

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	The Association of Tourism in Higher Education - ATHE (formerly known as the National Liaison Group-NLG)
Type of organisation (Delete those that are not applicable)	Academic association or learned society (ATHE is a learned society of the Academy of Social Sciences)
Contact name	Professor Peter Burns
Position within organisation	Vice Chair, Treasurer, and one of three directors
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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.

- We generally concur with the positive position of the Academy of Social Sciences position of welcoming the REF.
- We do however have some reservations about weighting of impact factors and some particular concern over panel composition, expert referrals and peer review.
- Each of these concerns is dealt with in relevant responses below.

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.

- We are in general agreement with the proposals but have particular concerns that reflect the somewhat diverse and fragmented nature of our subject group.
- The use of citations information to inform the review of outputs has proved to be inadequate for the task by the pilot exercise. For the same reasons that it is inappropriate for many other social science subjects, it would be invalid for Tourism research.
- If Tourism is included in a UOA where citations will be used (because for those subjects citations are a reasonable indicator of researcher quality), then we will be unfairly disadvantaged.
- Given that tourism researchers often work in very small groups and can be located in a number of disciplines/ departments, we agree with the Academy of Social Sciences response which states that we “would not favour assessments which take into account the proportion of staff submitted as this is irrelevant to the main purpose of the REF – judging research excellence.”
- The RAEs indicated positive agreement for four outputs per researcher. However, significant advancements have been made to our subject through monographs and large practice-based reports (to governments and international bodies). So we favour the ability to double weight some outputs in some cases.

- We would want clarification and assurances that such a variety of outputs would be assessed fairly so that university REF managers and strategy-makers would not be faced with choices based on unclear criteria.

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.

- We fully support a more systematic assessment of research outputs in terms of their external impact across a range of constituencies. However, we feel strongly that impact should not form such a large proportion of the overall assessment.
- We consider that weighting impact at 25% is too risky for a new criterion that has not yet been tested. There is well documented evidence that the RAE 2008 found the judgment of esteem less precise than the other categories, and there is a danger that this volatility will be transferred to impact – but exacerbated because of the higher weighting. Thus, until the judgement and measurement of impact is more tried and tested, we would suggest that the proportion for ‘Impact’ is reduced to 15% of the overall total, which would also have the benefit of being able to raise the ‘Outputs’ share to 70% of the total, far closer to what it was in RAE2008. We also have some concerns about the current wording of the ‘Impact’ component, notably:
 1. By excluding ‘intellectual/academic’ impact from the ‘Impact’ assessment, it implies a prejudice against research that is primarily aimed at intellectual advancement within a discipline, such as contributions towards the development and direction of future research agendas.
 2. There is inconsistency regarding the issue of time-lags for measuring ‘Impact’, and back-dating the time period to 10-15 years only creates further anomalies. Research work that has strong ‘impact’ might have been done by researchers who left the institution up to a decade previously.
 3. There seem to be enormous problems involved in attribution and corroboration, especially given that ‘Impact’ appears to be about past research work and not that which is actually being included as ‘Outputs’ for the REF.
 4. It is by no means clear that expert peer-review panels are in the best position to make judgements about the actual/ potential impact of research outputs, especially as they will not be looking at ‘Outputs’ nor will they have an overall idea of how the REF assessment is going. The danger is that it will just introduce another mode of subjective judgement into the process.
 5. The proposed menu of impact measures is a mix of inputs, outputs and unmeasurables and illustrates the difficulties in assembling a judgement

6. For all these reasons there will be problems in demonstrating impacts from tourism research that are world leading and thus a tendency for assessments to cluster around 2*
- Hence, for these and other reasons, and while we support the idea of analysing 'Impact', we feel that it would be far more prudent to reduce the size of this category so that it doesn't inadvertently skew the final results.
 - In general, we feel that impact as specified is too vague and uncertain to be rigorously assessed. Some of the research undertaken in tourism is practice-based and regularly in an international sphere (including reports for UNESCO, UNEP, UNDP, and UNWTO which may be sector/ country specific aimed at national policy).
 - This adds to the difficulty of measuring impact and even on the ability to get verifiable impact information.
 - Consistency in the assessment of impact across subject areas is very unlikely. As with many social science subjects the problems of the non-linear nature of the impacts of Tourism research are great.
 - However, even with such caveats in mind, we do strongly support the idea of case studies as they present an opportunity to celebrate practice-based/ applied social science. For the same reasons we endorse the suggestion to find a more significant role for research users.

