

The Stern Review recommendations: some possible implications for doctoral and early career researchers.

NDUBUKA, N.N.

2017

THE STERN REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

*Some Possible Implications for
Doctoral & Early Career Researchers*



Nkeiruka N. Ndubuka

SGSSS Summer School June 7, 2017



Outline

- What is RRP?
- Why does RRP matter?
- Key focus of RRP SC 14 and Summary of findings
- Short term goals
- Short term Research priorities
- Possible long term
- Conclusion

THE STERN REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

*Some Possible Implications for
Doctoral & Early Career Researchers*



Nkeiruka N. Ndubuka

SGSSS Summer School June 7, 2017



Outline

- What is DfE?
- Why does DfE matter?
- Key Parts of REF 2014 and Summary of Results
- Key Findings
- Key Recommendations
- Key Implications
- Conclusion

Outline

- What is REF
- Why does REF matter?
- Key Facts of REF2014 and Summary of Results
- Stern Review
- Stern Review Recommendations
- Possible Implications
- Conclusion



What is REF?



- The Research Excellence Framework (REF) is a sector-wide assessment exercise of publicly funded research in the UK. It is the latest iteration of research assessment exercises (RAEs) held by the UK government since 1986.

- Was last held in 2014. UK HEIs were invited to submit research outputs, evidence of the impact(s) of their research for the first time (impact case studies), and evidence about the quality of their research environment for assessment.

Outputs	Impact	Environment
65%	20%	15%

- There were a total of 36 Units of Assessment (UOA) that UK Higher Education Institutions could submit to.
- The research of 154 UK HEIs were assessed by panels of peer reviewers according to research areas, or units of assessments.
- Not all eligible staff were returned for REF2014 exercise - institutions strategically selected staff to submit. Selected staff submitted four publications (as base rule).
- Outcome was a quality profile for each UoA which rated the quality of outputs, impacts & research environment as 4* (world leading), 3* (internationally excellent), 2* (recognized internationally), 1* (recognized nationally) or u/c* (unclassified - quality that falls below the standard of nationally recognized work).

Why does REF matter?

- UK research is supported by a dual support grant system.
 - competitive grant funding for proposed future research projects
 - block grant that allows higher education institutions to strategical invest in research (on a long-term basis).
- Both investment streams have to channel limited resources on excellent research.
- Quality-related research (QR) funding/the block grant, is known as the Research Excellence Grant (REG) in Scotland. It is driven by an assessment of research quality (i.e. REF, formerly RAE).
- The primary purpose of REF2014 was assess the quality of research and produce outcomes for each submission made by institutions:
 - The four UK HE funding bodies used the outcome to inform the selective allocation of their grant for research to HEIs which they fund (from 2015-2016)
 - Assessment provides accountability for use of taxpayers in funding research & provide evidence of the benefits of such investments
 - Assessment outcome provides benchmarking information, establishes reputational yardsticks (used in HE & for public consumption).



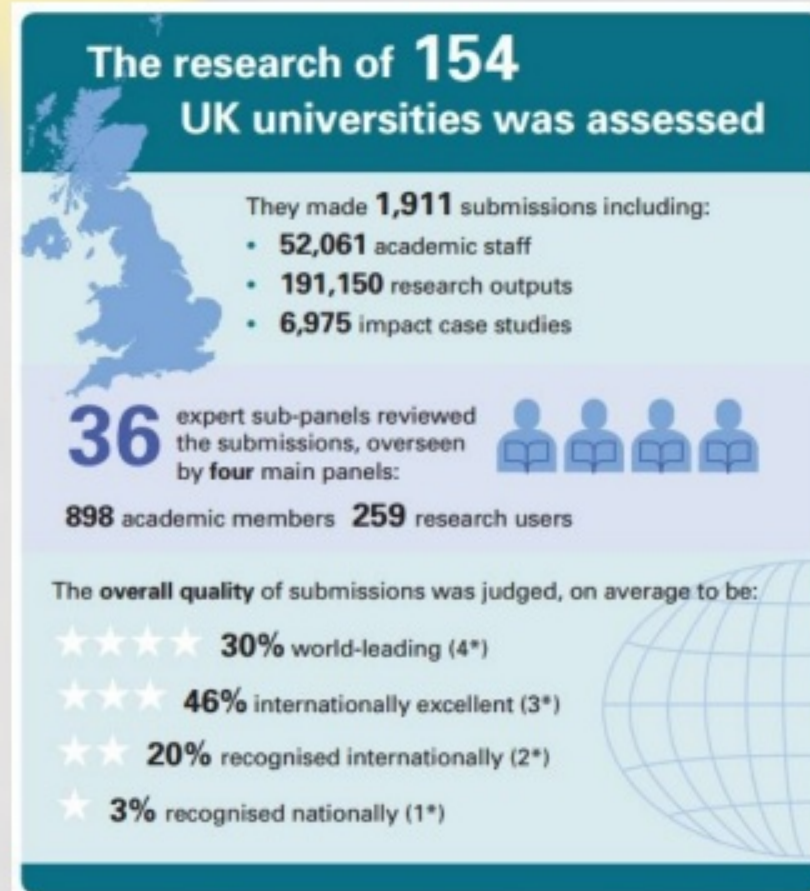
REF2014 Key Facts & Overall Results

Excellence

- Significant improvement was found in the quality of research (across a broad range of HEIs) since the last assessment (i.e. RAE 2008).

