

REF 2021 consultation on the draft guidance and criteria

Page 2: Respondent details

Q1. Please indicate who you are responding on behalf of:

Subject association or learned society

Q2. Please provide the name of your organisation.

British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL)

Q3. If you would be happy to be contacted in the event of any follow-up questions, please provide a contact email address.

BAALChair@cardiff.ac.uk

Q4. If your response is in relation to specific main panels, please indicate which one(s):

Main Panel C: Social Sciences (Sub-Panels 13-24)

Main Panel D: Arts and Humanities (Sub-Panels 25-34)

Q5. We are seeking views during the consultation on both the draft guidance on submissions and the draft panel criteria and working methods. Please select the documents for which you would like to provide a response:

Both documents

Page 3: Guidance on submissions: Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework

Q6. 1a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 1: Overview of the assessment framework':

Neither agree nor disagree

1b. Please provide any comments on Part 1. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Overall, there is a lot that BAAL welcomes in this document. There is an increased emphasis on impact and the promotion of interdisciplinary research, both of which are particularly pertinent issues for our membership. It is reassuring to note that all types of research and all forms of research outputs across all disciplines shall be assessed on a fair and equal basis (27a.), and that the value of applied, practice-based and interdisciplinary and collaborative research is given adequate prominence in the framework overview. Of course, the nod to equity, equality and transparency is also appreciated. However, throughout the document it was felt that there is a general need for more explicit guidelines on how interdisciplinary/collaborative research will be treated, with specific measures defined to ensure that this treatment is appropriate. Further consistency between the criteria for the main panels is also needed (see below). Regarding paragraph 46, the decoupling of the published data on people and outputs submitted is welcomed, but in practice it is, of course, possible for this data to be relinked in the future and there is the potential for this to be used in an inappropriate way. So while we acknowledge that the publication of this data contributes to achieving a transparent review process, there is some anxiety about the impact on morale of having this data published. This is insofar as the publication of this data can potentially contribute to unconscious bias, creating a working environment, which is competitive rather than collegial/supportive. More reassurance that this effect will be mitigated (where possible) would be appreciated. Under 'key changes since REF 2014' (58e), it would be useful to have some additional clarity concerning what an 'in-scope' output will comprise (i.e. how is this defined?).

Page 4: Guidance on submissions: Part 2: Submissions

Q7. 2a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 2: Submissions':

Agree

2b. Please provide any comments on Part 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

There is some inconsistency in the guidance. Under 'multiple submissions' (point 75b) the guidance only notes that 'multiple submissions to sub-panel 26 will be permitted where one submission is in Celtic Studies and the other in Modern Languages and Linguistics'. However, points 75d-79 of the guidance seem to indicate that the request for multiple submissions by a sub-panel in its UOA, beyond this context alone, would be supported. Further clarity on the expected nature and eligibility of multiple submissions would be welcomed.

Page 5: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff details (REF1a/b)

Q8. 3a. The guidance is clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Staff details':

Agree

3b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 1. (Indicative 300 word limit)

In general, this is clear. However, further clarity on the status, expectations of, and difference between, research-only staff and ECRs would be appreciated (see section 4 below).

Q9. 4. Possible indicators of research independence are set out at paragraph 130, including a reference to a list of independent fellowships. This list is intended to guide institutions on determining independence for staff holding fellowships from major research funders. The list is not intended to be comprehensive. Do you have any comments on the clarity, usefulness, or coverage of this list? (Indicative 300 word limit)

There is an assumption that Research Associates/Assistants and Research Fellows do not produce independent research, whilst this is not necessarily the case. The level of independence of a particular researcher may differ depending on the context of the research, the nature of the contract and/or research project to which they are employed, and according to more individual factors. There are some concerns that this assumption is a form of marginalisation/discrimination of individuals on these contracts and this may effectively penalise research heavy postdocs, who are producing (according to the definition provided here) 'independent' research outputs. Clarification on terminology would be appreciated here, along with further clarity on the perceived differences between ECRs and RAs/RFs.

Q10. 5a. Do you agree with the proposed eligibility of seconded staff set out at paragraphs 121.c to d?

Yes

5b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing further to add here.

