

Annex A

Consultation questions and response form

1. Responses to the consultation should be made by completing the form below, and returning it by e-mail by **midday on Wednesday 16 December 2009**.
2. All responses should be e-mailed to ref@hefce.ac.uk. **In addition:**
 - a. Responses from institutions in Scotland should be **copied to** Pauline Jones, Scottish Funding Council, e-mail pjones@sfc.ac.uk.
 - b. Responses from institutions in Wales should be **copied to** Linda Tiller, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, e-mail linda.tiller@hefcw.ac.uk.
 - c. Responses from institutions in Northern Ireland should be **copied to** the Department for Employment and Learning, e-mail research.branch@delni.gov.uk.
3. We will publish an analysis of responses to the consultation. Additionally, all responses may be disclosed on request, under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act gives a public right of access to any information held by a public authority, in this case HEFCE. This includes information provided in response to a consultation. We have a responsibility to decide whether any responses, including information about your identity, should be made public or treated as confidential. We can refuse to disclose information only in exceptional circumstances. This means responses to this consultation are unlikely to be treated as confidential except in very particular circumstances. Further information about the Act is available at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk. Equivalent legislation exists in Scotland.

Respondent's details

Are you responding: (Delete one)	On behalf of an organisation
Name of responding organisation/individual	Library and Information Science Research Coalition
Type of organisation (Delete those that are not applicable)	Academic association or learned society
Contact name	Dr Hazel Hall
Position within organisation	Executive Secretary
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Contact e-mail address	hazel.hall@lisresearch.org

Consultation questions

(Boxes for responses can be expanded to the desired length.)

Consultation question 1: Do you agree with the proposed key features of the REF? If not, explain why.

Yes, but with reservations regarding the proportion of assessment designated for impact, concerns about the timetable, and what constitutes a “research user” in the assessment process.

Consultation question 2: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing outputs? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following proposals:

- that institutions should select research staff and outputs to be assessed
- for the categories of staff eligible for selection, and how they are defined
- for encouraging institutions to submit – and for assessing – all types of high-quality research outputs including applied and translational research
- for the use of citation information to inform the review of outputs in appropriate UOAs (including the range of appropriate UOAs, the type of citation information that should be provided to panels as outlined in Annex C, and the flexibility panels should have in using the information)

and on the following options:

- whether there should be a maximum of three or four outputs submitted per researcher
- whether certain types of output should be ‘double weighted’ and if so, how these could be defined.

The LIS Research Coalition agrees that institutions should select research staff and outputs to be assessed.

The LIS Research Coalition welcomes the encouragement of submission and assessment of all types of high-quality outputs including applied and translational research. Indeed, the LIS Research Coalition particularly favours the consideration of applied research.

The LIS Research Coalition recognises that citation information differs in value from discipline to discipline and recommends that this is used with care, particularly in UoAs that comprise subject domains that handle citations in different ways. This applies to the proposed UoA that combines 37 and 66 from 2008.

The LIS Research Coalition recommends that four outputs per researcher should be submitted for reasons of consistency, i.e. same process as RAE2008, *provided that the timetable is adjusted*. Otherwise three is more appropriate given the reduction of the time period from seven (RAE2008) to five years.

For the proposed UoA that merges 37 and 66 the LIS Research Coalition suggests that research monographs be ‘double weighted’. Similarly, significant contributions to serial publications, such as review chapters for the *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology*, or review papers in the *Journal of the American Society of Information Science and Research* should carry a double weighting.

Consultation question 3: What comments do you have on the proposed approach to assessing impact? If you disagree with any of these proposals please explain why.

Comments are especially welcomed on the following:

- how we propose to address the key challenges of time lags and attribution
- the type of evidence to be submitted, in the form of case studies and an impact statement supported by indicators (including comments on the initial template for case studies and menu of indicators at Annex D)
- the criteria for assessing impact and the definition of levels for the impact sub-profile
- the role of research users in assessing impact.

The LIS Research Coalition supports the assessment of impact. The Coalition, however, questions the weighting of 25% and strongly suggests that a lower weighting may be more appropriate.

