



Report on ICS/CUCD post-REF discussion and strategy event

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Chair of CUCD**

On 4th July 2022 a group of UK HE Classicists with responsibility for research and/or REF in their units met to discuss the implications of REF2021 for the future of the disciplines covered by the Classics sub-panel. Many thanks to Prof. Katherine Harloe (Director of the Institute of Classical Studies) for organising, hosting and chairing the meeting, which took place in person with an option for online attendance in the Senate House. Thanks also to Maria Pretzler for her very useful and comprehensive notes, which I have used with my own to compile this report.

Present were: Maria Wyke (UCL, Sub-panel chair), Lin Foxhall (Liverpool, in charge of impact), Helen Lovatt (Nottingham, Chair of CUCD), Emma Aston (Reading), Philip Burton (Birmingham), Alison Cooley (Warwick), Liz Gloyn (RHUL), Penny Goodman (Leeds), Katherine Harloe (ICS), Jennifer Ingleheart (Durham), Chris Kremmydas (UCL), Phil Perkins (Open University), Maria Pretzler (Swansea), Roger Rees (St. Andrews), Kelli Rudolph (Kent), Emma Stafford (Leeds), Catherine Steel (Glasgow), Henriette Van Der Blom (Birmingham).

A. Group and procedure

The meeting began with brief thoughts from MW and LF as representatives of the REF 2021 process for Classics, which quickly became free-flowing discussion. MW's report on the first post-REF event, online-only, aimed at information and awareness-raising, is available [here](#). The group included representatives from departments across England, Scotland and Wales, and a variety of institutions, although not anyone from a post-92 institution. The group did include both stand-alone Classics units, some who submitted to the Classics panel as joint units (Nottingham's Classics and Archaeology, for instance) and some who were submitted to other panels as part of larger units (Leeds, Swansea). This report will summarise discussion under the following headings: resources and information, key questions and problems, impact, outputs, environment, staffing and EDI. It will finish with a list of action points and recommendations.

B. Resources and information

Reflections from the Classics sub-panel, by Maria Wyke, Barbara Borg and Lin Foxhall: <https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2022/06/REF-2022-reflection-1.pdf>
Full report from Main Panel D, with overview pp 3-47, Classics report pp. 113-30: <https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1855/mp-d-overview-report-final.pdf>
Results and information from REF itself: <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/>
Impact case studies, filter by unit of assessment (panel 29):



<https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact>

REF equality and diversity report: <https://ref.ac.uk/publications-and-reports/equality-and-diversity-advisory-panel-final-report/>

C. Key observations, questions and problems

1. General observations:
 - a. 17 Units assessed directly (down from 22 in 2014).
 - b. Middle-sized units *could* do well.
 - c. Staff numbers in the assessed units went up slightly between 2014 and 2021.
 - d. Current threats of closures are *not* related to the REF results (the issue is recruitment).
2. Sub-panel 29 Classics is by a long way the smallest. We are at significant risk of losing it. Departments deciding to submit to other panels increase that risk.

D. Effects of Stern rules

1. What impact does the new regime (Stern rules, which decouple number of outputs from number of researchers) have within departments?
 - a. Submissions suggest that this was handled in different ways in different places.
 - b. Significant difference in how many members of a unit recorded special circumstances (data not publicly available).
 - c. Also a big difference compared to 2014: 2014: 29%, 2021: 6%.
 - d. Why is this? Are these differences a matter of strategy? Is the drop due to the fact that there is no longer a fixed number of outputs?
 - e. Big differences between HEIs with regard to what they asked to be double-weighted (between 5% and 45% - in the latter case, the overall score relies on a fairly small number of outputs). Double-weighted items were not always highly scored. But generally, more double-weighting is not necessarily a bad thing.
2. Advantages of the new rules:
 - a. A chance to do bigger projects (and for HEI to allow space for this).
 - b. Focus on quality over quantity (Do departments acknowledge this in relation to performance review/appraisal processes?)
 - c. Impact on mid-career people: how is the transition from the first book to the next project handled? A sensitive approach to the new rules could leave some space for development of the next big project.
 - d. Smaller units with more special circumstances could see a big (positive) impact, if they actually make use of the rules.
 - e. The REF's approach to EDI could (should!) have an impact on how HEIs handle EDI (give them space to actually pay proper attention to it).



