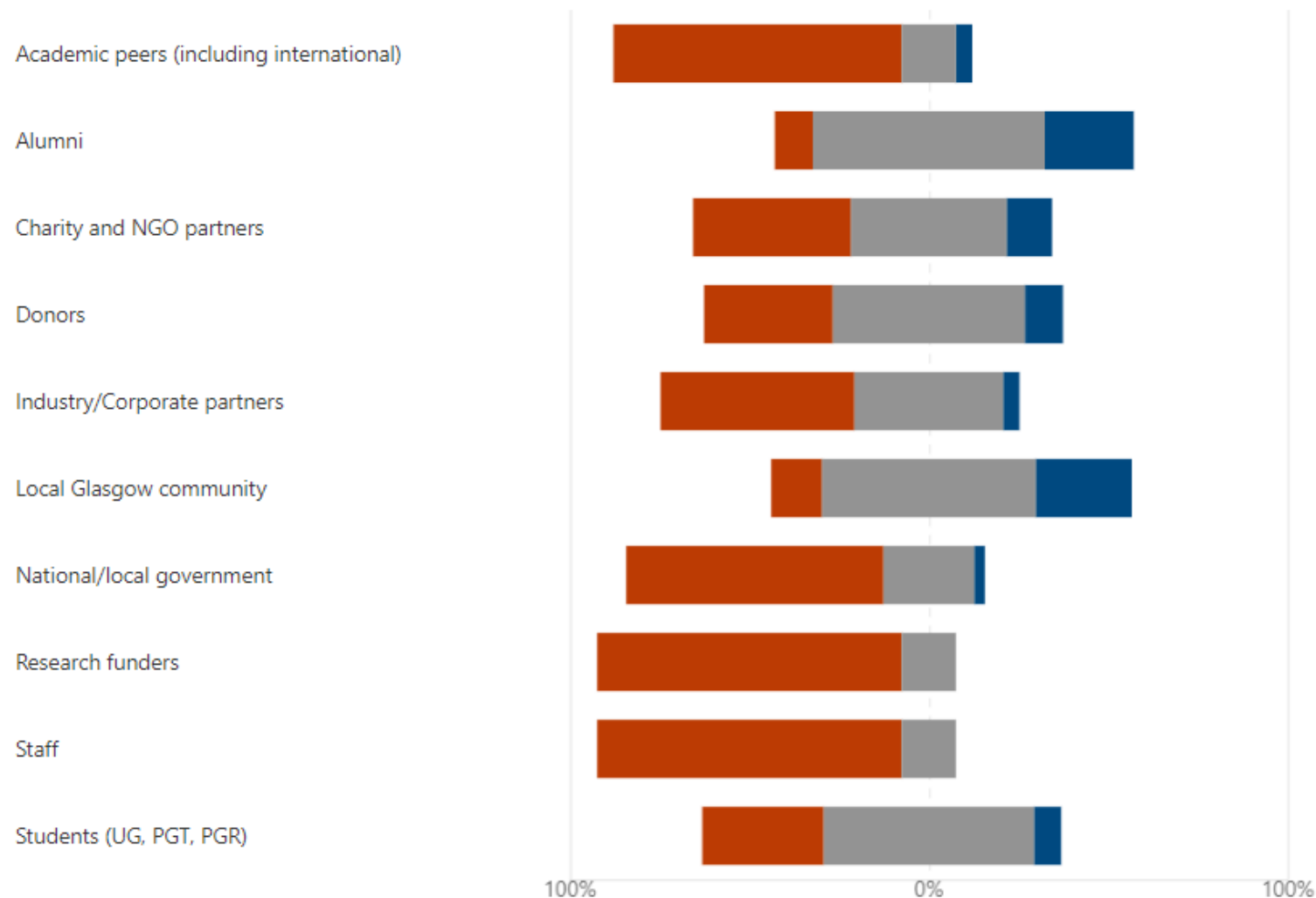
- REF achievements are built on strong foundations and everyone in the university has played and continues to play a part in supporting research.
- Commitment to EDI
- Motivating and encouraging researchers.
- That this is not only about the academics, but about everyone who works to support and enhance research.
- A sense that the UoG researchers feel congratulated and praised for their hard work.
- To recognise and highlight the role of staff at all levels in all job families
- To convey the breadth and depth of achievement and the amount of work that researchers do across the board.



