

# Response ID ANON-1JJU-4G1M-K

Submitted to Research Excellence Framework 2028: issues for further consultation following the initial decisions  
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## Personal Details

1 What is your name?

Name:  
Kyle Grayson

2 What is your email address?

Email:  
kyle.grayson@ncl.ac.uk

3 What is your organisation/institution?

Organisation/Institution:  
British International Studies Association

4 Are you answering on behalf of your organisation/institution or as an individual?

Organisation/Institution

## Volume Measure

5 What practical challenges may institutions face in implementing these changes?

This is an open text field:

This survey is being completed on behalf of the British International Studies Association – the leading professional association for International Studies (a disciplinary field contributing to UoA 19 'Politics and International Studies') in the United Kingdom with over 1100 members. As a professional association representing academics at a range of career stages, we have several concerns that we will raise in this questionnaire relating to how the FRAP proposals may impact our members and the standing of our discipline more broadly. The responses that we provide to these questions are a result of a survey of our members, consultation with UoA19 research directors, and discussion with our trustees.

In all these discussions, concerns have been raised about (a) the extent to which the new proposals re-introduce elements of 'game playing' that had been eliminated under the post-Stern REF2021 rules, (b) the potentially negative EDI implications of the proposed changes, (c) the ongoing reduction in the weighting of outputs given the methods for their evaluation are more familiar than other proposed elements of REF2028, (d) the workload implications for those tasked with putting together their UoA's REF submission given the proposed new elements, (e) the extent to which institutional level statements of the People, Culture, and Environment sub-profile will disadvantage SHAPE subjects relative to STEM and (f) the potential for wealthier institutions to benefit disproportionately from the changes - especially in relation to the revised weightings and inclusion of new types of statements. As a professional association we feel it is important to raise all of these issues, which admittedly go beyond the scope of this consultation, but will have long term implications for the health of our discipline.

In relation to the specific question of the volume measure, our concern is that many HEIs will see the new process as an opportunity to 'game' the system. In effect, we could see HEIs acting pre-emptively to reduce the volume measure ahead of the 25/26 academic year by either moving staff into teaching only contracts or replacing retiring staff on T&R contracts with teaching only contracts depending on (a) their evaluations of the responsibilities that a given headcount might entail (e.g., the number of impact case studies required) and (b) the probable impacts on their QR income based on predicted percentages of 4\*/3\* in their return arising from different FTE levels. This could become particularly acute if signals that QR income distributions will become more closely tied to GPA (as opposed to GPA and FTE) prove true. Similar to REF2014 strategies, others might simply wish to maximise GPA to place themselves at the top of league tables for promotional/reputational purposes.

As a professional association representing the interests of our discipline, any initiatives that could have unintended consequences in relation to the terms and conditions of academic staff employment are of great concern to us. Moreover, we are apprehensive about the long-term consequences of the proliferation of teaching only contracts that could result from these proposals and the negative impacts on the health of the national research capacity in international studies. In the context of a discipline that continues to attract very high student numbers, particularly in the highly variable international postgraduate taught student market, our fear is that HEIs will prioritise the development of elite research teams at the expense of investing in all research active staff, with detrimental consequences for the broader research culture and environment.

6 How might the funding bodies mitigate against these challenges?

This is an open text field:

It is important that more thought is given to how HEIs respond to the REF process in practice and that further consideration is given to the unintended consequences of rule changes, especially those that impact EDI commitments.

Thus, we would favour strict content guidance with clear criteria to accompany the Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding and People, Culture, and Environment statements. For the Contribution statement, UoAs should also be required to explain the process through which outputs were selected, who was involved in the selection, and justify how EDI concerns were mitigated. As part of the People, Culture, and Environment statement, UoAs should be required to report the proportion of staff within the submitting unit on hourly paid, fixed term, and open-ended contracts alongside the proportion that have research as part of their duties over the REF period. The purpose would be to outline the broader infrastructure and labour upon which the presented research culture is based. They should also be required to list substantive measures that they are undertaking to improve the quality and sustainability of their research culture by reducing their reliance on precarious labour as well as tangible policies that are in place to support researchers moving into permanent contracts within the sector (or beyond). Thus, we would urge FRAP to be braver in its consideration of how REF2028 reporting can contribute to meaningfully addressing issues of precarity and inequality that corrode research culture.

7 What would be the impact of these changes on individual researchers and particularly those with protected characteristics or other underrepresented groups?