Diversity

- Excellence was found in all types/forms of research.
- Research outputs from ECRs and staff with circumstances (e.g. part-time or maternity leave) rated just as high as other staff.
- World-leading work was found in many diverse universities, albeit concentrated in the most research-intensive universities.



Impact

- First time assessment provided evidence of the impact of UK research.
- Impressive impacts were found in all disciplines, from diverse UK universities with submissions of all sizes.
- On average across all submissions, 44% of impacts were judged outstanding (4*) by over 250 external research users, working jointly with academic panel members. A further 40% were judged very considerable (3*).



Stern Review

- An independent review of the REF was commissioned in November 2015 (chaired by Lord Nicholas Stern) and reported in summer 2016.
- The task was to make REF exercise more cost effective and reduce administrative burden on HEIs while still identifying excellent research.
- Estimated total cost for running REF2014 was £246M (more than twice the total cost of running RAE2008).
 - Around £232M in cost for HEIs
 - About 14M in costs for the four UK HE funding bodies.
- Government consultation of Stern report was due in November Decisions on consultation due in November 2016 & was open for 3 months, allowing HEIs to submit institutional responses.
- Decisions from consultation due in summer 2017.
- It is assumed that REF2020/1 submissions will be collected in 2020 & assessed in 2021 with implementation for funding from 2022 (tentative).



Stern Review - Recommendations

1. All research active staff should be returned.
2. Research outputs should be submitted at UoA level with an average of two/staff but with flexibility (a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 6) .
3. Research outputs should not be portable - to remain at HEI where the researcher was at the time of acceptance.
4. Panels should continue to assess research outputs on the basis of peer review.
5. A new institutional-level impact case studies which arise from multi- and inter-disciplinary and collaborative work.
6. Impact should be based on research of demonstrable quality and the notion of impact should be broadened to more general forms of public engagement, including pedagogical research.
7. Creation of a new institutional-level environment assessment and the need for individual UoA environment statements to be condensed.
8. Where possible, REF data & metrics should be open, standardized and combinable with other research funders' data collection process.
9. Government and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) could make more strategic use of REF.
10. Government should ensure that there is no increased administrative burden to HEIs from interactions between the TEF and REF.



Possible Implications for Doctoral & EC Researchers

Recommendation 1: All research active staff should be returned in the REF

- PhD students not included but REF-able output(s) in collaboration with staff may be returned.
- Should ECRs be exempted or included (but be under no obligation to submit any output)?
- What about ECRs on fixed or short-term contracts?
- Need for ECRs and PhDs to publish in good quality journals - aim for 3/4* over 1/2* journals, even if they are relevant?
- Need to complete doctoral research within 3/4 year window (counts towards research environment).
- Unfair change in contracts (research to teaching) for some ECRs?



Possible Implications for Doctoral & EC Researchers

Recommendation 2: Outputs should be submitted at UoA level with a set average number per FTE but with flexibility (a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 6)

- Removes the need for the declaration of individual circumstances and the requirement for 4 outputs.
- Less focus on monitoring/selecting staff with 4 outputs to more focus on ensuring that a department has a strong collective basket of outputs to submit.
- Less burden for ECRs, or not? Perhaps increased pressure from senior management to have 2 quality outputs, since time spent in producing 4 will be limited to 2?
- What are the implications on REG allocation for submitting staff with 0 outputs? Effects on ECRs with 0 outputs?



Possible Implications for Doctoral & EC Researchers

Recommendation 3: Non-portability of outputs - outputs to remain at HEI where the researcher was at the time of acceptance.

- Perhaps will reorient hiring to focus on candidates' potentials rather be based on existing publications.
- Will transfer window be extended for ECRs or will they be completely exempted - move with outputs to new HEI?
- Encourage HEIs to support and invest in staff, including ECRs and PhD students, since they cannot leave with outputs that were accepted at their former institution. Might reduce the incentives for buying "hired guns".
- This might encourage the shelving of research outputs. But would you rather:
 - Shelf potential outputs and present at interviews as both a leverage and a sign of potential?
 - Purposefully delay reviews from editors and tidy up once you land the job? (assuming acceptance only applies from the date output was published). Or,
 - Publish in quality journals to develop a track record for evidencing "potential" at interviews? Though they will remain at your former HEI when eventually leave.
- Will the research outputs of teaching only staff/ECRs be included in the non-portability rule?
- If you move to another HEI, will your former HEI acknowledge you when returning outputs you authored or co-authored, or will they be assigned to staff with 0 outputs and 0 contributions to those outputs?
- Will this recommendation strict mobility, especially for ECRs in the process of moving up and those who seek new challenges, albeit in new HEIs?



Conclusion

Nothing is concrete, just tentative. Decisions to be reported before the end of summer 2017.

- Safe option - have at least one quality output published to evidence potential, there are no guarantees that shelved outputs will get you the job.
- Cheer up...better to be judged by, & hired because of your potential rather than number of REF-able outputs you have. Or not?
- Try not to lose yourself and voice as a researcher because of REF. But think creatively think of ways to create impact through your research, especially it has been recommended for "impact" to not be interpreted narrow
- However, be open to make certain institution/management induced compromises, as long as they are ethical and legal, whilst maintaining your core.