3. From your perspective, can you identify the primary audiences for Glasgow's REF results?

[More Details](#)

■ High Priority ■ Medium Priority ■ Low Priority



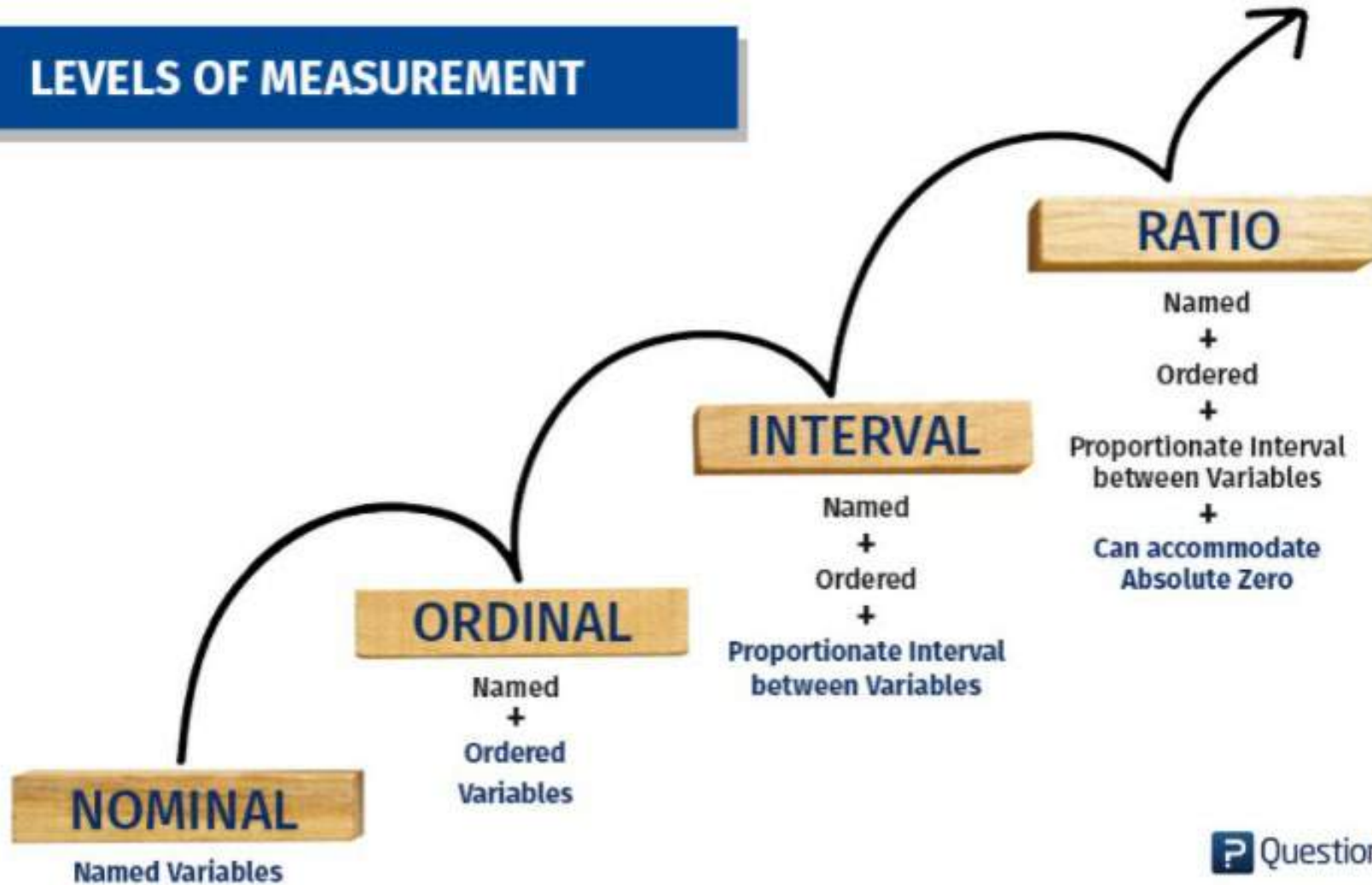


What might responsible REF results analysis look like?