This is an open text field:

As mentioned in relation to question 5, BISA seeks to raise concerns about the consequences of these proposed changes for individual researchers who may be pushed to accept changes to the terms of their employment contract as HEIs seek to maximise unit GPAs and their proportion of 4\*/3\*outcomes. Research suggests that the use of discretion in higher education, including in politics and international studies, often reproduces existing structural inequalities (e.g., Meho 2021; Mitchell et al 2013). Efforts by HEIs to manage their volume measure will undoubtedly have EDI implications. In making reasonable inferences from existing research on differential outcomes in higher education (e.g., Teelken and Dean 2013; Hanretty 2021; Hinze 2023), these practices will disproportionately impact researchers with protected characteristics or who belong to other underrepresented groups, with significant impacts on their careers, compounding current inequalities. We note that in a report we co-commissioned with the Political Studies Association about career trajectories in our disciplines, key findings included that “controlling for length of experience in higher education, members of staff from an ethnic minority are 5.6 percentage points less likely.... [and] female members of staff are 6.2% less likely to be in a senior position (senior lecturer, reader, professor)” and that “members of staff from an ethnic minority were 2 percentage points more likely to exit employment in higher education in any given year in the period 2012/13 to 2018/19” (Hanretty 2021: 4). The proposed changes would also have the effect of making conditions even harder for new entrants to the profession – for example, by making it more difficult to secure open-ended posts that include both a teaching and research component.

Please see:

Teelken, Christine and Deem, Rosemary (2013) ‘All are equal, but some are more equal than others: managerialism and gender equality in higher education in comparative perspective’, *Comparative Education*, 49(4): 520-535.

Hanretty, Chris (2021) *Career trajectories in UK departments of politics and international relations: A report for the British International Studies Association and the Political Studies Association*. Available from: <https://www.bisa.ac.uk/news/bisapsa-report-career-trajectories-uk-departments-politics-and-international-relations-launch>

Hinze, A. M. (2023). ‘Made for Men: Political Science Departments in the United States as Gendered Institutions’. *Politics & Gender*, 1-33. doi:10.1017/S1743923X23000399

Meho, Lokman (2021). “The gender gap in highly prestigious international research awards, 2001–2020.” *Quantitative Science Studies*, 2(3): 976-989.

Mitchell, Sara McLaughlin, Lange, Samantha, and Brus, Holly (2013). “Gendered citation patterns in international relations journals.” *International Studies Perspectives* 14(4): 485-492.

## Output Submission

8 What would be the impact of these changes on individual researchers and particularly those with protected characteristics or other underrepresented groups?

This is an open text field:

The issue of delinking staff from outputs was flagged in our consultation as an area of significant concern. Delinking staff from output submissions could at first sight appear positive by reducing pressures to meet a minimum number of outputs. This can help cultivate a research culture that empowers researchers to conduct in-depth, longer term collaborative impact-oriented research. However, it is also very likely that it will create a two-tier system with those whose work is considered 4\* allocated more time and additional resources while being under increased pressure to produce more high-quality outputs, and those whose work is less valued given fewer resources and a higher teaching/admin workload. The risk is that local processes for making these determinations, and their outcomes, will be blunt and brutal, particularly in relation to the proposed first census date. The ‘winners’ in this system are likely to be those who have historically benefitted from lower teaching and admin workloads (e.g. as a result of big multi-year grants that lead to large numbers of high-quality outputs, and thus to those individuals being seen by their institutions as ‘REF superstars’). This is likely to increase tension, ill feeling, and inequality within the group being submitted to a given UoA, as well as have consequences for individuals’ probation, promotions, and career trajectories. Again, we would draw attention to the existing demographic gaps at senior levels within our discipline and the likelihood that delinking will further exacerbate them.

Our consultation raised significant concerns about the repercussions for individual staff whose work is not submitted – a set of concerns that relate to member’s direct experiences of how REF is managed in practice at their HEIs.

In our consultations with research directors and our membership more broadly, the delinking of individuals from outputs was viewed in broadly negative terms. Many of our members have expressed concerns about the scrapping of the post-Stern rules that linked individuals to at least one output whilst requiring all staff with a substantial responsibility for research to be included in the output pool. The value of the REF2021 rules on outputs is that they were highly inclusive and led to many HEIs taking extremely positive steps – for example around introducing bespoke support after a period of parental leave in order to ensure that those returning are able to re-start their research careers. Similarly, our members emphasised how the process of declaring disabilities, or periods of research interruption, lead to better treatment and recognition for staff who are often disadvantaged in research assessment processes. The delinking of outputs offers a disincentive for adopting and/or maintaining these institutional best practices.

Similarly, a focus on research ‘stars’ being able to submit numerous publications, will reinforce structures of inequality within our discipline (e.g., Dion et al 2018; Ginocchio et al 2022). Whilst we welcome the strong emphasis on EDI that will form part of the People, Culture and Environment component of the REF submission, we feel that a narrative form of reporting may not be enough to mitigate against the knock-on effects of the creation of a tier of research ‘stars’ for those coming from more disadvantaged backgrounds or those just starting off in the profession. We also have concerns that without a requirement to report about specific forms of data and actions (please see our response to question 6), the EDI component of these statements will be filled with platitudes and aspirational references to accreditation processes that do not reflect the lived experiences of researchers or those whose teaching and administrative responsibilities enable research to take place (Bhopal 2020).

