

REF2029 Survey – British Academy response

September 2026

This document sets out the British Academy's response to Sections A to D of the REF2029 sector survey on final policy developments.

Section A – Draft Strategy, People, and Research Environment (SPRE) criteria

A.3 Questions on section A:

- Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: the draft SPRE criteria are clear in distinguishing between what is being assessed at institutional-level and what is being assessed at unit-level:
 - ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☒ Agree
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Not sure
 - ☐ Skip question
- Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: the draft criteria are clear on the submission requirements for the Statement of Representation (SoR):
 - ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☒ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Not sure
 - ☐ Skip question
- Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement: the draft criteria are clear on the submission requirements for the Statement on research community (SoC):
 - ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Not sure
 - ☐ Skip question

Additional comments on the proposed approach (optional):

We broadly agree that the draft SPRE criteria provide a clearer distinction between institutional-level and unit-level assessment and welcome the emphasis on avoiding unnecessary duplication between statements.

We remain concerned that the 60:40 weighting in favour of institutional-level statements may disadvantage smaller institutions and units, particularly those affected by restructuring, closures and redundancies. We continue to urge consideration of a 50:50 balance between institutional- and unit-level assessment. The proposed weighting risks reducing the influence of evidence presented at unit level, where many of these strengths are most clearly demonstrated.

We are also concerned that smaller units, which are particularly common in Main Panels C and D, may not be fully reflected within institutional-level narratives. As SPRE indicators have yet to be published, the sector cannot fully assess the burden or implications of the proposed approach. We encourage criteria that ensure that units are assessed on their own merits and are not disadvantaged by the extent to which their subject area is represented within an institutional-level statement.

We would welcome greater clarity on the Statement of Representation. For some disciplines, particularly where longer-form and double-weighted outputs are common, there may be tensions between submitting the highest-quality research and achieving a distribution that appears representative of the unit's activity. Finally, the guidance on omissions and concentration should more explicitly recognise the effects of redundancies, closures and reconfiguration. [Recent British Academy analysis](#) highlights growing pressures on SHAPE staffing capacity. The omissions and concentration list should reflect how sector-wide contractions may impact a unit's research activity.

Section B – Single unit of assessment submissions for SPRE

B.3 Questions on section B:

- Do you work at an institution planning to submit to more than one unit of assessment?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Undecided
 - Not applicable
- Do you agree with the proposal that institutions submitting only to a single unit be provided with the option to submit only an institution-level template, in addition to

a Statement on the Research Community (SoC) and a Statement of Representation (SoR)?

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☒ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Not sure
- ☐ Skip question

Additional comments on the proposed approach (optional):

We support the principle of a proportionate approach for institutions submitting to one unit. However, the proposed arrangements for SPRE should recognise that institutional size and complexity do not necessarily align with the number of Units of Assessment submitted. In REF2021, some small and specialist providers submitted to only two UoAs but faced many of the same capacity and resource constraints as institutions submitting to a single UoA.

We therefore suggest that the proposed flexibility for completing institutional-level statements should not be determined solely by whether an institution submits to one UoA. The funding bodies should consider whether broader criteria, based on institutional scale, research volume, or a small number of submissions, would better achieve the objective of proportionality while ensuring a consistent approach across similar institutions. There is otherwise the risk of a cliff-edge effect between institutions submitting to one and those submitting to more, even where they operate similarly in terms of scale or capacity.

Section C – Approach to equality-related unit reductions.

C.8 Questions on section C:

- Do you agree this proposal is clear and workable?
 - ☐ Strongly agree
 - ☐ Agree
 - ☒ Neither agree nor disagree
 - ☐ Disagree
 - ☐ Strongly disagree
 - ☐ Not sure
 - ☐ Skip question

- Do you agree this proposal delivers benefit without creating disproportionate burden?

- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Not sure
 - Skip question
- Do you agree the evidence requirements are appropriate and proportionate?
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Not sure
 - Skip question

Additional comments on the proposed approach (optional):

We welcome the intention to maintain an equality-related reduction mechanism within the decoupled framework. However, it is not yet clear what evidence has informed the proposed eligibility threshold of a volume measure below 10 FTE, or the expectation that only a small number of cases will arise. Given that REF 2029 introduces a substantially different and largely untested decoupled model, and that the sector has undergone considerable change in the last REF, we would welcome further explanation of how these thresholds have been developed and how their effectiveness will be monitored.

Following the 2021 exercise, the REF team published [analysis](#) that demonstrated significant disparities with respect to Black researchers in particular, but these have not been addressed in the approach taken for 2029. We also encourage the funding bodies to consider the interaction between equality-related circumstances and career stage. As in our previous answer (Section A), we note that recent [British Academy analysis](#) has highlighted increasing pressures on early academic career pathways and staffing capacity across parts of the SHAPE disciplines. While the decoupled framework is intended to increase flexibility, it remains uncertain how effectively that flexibility will mitigate the effects of equality-related circumstances in smaller or capacity-constrained units, especially for early-career staff. We cannot stress strongly enough that continued monitoring of disciplinary and institutional impacts will therefore be important.

Section D – Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding

13.1 – Submission of outputs to more than one UoA

D.5 Questions on section D:

- Do you agree this proposal is clear and workable?
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Not sure
 - Skip question

- Do you agree this proposal delivers benefit without creating disproportionate burden?
 - Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Not sure
 - Skip question

Additional comments on the proposed approach (optional):

We are concerned that the draft approach lacks clarity and may contradict what is currently published in the guidance for Contributing to Knowledge and Understanding. Within the existing guidance, Section 13.1 suggests that outputs may be submitted to more than one unit should it satisfy those unit descriptors. This section does not refer to co-authored outputs (which is dealt with separately in Section 14 of the guidance), however, the current draft proposal in question suggests that 13.1 relates to co-authored outputs.

This new guidance suggests that outputs with only one author/substantive link may be submitted to one UoA only. While beyond the scope of the present survey, it is worth noting that this approach may disadvantage interdisciplinary research within Panels C and D which are more likely to be single-authored outputs. It is therefore not clear that the approach supports equitable treatment of different disciplines and institutions.

We would welcome clearer worked examples, making it clear that an output does not have to be submitted to the same UoA as that in which the substantive link lies, as set out in 12.0.2 of the existing CKU guidance. Addition of a worked example which applies to single-authored outputs would be welcome and offer greater balance, as these represent a significant proportion of outputs within Main Panels C and especially D.