- Responsible metrics principles still apply!
 - Measure what matters to you
 - Compare like with like – and only where necessary
 - Beware of small sample sizes
 - Beware of false precision



LEVELS OF MEASUREMENT





Uncertainty about uncertainty

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Article | Open Access | Published: 12 March 2019

Systematic analysis of agreement between metrics and peer review in the UK REF

V. A. Traag & L. Waltman

Palgrave Communications 5, Article number: 29 (2019) | Cite this article

5103 Accesses | 19 Citations | 94 Altmetric | Metrics

Abstract

When performing a national research assessment, some countries rely on citation metrics whereas others, such as the UK, primarily use peer review. In the influential *Metric Tide* report, a low agreement between metrics and peer review in the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) was found. However, earlier studies observed much higher agreement between metrics and peer review in the REF and argued in favour of using metrics. This shows that there is considerable ambiguity in the discussion on agreement between metrics and peer review. We provide clarity in this

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The future of research assessment

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Systematic analysis of agreement between metrics and peer review in the UK REF

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Regardless of the level of aggregation at which agreement between metrics and peer review is analysed and regardless of whether a size-dependent or a size-independent perspective is taken, agreement between metrics and peer review should be placed in an appropriate context. To determine whether agreement between metrics and peer review should be regarded as high or low, it is essential to make a comparison with internal peer review agreement. Unfortunately, there are currently no data available to quantify peer review uncertainty in the REF. Ideally, one needs to have an independent replication of the peer review process in the REF to determine the degree to which peer review is subject to uncertainty and to quantify internal peer review agreement. We recommend that uncertainty in peer review is analysed in the next round of the REF in 2021 to clarify this important point.

Given the lack of empirical data, we rely on a simple model to get an idea of the degree of uncertainty in peer review. For some fields, our model suggests that agreement between metrics and peer review is quite close to internal peer review agreement. In particular, this is the case for Physics, Clinical Medicine, and Public Health, Health Services & Primary Care. For these fields, the differences between metrics and peer review

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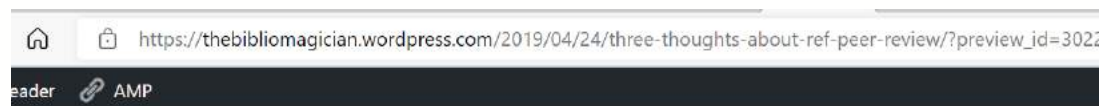
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Uncertainty about EDI implications of peer review



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APRIL 24, 2019

Three thoughts about REF peer review

Lizzie Gadd asks whether more could be done to build confidence in the REF peer review process.

Introduction

Peer review is still held up as the gold standard of research evaluation, and,

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Post-script

Since writing this blog, I'm delighted to say that the Association of Research Managers and Administrators (ARMA) have submitted a formal request to the Chair of the REF Equality & Diversity Panel (EDAP), Professor Dianne Berry, for EIAs on the scoring of outputs. Professor Berry has agreed to put this on the agenda for their next meeting on 24 May. I will post any updates on this blog post as-and-when I have them.

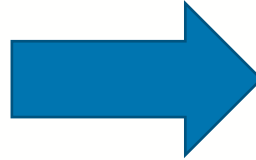
25 June 2019 - Prof Dianne Berry confirmed that "EDAP was positive about this matter and we agreed that we would recommend to the REF Steering Group that we should press ahead with this. We suggested that the analysis should look at:

- Staff with declared circumstances vs those without
- ECR against non-ECR
- Scores by protected characteristic where the amount of data was sufficient."