Our members have also expressed concerns about the likelihood that the changing rules on outputs will lead to very conservative decision-making on behalf of those tasked with putting together a UoA’s output pool. There is a strong feeling amongst our membership that works that are considered too ‘cutting edge’ or ‘risky’ - including work that takes a less conventional format (e.g. film) – is likely to be overlooked in favour of ‘normal science’, with knock on effects in terms of the methodological, theoretical and intellectual plurality of our discipline. There are particular risks for colleagues who are currently being included in UoAs other than 19, and whose work is likely to be considered of less importance for a successful submission (this often happens with smaller or larger Social Sciences departments).

An important final point to stress is that although many of our members were supportive of an increased weighting to People, Culture, and Environment, they remained concerned that the proposed rules on outputs will undermine the intentions of this weighting to improve research cultures, undercutting any incentive for HEIs to invest in this area. We suggest that this could be mitigated by providing more explicit guidance on the connection of this section to the pool of outputs submitted alongside explicit penalties for practices that focus submissions on a select group of ‘research stars’. This clarity in advance is critical because it will shape how institutions prepare for REF 2028.

## References

Bhopal, Kalwant (2020) ‘Gender, ethnicity and career progression in UK higher education: a case study analysis’, *Research Papers in Education*, 35(6): 706-721.

Dion, Michelle L., Jane Lawrence Sumner, and Sara McLaughlin Mitchell (2018). "Gendered citation patterns across political science and social science methodology fields." *Political Analysis* 26(3): 312-327.

Ginocchio, B.G., Hindmoor, A. and Stanley, L., 2022. Pluralism and political studies in the UK: A pilot study into who gets what in the discipline. *Political Studies Review*, 20(1): .3-22. [Figure 2 on gender gaps in ESRC funding is instructive]

9 What impact would these changes have on institutions in preparing output submissions? For example, what may be the unintended consequences of allowing the submission of outputs produced by those on non-academic or teaching-only contracts?

This is an open text field:

BISA is not in favour of allowing submission of outputs produced by those on teaching only contracts as they are not generally provided with a workload allocation to conduct research. The likely consequence of such a policy is to create huge pressures on a group of staff who are not contracted to undertake this work. If this proposal stands, HEIs would be able to use outputs to which they have in practice contributed very little (no workload allocation for research and no research funding allocation). While we understand that the intention is to be inclusive by allowing submissions from staff without a substantive responsibility for research, we would caution against a measure that potentially places demands on colleagues who are not given (similar) workload allocation for research activity. As noted in our comments on the volume measure (above), BISA is concerned about how proposals are likely to be taken up by institutions – for example, there is the possibility that certain institutions may seek to increase the number of colleagues on teaching-only contracts, knowing that their outputs can still be used. If the intention is for a vibrant and inclusive research culture, the direction of travel ought to be bringing colleagues into T&R (or R&I) contracts, not taking research from other job families.

Some of our members have also expressed concerns about the increased administrative burden that would result from this change by increasing the pool of outputs that would require internal quality assessment.

10 Should outputs sole-authored by postgraduate research students be eligible for submission? If so, should this include PhD theses?

This is an open text field:

As a professional association with a large proportion of our membership made up of PGR colleagues and ECRs (62%), we are very concerned about the potential for inclusion of PhD students' work (including PhD theses) in a UoA's output pool.

We would caution against the inclusion of sole-authored non-PhD thesis outputs by PGR colleagues. Rather than being seen as exceptional, it is very likely that this would be internalised by PGR colleagues as a necessity and have the potential to create additional pressures in already demanding circumstances. It will also likely exacerbate existing differences between funded and self-funded PhD students (akin to many social science disciplines, self-funded students proliferate in the field of International Studies) with the former more likely to have the time/resources to pursue additional research opportunities.

We are particularly worried about the proposal to include PhD theses in the submission of outputs. Including PhD theses in submissions could be extremely damaging for individuals who will usually look to develop their PhD into articles or a research monograph post-PhD. There are potential knock-on effects related to this proposal – for example, it could create a situation in which individuals find it very difficult to secure continuing employment on a T&R contract post-PhD if their work is ineligible for future REF exercises.

Given the highly precarious job market that PGR colleagues and ECRs face in our discipline, we would also like to raise the issue of portability rules: if the submission of, say, a PhD student's article by their PhD granting institution means that the same article cannot be submitted by another institution, that seriously harms their prospects on the job market. At the very least, it must be eligible for inclusion by both.