E. Impact

1. Problems and difficulties:
 - a. Number of required impact case studies can be a significant problem in Arts and Humanities, where departments/units are often smaller.
 - b. Should impact be portable (or countable at both old and new institutions)? Problems of losing whole impact case studies when staff move or retire. Need to develop even more impact case studies to protect against this lack of portability.
 - c. Some colleagues still resisting the need for impact work. This is not viable, as all need to contribute to what is a large burden of work.
 - d. One university calculated that one impact case study was the equivalent of 11 outputs. How do we make the development of impact case studies a realistic proposition? If allowances are made for staff to develop this work, what are the knock-on effects on the rest of the department, and how is this handled?
 - e. Impact case studies done in collaboration (with other UoAs or even colleagues in other HEIs) are OK: this may be important to note in Arts and Humanities where department size makes impact case studies more burdensome. Universities are risk averse when it comes to submitting collaborative projects – but this is perfectly acceptable, and this should be communicated to them. (Documentation of the contribution of a specific person/department has to be clear, however). There are good examples from other disciplines.
 - f. Develop impact case studies in the long term: which are ready to go now – which might be potential projects a decade from now?
 - g. Impact needs to be built into appraisal/staff development process, especially supporting Early Career/Mid-Career scholars.
 - h. In at least one institution there is now a chance to get specific ‘Impact Leave’ in order to develop a case study (also funding). What conversations could we have at our universities?
2. At one institution, there is a new ‘impact strand’ as a path to promotion.
3. ICS public engagement grants: many applications from PhD students, explaining that there is no support for PhD-level work in this area. PhD-level impact does not count for REF, but how far are we willing to support PhDs and postdocs develop expertise in this area (see point above on developing impact in the long term/a decade from now)? NB: issues with making PhDs do unpaid work. (One university is able to offer pay to PhD students for work in this area, on a par with pay for teaching).

F. Outputs

1. **Effects of Stern rules.** Did the variable numbers of outputs submitted for each researcher cause problems? How should this be handled (e.g. does having four pieces submitted, as opposed to one, confer more prestige, or is it



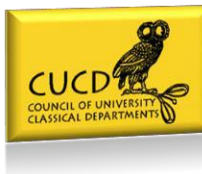
presented like that? Is it turning up as part of discussions about promotion?). We should share how universities deal with this. (NB: opportunities to take more account of colleagues' circumstances and make things fairer and more accessible – but also potential for abuse).

2. **Difficulties of internal assessment of outputs.** A discrepancy between prediction and outcomes can make departments vulnerable to internal pressure and potential cuts. Some institutions have much more money to buy in assessments. Rules changed about how internal assessment processes should function during the last cycle. Data on different approaches to assessment might also be useful in lobbying for a constructive approach to this, which aids career development, and is not punitive.

G. Environment

Some problems/challenges:

- a. Data was not always specific or helpful enough to assess units properly.
 - b. The panel noted the significant differences between units in terms research time people got. This was not always clear. E.g. what does 'grants of research leave are competitive' mean in practice? How much do people actually get?
 - c. Statements should pay more attention to how EC researchers are supported into the mid-career stage.
 - d. Word limits for environment statements did not allow space to deal adequately with all the aspects required by the guidance. A more realistic word limit or more realistic expectations are needed.
 - e. Smaller units often need colleagues with diverse research interests in order to cover the vast range of disciplines we teach. This can make it much harder to generate research clusters or collaborative impact work in departmental teams. Collaboration between departments and institutions is one possible solution that could be supported, encouraged and incentivised (as with PhD supervision and block grant partnerships).
 - f. Better outcomes are correlated with more time/money/infrastructure (obviously) – but careful support for staff and a chance to get feedback internally also makes a noticeable difference. This should be raised in the context of conversations within HEIs before the next REF cycle.
2. Tips for improving environment statements (given current emphases of REF assessment):
 - a. Put more emphasis on EDI – especially in relation to recruitment and promotion, and especially going beyond gender and caring responsibilities. The REF rules should provide some leverage to improve things locally.



- b. Explain how you provide support for early career colleagues into the mid-career stage, both in terms of promotion and in fostering the 'next big project' (bearing in mind opportunities to record special circumstances for REF purposes).
- c. If handled well, REF rules should give researchers more space to work towards longer-term goals; HEIs should also acknowledge that the terms of REF as exercise makes it possible to allow for those who have less research time due to caring responsibilities.