Q11. 6a. Do you agree with the proposed ineligibility of staff based in a discrete department or unit outside the UK?

Other (please specify):

Not completely

6b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Greater clarity would be useful concerning the status and expectations of colleagues who are substantially employed outside the UK but have proportional posts at UK HEIs (as is the case with some colleagues working within our broad disciplinary field).

Page 6: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 1: Staff circumstances (paragraphs 149 to 193)

Q12. 7a. The proposed approach for taking account of circumstances will achieve the aim of promoting equality and diversity in REF 2021:

Agree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The guidelines for staff circumstances are, on the whole, clearly expressed and supported (with some of the modifications from the previous iteration of this document particularly welcomed).

Q13. 7b. The potential advantages of the proposed approach outweigh the potential drawbacks identified:

Agree

Please provide any comments on your answer. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing to add here.

Q14. 7c. Please provide any further comments on these proposals, including any suggestions for clarifying or refining the guidance. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Again, the current iteration has, helpfully, clarified some of the concerns/inconsistencies noted in the previous iteration – this is appreciated.

Page 7: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs (REF2)

Q15. 8a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 2: Research outputs' is clear:

Agree

8b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 2. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The guidelines suggest that there is no differentiation in type of submission (which is welcomed), but further details on what measures are in place to ensure that they will be assessed in the same way across the different panels needs to be included. That is, clarification on how different types of research will be reflected/assessed across the panels. This is of particular concern to colleagues in applied linguistics as their work can be applied to two main panels and at least 3 sub-panels.

Q16. 9. A glossary of output types and collection formats is set out at Annex K, to provide increased clarity to institutions on categorising types of output for submission. Do you have any comments on the clarity and usefulness of this annex? (Indicative 300 word limit)

The wide range of listed output types and collection format (Annex K) is a very useful document. There are, however, some concerns about the status of edited work. This type of publication is valued by, and important to, colleagues but is often not deemed as returnable by an institution (i.e. this contradicts what Universities tell their staff). So while it is listed here, the guidelines need to clarify what type of edited work can be submitted and how this links to the general REF criteria. In addition to this, a note regarding the deemed value and treatment of monographs across the different panels would be helpful.

In addition to this, the membership queried whether there could potentially be any scope for particularly significant outputs to be triple weighted.

Q17. 10a. Paragraph 206.b sets out the funding bodies' intention to make ineligible the outputs of former staff who have been made redundant (except where the staff member has taken voluntary redundancy). Do you agree with this proposal?

Yes

10b. Please provide any further comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing to add.

Q18. 11a. Do you agree with the proposed intention to permit the submission of co-authored outputs only once within the same submission?

Other (please specify):

Not completely

11b. Please provide any comments on this proposal. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We note that this proposal will potentially disadvantage colleagues whose work is returned within the same submission due to institutional decisions relating to UOA alignments and scope.

Page 8: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 2: Research activity cost for UOA 4

Q19. 12a. How feasible do you consider to be the approach set out at paragraphs 267 to 271 for capturing information on the balance of research activity of different costs within submitting units in UOA 4? (Indicative 300 word limit)

This seems feasible.

Q20. 12b. Are the examples of high cost and other research activity sufficiently clear to guide classification? (Indicative 300 word limit)

Yes (although these are not typically relevant to the BAAL membership).

Q21. 12c. Please provide feedback on any specific points in the guidance text as well as the overall clarity of the guidance. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We would argue that there is no guarantee that citations are equivalent to quality. This is a not a metric that is typically used within applied linguistics so there is a concern with the reference to citations here, and the fact that this data is not necessarily treated in a consistent way across the (sub)panels (it seems that some refer to this data, whilst others don't). As BAAL includes members who will return research across different UOAs, some reassurance of the 'value' of citations, and the parity of the assessment of this data across the different panels and UOAs, would be useful.

Page 9: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Section 3: Impact (REF3)

Q22. 13a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact' is clear:

Agree

13b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 3. (Indicative 300 word limit)

The definition of impact used here is broad and has relevance to researchers within applied linguistics.