11 What would be appropriate indicators of a demonstrable and substantive link to the submitting institution?

This is an open text field:

BISA is strongly opposed to the possible use of 0.2 contracts with a minimum of six months in post as a part of unit submissions. Our consultation with members indicated that the use of such contracts was seen as unfair because they would be used to recruit 'research superstars' from overseas, which would privilege wealthier institutions and would undermine research cultures within departments/units. We have concerns that the new rules will also have a negative impact on diversity and intellectual pluralism as those afforded this hyper-mobility are more likely to be from better resourced universities in the global north and disproportionately representative of particular genders, ethnic backgrounds, and nationalities. Likewise, as institutions seek to attract these 'super-stars', resources and investment will inevitably be diverted away from posts aimed at early career researchers. We are also concerned that this could undermine the integrity of the exercise because units will be able to give a false impression of the quality of their research environments by claiming research achievements that their own environment has not supported or nurtured.

We would suggest that only 0.4 FTE and above for at least 2 years are counted as having a demonstrable and substantive link to institutions. This would ensure that colleagues who work part time due to caring responsibilities or other reasons, can be included.

12 Do the proposed arrangements for co-authored outputs strike the right balance between supporting collaboration and ensuring that assessment focuses on the work of the unit?

This is an open text field:

This is something that BISA is supportive of, recognising that our members often co-author across fields both within, and across, institutions.

13 Are there any further considerations around co-authored outputs that need be taken into account?

open text box:

From the perspective of the discipline of International Studies, we welcome the fact that in the discussion of co-authorship, the issue of author order is not mentioned. International Studies does not have consistent practices in relation to author order with many research teams ordering authors alphabetically. We are very much in favour of making outputs eligible for any listed author of a piece.

## Impact Case Studies

14 What will be the impact of reducing the minimum number to one?

This is an open text field:

In discussion with research directors representing UoA 19 we found that there was widespread support for the proposal to reduce the minimum number of impact case studies required to one. This is a positive development which may well encourage more HEIs to submit to UoA 19, since they will only need to submit one impact case study. We would note however that the threshold of 9.99 FTE is very low and that a unit with a FTE of 19.99 or below would struggle to put together two impact case studies.

15 What will be the impact of revising the thresholds between case study requirements?

This is an open text field:

N/A

16 To what extent do you support weighting the impact statement on a sliding scale in proportion to the number of case studies submitted?

This is an open text field:

This proposal is a practical one in the sense that it could ensure that an impact statement is not given less weight than single case studies; however, as things stand there is very little insight into what the impact statement will look like or the robustness of the assessment process. Thus, as we have noted in answer 6, we would call for clear criteria for impact statements to be shared publicly and made available for further consultation.

## Unit of Assessment

17 If the UOA structure is relevant to you/your organisation, please indicate clearly any changes that you propose to the UOA structure and provide your rationale and any evidence to support your proposal.

This is an open text field:

As an International Studies disciplinary body we welcome keeping sub-panel 19, which makes sense for our discipline, particularly given the composition of departments/schools across the United Kingdom.

## Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

18 What is your view on the proposed measures to take into account the impact of the Covid pandemic?

This is an open text field:

Recognising the long-term consequences of the pandemic for researchers and research projects (especially those with an international dimension), we are strongly in favour of maintaining the COVID impact statement for REF2028. The new overall UoA level statements for outputs and environment should have a specific question on the impact of COVID.

Our consultation with members indicates that there are significant concerns relating to the ongoing impact of the pandemic – especially for certain groups who were disproportionately affected (including those with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities and early career researchers whose job prospects were particularly hard hit) (Wright et al 2022). As noted in our responses above, we are gravely concerned about the EDI implications of de-linking individuals from outputs which we regard as likely to increase rather than decrease existing inequalities between members of staff. The commitment to taking account of COVID is to be welcomed, but we are concerned that such commitments could be undermined by the new output rules.

Please see:

Wright, K. A., Hastrup, T., & Guerrina, R. (2021). "Equalities in freefall? Ontological insecurity and the long-term impact of COVID-19 in the academy." *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28: 163-167.

19 What other measures should the funding bodies consider to take into account the impact of the Covid pandemic?

This is an open text field:

For REF 2021, there was a need to reflect on how COVID shaped output selection. Imagining that this will stay in place, it would be really great to see a requirement in the People, Culture and Environment section about how universities have compensated for the impact of COVID in terms of their wider research culture.

## Cymraeg in HEFCW

20 What positive or adverse effects will the proposals have on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

This is an open text field:

N/A

21 Could the proposals be changed to increase positive effects, or decrease adverse effects on opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

This is an open text field:

N/A