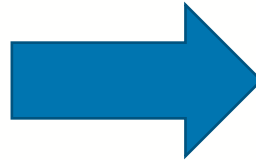
What might responsible REF comms look like?

- Presenting REF results in line with UofG mission
- Presenting REF results as part of larger whole



- Mission-focussed celebration of Research at Glasgow

- Avoiding unnecessary claims of superiority



- Sample 'collegial' Press Release



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The benefits of a broader research celebration approach

- **Reputation protection.**
- **We can start now.**
- **It will outlast the REF.**
- **It has broader applications.**



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Thank you for listening

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#UofGWorldChangers



@UofGlasgow

Responsible REF Results Workshop - 13.01.2022

ARMA UK JAN 10, 2022 10:06AM

Group 1 - 10: How might you plan to analyse and communicate your REF results in a more responsible way?

Developing a relationship with the communications office and agree a unified approach

Agree the Comms strategy

Decide ahead of time who needs to be involved and what type of story the University wants to tell - this will likely vary dependent on the type of institution and submission made

take time to analyse the results in the context of all HEIs submissions, and plan your communication strategy

Forefront collaborations

Consideration if your institution already has a Responsible Research Matrix

Agreed that at internal guidance document on how Dept's can use the data and what they can publish. Also a process for pre-approval before publishing or using any of the data.

Establish shared understanding of limitations of results.

Agree a uniform approach to reporting and make sure everyone is aware of what will be made available.

Ensure awareness of our institution's Principles of responsible use of metrics - circulate and discuss

Draw your red lines

Draw up your red lines in case some stakeholders want to be go further in claims than the data can sustain.

Senior Team endorsement

Clear understanding of the approach and senior endorsement - avoid conflict between central comms and more local comms.

We suggested sharing this video with senior management teams! Very interesting and important messages to get across

Agreement that direct comparisons with other institutions is not good practice. Strong feeling of support for the approach of highlighting what institutional contribution was to the research.

Onboarding of comms professionals across the institution

Collaborative approach - what do they need from central comms and when?

make sure people are comparing like with like, refer to INORMs, map out chains of communication - ie messages from President before Heads of Department

Ensure everyone familiar with uni strategy to align and refer to context

Internal comms

This is so important to manage expectations, provide transparency and adopt a one team approach.

Prepping internal audience for what REF is & means, and what to expect from results comms

Get the press officer to this event

Recognise motives of people making comments

Think about being collegiate

Make sure have principles for being responsible agreed

Agreeing who will do what

Try and avoid discussing money

Agree who is responsible for the messaging

Small and new units - how to prepare them for their results if they aren't good

Remember the results are based on the work of individuals and have worked very hard to get the submission together. Be nice and think about how to support

Responsibility, think about the mission of the institution

Be mindful of the analysis that The Times Higher did last time, and what they will publish this time. This could be helpful and useful and save you from very detailed analysis.

Need a plan for dealing with the gap between release of institutional results and all results

Start planning comms around the areas we're most confident e.g. strong impacts

Group 11 - 20: What has worked well for you in the past when preparing for the analysis of REF results?

don't be pressured to give early results

Timetable

Need a very detailed timetable (even hour by hour)

Get messages to senior team early - good and bad news

Elsevier tool

Worked well - Elsevier tool, provided to those with PURE

Could rank by different metrics, GPA, Power etc. Wasn't expensive to buy. Worth the money if Elsevier have it ready in time

Face to face meetings are best - explain the nuances

Having those early discussions with planning office to agree timetable for analysis

Had an ALL-STAFF briefing - everyone had same info at same time.

engaging with planning colleagues, or others with more data analysis skills

Getting your results template ready, and letting people know what format they will get their results in

This isn't just about numbers it's about people

Locking yourself away with your spreadsheet

REF2014

Don't rely too heavily on what happened last time - things have changed a lot since then, in terms of things like the importance of EDI, the way staff are identified for submission, how outputs represent a Unit not an author, and so on. We need to be mindful of the current context and where the sector is now.