H. Submission to other panels/with other units of assessment

1. A number of such departments were represented (e.g. Nottingham, RHUL, Leeds, Swansea).
2. Advantages of being part of a larger UoA were noted: less pressure, the chance to combine different strengths in different departments.
3. The process needed to be managed carefully, with emphasis on the process as common endeavour (problems can arise if a bigger unit sees the addition of a few people from 'another discipline' as an imposition). But the departments with this experience generally thought that this had worked reasonably well in 2021.
4. What can we do to highlight the *actual* number of Classics departments and colleagues teaching the ancient world in the context of larger departments/schools? There are about 30 HEIs with some ancient world presence (as per CUCD), whilst Classics REF UoAs are down to 17.
5. Can we do something to help maintain the visibility of the discipline in those places that were not submitted as separate UoAs? (NB: most are fairly clearly not under threat. E.g. in one case, the merger helped to maintain another discipline.)
6. What happens to any money based on REF results: how is internal distribution handled?
7. If the Classics sub-panel is unsustainably small, would co-ordination at the Arts and Humanities level i.e. a Humanities sub-panel that contained multiple small disciplines (such as Archaeology, Theology, Music) be better than being merged with one other discipline?

I. Action points and Recommendations

It will be important for classical units to make the case for:

1. The continued existence of the Classics sub-panel. This is very important to give an overview of the discipline, make it visible, support the continued existence of departments and degree programmes when these come under threat.
2. A reduced number of impact case studies, perhaps combined with a more general impact narrative, to enable departments with smaller numbers of



researchers, usually with diverse interests in order to cover the required teaching, still to create and record impact.

3. Supporting units in making the case for submissions to the Classics sub-panel, whether by part-units, or combined units.
4. Increased visibility of Arts and Humanities in wider university narratives.
5. Increased visibility of Classics in other panels and subject area narratives.
6. Increased awareness of the breadth and interdisciplinarity of Classical subjects, and its geographical and chronological scope.
7. Better support for collaboration across units and institutions.
8. Careful support of individuals and opportunities for internal feedback both on outputs and impact, as well as in applying for special circumstances.
9. Impact funding for all, including PhD and early career scholars, impact as a strand in appointment and promotion criteria, impact leave to facilitate the enormous work involved in a case study.
10. Long-term impact strategies which spread the burden of impact work and make it more sustainable and less risky.

Data should be gathered to support local campaigning for improved research conditions in particular institutions. **Data-gathering** exercises might be better done at AHA level, given that situations are likely to be similar across Arts faculties. EDI concerns might be addressed to improve conditions for all, especially those with special circumstances. Data needed includes:

1. Data on the amount of **research time** and **research leave** granted in different institutions and the conditions placed upon it/processes for gaining it.
2. Data on **support for ECR researchers**.
3. Data on whether colleagues were or are being coerced onto **teaching and scholarship focused contracts** or part-time contracts.
4. Data on the **effects of the pandemic**, particularly on different protected groups, and on different institutional responses, both positive and negative.
5. Data on **workload and morale**. What happens when staff develop impact case studies that are not submitted? What happens when staff outputs are not submitted? How does this affect people's morale? What are good strategies for handling these situations? How do workload allocation tools reflect and create good practice?
6. Data on **internal output and impact case study assessment processes**. What worked well? What was problematic? What different processes and attitudes did different institutions adopt?

More **collaboration** both between different disciplinary areas within individual institutions and across institutions, to gain benefits of shared expertise as well as reducing the exposure of smaller units, thus hopefully enabling them to continue submitting to Panel 29. This could take the form of events (in person, or hybrid), or blog posts/articles on particular issues or aspects. Priorities for sharing expertise are:



1. Impact, especially making impact sustainable, and distributing the work of impact fairly, and collaborating across institutions and units
 - a. What a good impact case study looks like (once the database is accessible);
 - b. How to support impact activities well.
 - c. How to build impact into career trajectories.
 - d. How do get impact done and documented.
 - e. Discussing the institutional framework that enables good impact case studies.
 - f. Advice on different *types* of impact case studies.
2. Assessing outputs
 - a. What do 4* outputs in Classics look like
 - b. How best can we support their production?
3. Grant applications.
4. Consider creating a Research and Impact Officer on CUCD Standing Committee.
5. Create a Jisc-mail discussion list for unit research leads, REF and impact officers.