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

We are in agreement with the Academy of Social Sciences' view that the proposed approach "may well favour units which have been well funded in the past and handicap units that have managed to produce excellent research despite a less than adequate environment for it."

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 suggested weighting for research environment (15%) should be the absolute minimum as it combines the internal research environment and also the contribution to "the vitality of the research base" (p. 8).
- Thus, the 15% includes essential activities to the maintenance of the overall research base in the UK - notably "esteem" activities such as journal editing, membership of editorial boards, refereeing activity, and external examining of PhDs.
- If such activities are just one element within a wider environment profile that itself is only weighted at 15%, then the vitality and competitiveness of the UK research base is threatened as academics may decide to withdraw from such activities given their potentially low recognition in REF.
- This weighting could be increased at the expense of the Impact weighting.
- Outputs could be retained at 70% given that they are the one element with the most objective evidence.

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.

- Given the amount of effort and negotiation undertaken in reducing the number of panels, there is probably little to be gained in pressing for a sub-panel or cohesive group to deal with tourism research (our preferred option).
- However, we think that the key for a successful and equitable assessment of tourism to take place is in getting effective cross referrals between panels and increasing the number of specialist tourism advisers so that tourism is indeed assessed by peers with an intimate knowledge of the literature and landscape of our subject.
- In its response to the REF consultation, the Academy of Social Sciences referred to this aspect as “HEFCE need[ing] to take a realistic view about the level of support panels will need to function properly.”
- Some, though not all, of our members expressed disappointment at the loss of the UOA Sports related Studies which was the only dedicated panel to name tourism as a research area under its remit.
- Those involved in tourism ‘studies’ consider this likely to have damaging consequences for their kind of research in the UK. Most members do however, agree that tourism research is undertaken from different disciplinary perspectives, and it is often inter- or multi- disciplinary.
- If Tourism research is largely identified with the UOA Business and Management Studies, this may discourage future Tourism research that is from disciplinary fields other than those in Business and Management, and it would also fragment Tourism research even further across different panels.
- This change would be a disincentive for researchers continuing to work on Tourism from disciplinary perspectives other than Business and Management, or from interdisciplinary perspectives. This disincentive and fragmentation will threaten the UK's position as a global leading contributor to advances in Tourism research.
- A way must be offered that dissipates the threat to the cohesiveness of tourism research (our members expressed this as ‘lack of visibility’) by instituting a named ‘home’ for such research (which takes account of the spread of interests ranging from the socio-cultural to management) to be assessed by peers with an understanding of the subject’s complexities.

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

We concur with the views expressed by the Academy of Social Sciences.

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.)

The Association of Tourism in Higher Education with a membership of some 40+ UK HE institutions should be the first and main source of reference for all matters related to tourism research including nominations to panels.

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?

We concur with the Academy of Social Sciences view that such measures need to be specified. Interdisciplinarity (and in some cases post-disciplinarity) are vital characteristics in our research.

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?

No comments

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

The measures suggested seem adequate

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

No comments

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

No comments

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

- In RAE2008, 39 HEIs submitted 392 tourism outputs by 152 staff across 9 UOAs. This does not represent the full picture but is sufficient to show that tourism research is of some significance in the UK.
- The vitality of tourism research is a vital contributing factor to the health of the sector which contributed £114.4bn to the UK economy in 2007 once the direct and indirect impacts are taken into account, equivalent to 8.2% of UK Gross Domestic Product and provided employment for 2.7 million- equivalent to 8.4% of the workforce (Tourism is the UK's third highest export earner behind Chemicals and Financial Services).
- The ATHE urges serious consideration is given to ensuring this importance is reflected in the composition of panels, the way in which those panels review tourism research, and to allow tourism research to be assessed by tourism peers.