Page 10: Guidance on submissions: Part 3, Sections 4-5: Environment data and environment (REF4a/b/c-REF5a/b)

Q23. 14a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment data' is clear:

Agree

14b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 4. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing to add.

Q24. 15a. The guidance in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment' is clear:

Agree

15b. Please provide any comments on Part 3, Section 5. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing to add.

Page 11: Guidance on Submissions: further comments

Q25. 16. Please provide any further comments on the 'Guidance on submissions', including Annexes A-M. (Indicative 500 word limit)

While there is some clarification of the following point later within the document, it would be useful to answer the following question explicitly within this section: are research outputs to be included in impact case studies to be submitted as a main output or not? It would, for example, be difficult to classify an output which relates to an impact case study as being 2* or above without actually being submitted for assessment, so the assumption that the answer is 'yes' here

Page 12: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 2: Unit of assessment descriptors

Q26. 1. Do the UOA descriptors provide a clear and appropriate description of the disciplines covered by the UOAs? Please include any suggestions for refining the descriptors and state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

UOA 23: Education

UOA 26: Modern Languages and Linguistics

UOA 27: English Language and Literature

Where relevant, please state which UOA(s) you are commenting on.

Colleagues working in applied linguistics have the potential to be returned to two different main panels and at least three different sub-panels (i.e. it spans different (sub)panels in different ways). How they are returned may depend on organisation decisions and institutional alignment rather than research, so it is vital that there is equity across the different main panels and UOAs. There should also be some recognition that applied linguistics is a social science but often sits within arts and humanities contexts within the UOA descriptions. In the criteria for UOA 26, linguistics looks like an afterthought which is in contrast with other sub-panels (e.g. UOAs 23 and 27) which are broader in scope and appropriately inclusive. UOA 26 requires a more 'equal' distribution between linguistics and modern languages in their description, so revision is required here.

Page 13: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 1: Submissions

Q27. 2a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Disagree

Q28. 2b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions':

Agree

Q29. 2c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 1: Submissions', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

- UOA 23 explicitly refers to language/applied linguistics, which is welcomed. There is also a good range of research designs discussed here and an overview that is also relevant to applied linguistics work that could be submitted to UOAs 26/27 (i.e. 'ethnography; interview and narrative enquiry; action research and case study; evaluation research; critical theory and documentary analysis; analytic synthesis and systematic review' – paragraph 126). It would be useful to replicate this information across the other UOAs to which applied linguistics work is relevant.

- We are concerned about the restricted focus in UOA 26, paragraph 36 ('research on the languages, literatures, cultures and societies of all regions, countries and communities where Celtic, Germanic, Romance or Slavonic languages or other languages of Europe and Latin America are, or were, used'). Why is there only a European focus here? What about other world languages? It is reasonable to anticipate that a unit returning outputs on e.g. German literature might also be producing outputs on e.g. Arabic literature.

- UOA 26, paragraph 136, states it 'includes all areas of general, historical, theoretical, descriptive and applied linguistics and phonetics and interpreting studies, regardless of the methodology used' - is this enough to make it clear that social sciences (and psycholinguistic) methods are welcome? Further reassurance is needed. Whilst this descriptor does acknowledge 'applied, practice-based and pedagogical research', the definition and description of applied research does not translate clearly to the assessment criteria of Panel D.

- UOA 34 could potentially be an area where applied linguistics work could be submitted, but there is currently no reference to work of this nature here.

- There is some inconsistency within the document with regards to multiple submissions to UOA 26 (paragraphs 136-137). This needs to be adjusted to ensure consistency with the other relevant sub-panels.

Page 14: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 2: Outputs

Q30. 3a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Disagree

Q31. 3b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs':

Disagree

Q32. 3c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 2: Outputs', in particular on:- the proposed criteria for double-weighting outputs in Main Panels C and D, and on whether requests to double-weight books should automatically be accepted- whether Annex C 'Main Panel D – outputs types and submission guidance' is helpful and clear - where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Variation across the panel assessment criteria (especially C/D) could lead to differences in assessment of work by applied linguists entered under UOAs 23, 26 and 27. Clarification is needed about what measures are in place to ensure consistency/parity across the main and sub-panels. Further detail on what happens if one submission is cross-referenced should also be provided. Additionally:

- Paragraph 204, main panel C mentions the generation of significant datasets. This is missing from main panel D.
- Paragraph 203, main panel C refers to some of the applications/impacts of research, such as major changes in policy or practice; influences on processes, production, management and user engagement. These should also be included under main panel D.
- Paragraph 206, main panel D neglects to provide reference to social science methodology and interpretation of rigour (main panel C does – see paragraph 204), placing an emphasis on creativity and innovation instead.
- Paragraph 292, main panel C has an extra useful note about work that is potentially critical of Government policy ('public scrutiny'). This may also be relevant to those under main panel D.
- There are small inconsistencies in the double-weighting guidelines across panels C/D (paragraphs 236/239). Emphasis should be given to the amount of work/time involved in creating these items, rather than simply focusing on their length.
- Further clarification would also be useful on the definition of 'significance', and how possible future practical applications relate to this (paragraph 199).
- The definition of 'originality' in Paragraph 193 should encompass originality of critical perspective and of scale, as afforded, for example, by systematic reviews and by replication studies (compare references to systematic reviews in main panel B and sub-panel 23 (Paragraphs 247 and 126), and to replications in main panel A (Paragraph 201)).

For comments on citations see section 12c.

Page 15: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 3: Impact

Q33. 4a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Agree

Q34. 4b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact':

Disagree

Q35. 4c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 3: Impact', in particular on:- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

There is a welcome emphasis on impact through the document. The definition and examples used are broad and inclusive of a range of different form of impact generation, and we particularly support the fact that it can be delivered at multiple institutions. What would be useful to include, however, is a clearer statement on public engagement and its relation to impact (and as a type of impact itself), in relation to panel D specifically. Main panel C also mentions the 'diversity' of evidence of impact, a reference to this should be included in other panels as well.

Page 16: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 3, Section 4: Environment

Q36. 5a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 3, Section 5: Environment':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q37. 5b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q38. 5c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 3, Section 4: Environment', in particular on:- whether the difference in section weightings across main panels is sufficiently justified by disciplinary difference (paragraphs 322 and 323)- whether the list of quantitative indicators provided at www.ref.ac.uk is clear and helpful- where further clarification is required- where refinements could be made- whether there are areas where more consistency across panels could be achieved- whether there are differences between the disciplines that justify further differentiation between the main panel criteria. Where referring to particular main panels, please state which one(s). (Indicative 300 word limit)

Again, it would be useful to include the same criteria for environment across main panels C and D (perhaps across all panels). The weighting across different components for Panel D (paragraph 323) is unhelpful in its inconsistency with paragraph 322. The inclusion of income, infrastructure and facilities is also questionable here.

Page 17: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 4: Panel procedures

Q39. 6a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Agree

Q40. 6b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 4: Panel procedures':

Agree

Q41. 6c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 4: Panel procedures', in particular on:- where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (Indicative 300 word limit)

We welcome joint panel appointments and hope these will be used across main panels as well as within them. Such appointments should extend their remit to coordinating cross-panel calibration. As an Association we will be ready to suggest appropriate candidates to these panels when the time comes.

Page 18: Panel criteria and working methods: Part 5: Panel working methods

Q42. 7a. a. Overall, the criteria are appropriate in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Neither agree nor disagree

Q43. 7b. Overall, the criteria are clear in 'Part 5: Panel working methods':

Agree

Q44. 7c. Please comment on the criteria in 'Part 5: Panel working methods', in particular on: - where further clarification is required or where refinements could be made. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Paragraph 364 (appointing the full assessment phase sub-panel) should stipulate that all sub-panels should have sufficient membership to assess applied and interdisciplinary work, to ensure that all (sub)disciplines are treated equally. In addition to this, it would be useful if references to cross-referral are included here, along with details about the eligibility of double-weighted items and how they will be assessed.

Page 19: Overall panel criteria and working methods

Q45. 8a. Overall, the 'Panel criteria and working methods' achieves an appropriate balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the panels.

Agree

8b. Please comment on the balance between consistency and allowing for discipline-based differences between the main panels. (Indicative 300 word limit)

Nothing further to add.