Have people in charge of each college

It's really hard until you get sector results to tell how you've done

Have comms. team briefed ahead of time

Infographics created ahead of time. Need to understand responsible reporting

Important to think about how well new units have done relative to where they've come from, rather than where they compare to others

waiting for the sector data

It's easy to get carried away and the data looked very different when not in isolation

Establish roles and responsibilities for your analysis team

Keep it simple!

Prepping comms around impact - our 'impact rockstars'

Back-up staff for all roles

Liaising with comms and press offices

making sure other staff understand the assessment, what it is, and that there are differences compared to 2014 - it isn't just the same again

Develop templates in advance as to what should go to Units/colleagues

Knowing which power equation is being used when thinking about performance in ranking

Scenario planning was important - how to frame if unexpected rise or fall vs expected

Group 21 - 30: What next steps will you take at your institution in light of today's discussion?

Institutional Strategy

Have broader discussions internally about what the coms strategy will be

How to manage local and central messaging/analysis

Managing expectations by having a number of strategies

Formalising an approach

Making a proposal to Senior Managers about the approach we recommend

bringing in colleagues from all UoA to stress the importance of using the results responsibly locally, as well as at an institutional level

Planning

Establishing and formalizing a plan of action for stakeholders to agree on prior to results being released

not to forget to plan internal communications

How to manage the use/reporting of results on an ongoing basis rather than just in the lead up to and immediate aftermath of the results.

making sure there is coverage for eg PVC-R, Director of Research, analysts, press leads.

Establishing what senior leaders would like to know in advance, what specific elements they are most interested in

Important to have a range of strategies

Showcasing wider research

Department heads have said they'd like to have a say on the narrative and ensure it's nuanced. I think we'll get in contact with Departments to see what they already want to showcase, without knowing the REF results

Management of results at UoA level

Need to make sure that have internal discussions about how staff at UoA level will use the results responsibly, and also agree what sort of access they may need/should have to the submission system

what to do about rankings?

Formalising a process - through research committees etc.

Deciding who has access to the results in advance.

Accessing more resource or help to process and the analyse

Teams Channels to include Comms team

can get stories in preparation now based on our submission

make it clear who are involved in the team - engage with the personal data analysts to reassure that they are involved/can trust the analysis

Take temperature of what relevant stakeholders want from results

Preparing impact comms

Maybe asking authors (for submitted and non-submitted) to create blog posts/lay articles about their work to link to from the press releases

Discussions w/ departments who want to Control narrative

they already know what they want to showcase

Internal comms important:

- teams wanting heads up of bad news
- timeline of release for all other stakeholders aside from directly involved teams
- guidance on what results mean as well as what processes are

Develop some contextual information for UoAs to supplement data and results

Find a good news story for every UoA to ensure staff are not demoralised

Lots of internal engagement

Helping people to understand what the data means, and understanding what they want from the analysis.

Sharing who is on the analysis team and their working methods

Making it clear to the whole research community in advance who will be having early sight of the results and how they will be analysing them. People will be able to talk to their contacts on that group in advance and share their concerns, and see if/how they are represented on that group. Head off the assumption that this is just the Marketing team/VC's office/whoever and will be a team, cross-institution effort.

short term vs long term analysis

There will be short-term headlines and comms, and also long-term analysis of results that can benchmark against similar institutions to set targets and identify strengths and weaknesses to focus on in the future

QR funding formula

Would help to have a statement from RE around when the formula for QR will be calculated so that we can help push back on pressures to prematurely answer funding questions.

Making comms mission-focussed

The central importance of our principles to all comms and interpreting REF results through this lens is the way to anchor this

Convene an internal REF results working group

Responsibility - more than just the numbers, the context of results as assessing the research behind the paper/eg not a journal

Complexity!

The different layers of considerations and possible ramifications need thorough planning. A multidisciplinary, multi-viewpoint team is needed

Also: potential for confusion when audiences don't know what the REF is.

Re-visit commitments to the ASA

This is of particular import to Comms teams