The LIS Research Coalition notes that the challenges of time lags, attribution and corroboration will differ across subject domains. Similarly there is a multiplicity of means of measuring impact, particularly, in digital environments and beyond the UK. Therefore the criteria for impact need to be carefully formulated. For example, in library and information science research enterprises beyond the home of individual researchers regularly exploit the research output of others, even if the original researchers are not directly involved in this work. Mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that the originators of the work are credited for it in terms of impact. Separate domain-specific consultations may be necessary to set out the specifics for impact assessment.

The low number of case studies for the measurement of impact as proposed in the document is too few for library and information science. The risk here is that submissions will not be able to provide a full picture of the impact of the work completed. This criticism will apply to other multidisciplinary subject domains. In addition, there appears to be an assumption here that research to be assessed will be group research: there is no provision for individual work.

The definition of “research user” is a difficult in terms of LIS provision (and is also the case for other domains which are linked to professional practice). In the context of REF this could encompass policy makers who make decisions on library and information services provision, LIS practitioners or library end users. If the latter category is to be included, then the general public would need to be included in the assessment of impact. There would clearly be significant resource implications if this is to be the intention of the examination of impact.

The question of excluding teaching impact should be revisited. For example, the production of a teaching pack for schools which then invigorated the subject area, would appear to represent significant impact, yet according to the consultation it appears that this kind of output would not be valued.

Consultation question 4: Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to assessing research environment?

The LIS Research Coalition welcomes the approach to assessing the research environment.

Consultation question 5: Do you agree with our proposals for combining and weighting the output, impact and environment sub-profiles? If not please propose an alternative and explain why this is preferable.

The LIS Research Coalition has concerns regarding the 25% weighting for impact because (1) this is the first time that this will be applied, (2) the timescales are tight and (3) this element of the assessment risks becoming a distraction from conducting the actual activity of research. It should also be noted that poor quality research can have a higher impact than “good” research: it is imperative that the weighting does not encourage behaviours that undermine research excellence. In addition, early career researchers may be disadvantaged by the high allocation for impact. For these reasons – as well as the resulting costs of a misguided allocation decision - it is suggested that the weighting for impact be lowered from 25%.

Consultation question 6: What comments do you have on the panel configuration proposed at Annex E? Where suggesting alternative options for specific UOAs, please provide the reasons for this.

The LIS Research Coalition appreciates the reasons for UoAs from RAE to be combined. The pairing of UoA 37 and UoA 66 is acceptable (although a single UoA as 37 would still be the preference). The LIS Research Coalition approves the pairing as proposed in Annex E of the consultation document (and favours this over other possible pairings). Care will need to be taken in ensuring that panel members are able to handle the broad range of sub-domains within the new UoA. It is suggested that some specific members (but not all) be domain generalists sought for their *broad* experience across Library, Information, Communication, Cultural and Media Studies. Added to this, the documentation provided as part of the assessment should be comprehensive in its profiling of the whole UoA.

Consultation question 7: Do you agree with the proposed approach to ensuring consistency between panels?

Yes

Consultation question 8: Do you have any suggested additions or amendments to the list of nominating bodies? (If suggesting additional bodies, please provide their names and addresses and indicate how they are qualified to make nominations.)

No

Consultation question 9: Do you agree that our proposed approach will ensure that interdisciplinary research is assessed on an equal footing with other types of research? Are there further measures we should consider to ensure that this is the case and that our approach is well understood?

Care needs to be taken so that the impacts from research in one domain that are felt in others are identified. For example, work research into the role of public libraries within community settings may have an impact on social policy.

Consultation question 10: Do you agree that our proposals for encouraging and supporting researcher mobility will have a positive effect; and are there other measures that should be taken within the REF to this end?

It is difficult to assess this. However, the means by which the assessment will be made should not artificially increase or decrease researcher mobility.

Consultation question 11: Are there any further ways in which we could improve the measures to promote equalities and diversity?

There is a risk that early career researchers may be disadvantaged by a 25% allocation for impact. An impact of this is that universities may be discouraged from appointing new academic staff from the pool of younger researchers.

Consultation question 12: Do you have any comments about the proposed timetable?

The proposed timetable looks rather tight, particularly if the decision will be to consider four outputs per researcher.

Consultation question 13: Are there any further areas in which we could reduce burden, without compromising the robustness of the process?

Attention to sampling will help reduce the burden.

Consultation question 14: Do you have any other comments on the proposals?

The LIS Research Coalition welcomes the opportunity to make this contribution to the consultation process.