

UOA 30: History

1. All Sub-panel members have discussed and collectively agreed this report. It should be read alongside the Main Panel D section which deals with matters of generic interest.

Summary of submissions

2. UOA 30 received 83 submissions from HEIs, the same number as in RAE2008, and 1,786 FET staff, a small (1.4 per cent) increase on 2008. 67 of the submissions came from HEIs in England, nine from Scotland, five from Wales and two from Northern Ireland. The sub-panel assessed 350 Impact items (this included 83 templates and 267 case studies) and 6,431 outputs (counting double-weighted outputs as two outputs and eliminating reserve items; this was the equivalent of 6,478 outputs). In the latter case this was again a similar number to 2008, although here there are issues of comparability, given that, for example, historians submitted to Area Studies rather than History varied considerably between RAE2008 and REF2014. The sharp increase in academic staff submitted with fewer than four outputs owing to clearly-defined and complex circumstances also affected this figure, reducing it by 7.6 per cent overall.

Table 1: Summary of Submissions

	Number of submissions	Cat A FTE staff	Cat A and C headcount staff	Research outputs	Double-weighted outputs	Outputs per person	Impact case studies
REF2014	83	1,786	1,885	6,458	804	3.43	267
RAE2008	83	1,761	1,927	6,960	–	3.61	–
% difference	0.0%	1.4%	-2.2%	-7.2%	–	-5.0%	–

3. The overall quality profile and the three sub-profiles for UOA 30 (History) are shown below.

Table 2: UOA average profiles

	% 4*	% 3*	% 2*	% 1*	% uc
Overall quality	31	44	23	2	0
Outputs	27.8	42.7	26.9	2.4	0.2
Impact	36.1	47.3	15.4	1.1	0.1
Environment	39.5	45.2	14.2	1.0	0.1

4. In establishing its working methods UOA 30 adhered to the assessment principles and framework adopted across Main Panel D (MPD) (see paragraphs 21-31 of the Main Panel report) and participated in the calibration exercises that were conducted within the sub-panel and then across the Main Panel (see paragraphs 32-38 of the Main Panel report).

5. The overall quality of research in UOA 30 (History) has improved since RAE2008, with the sub-panel concluding that History as a discipline is in very good shape across the UK University sector with some 4* work being recognised in nearly every submission.

Outputs

Table 3: UOA average outputs sub-profile

	% 4*	% 3*	% 2*	% 1*	% uc
Outputs	27.8	42.7	26.9	2.4	0.2

6. Outputs of world-leading quality were produced by scholars at every career stage, from early career researchers through to those now retired, and by those writing in English and those writing in other languages (4 per cent of the total). Work of world-leading quality was found spread widely across the work of the submitted staff, and the great majority of staff were judged to have produced work in more than one quality band. In particular, although it must be stressed that the sub-panel did not grade individuals, it was noted at the end that very few people submitted to SP 30 had a complete set of 4* outputs; that sort of clean sweep is very rare in History. The sub-panel noticed that in many cases 2* work, also submitted, had acted as a springboard for subsequent 4* work, and could be seen as its crucial underpinning.

7. World-leading research is being produced in almost all of the submissions to UOA 30, and in all areas of the subject. The sub-panel read much that was exemplary in its rigour and of outstanding significance for the course of research in the areas it covered. This included many works which were already or would become recognised as primary and essential points of reference, many that were already or would be of profound influence, many that were instrumental in developing new thinking, new practices, new paradigms, new policies or new audiences, or which represented major expansions of the range or depth of research and its application, or were outstandingly innovative and/or creative. The outputs read by the sub-panel also showed that UK research in History as a whole continues to be world-leading. The types of research submitted, as in RAE2008, cover every aspect of the discipline, and no major variations between them were observed by the sub-panel: areas of strength were observable in most submissions, but, taken together, they cover all the sub-fields of the discipline. History is an intrinsically interdisciplinary subject, and the sub-panel read and assessed a substantial amount of work which could equally well have been submitted to other sub-panels; the range of quality shown there was the same as in outputs which were more focused inside the disciplinary field.

8. This range of quality was also visible in all the forms that outputs came in: monographs and other single- or dual-authored books, edited collections of articles, journal articles, book chapters, scholarly editions of texts, websites, working papers, or publications in other media.

9. Authored books (32.1 per cent), journal articles (38.4 per cent) and book chapters (22.7 per cent) constituted 93.1 per cent of all submitted outputs, although this understates the numbers of scholarly editions, which were often listed as monographs or edited books. In RAE2008, these three figures were 24, 36 and 36 per cent respectively; the percentage of books has gone slightly down and that of journal articles substantially up. The number of websites and databases submitted has decreased substantially (out of small numbers) since 2008.

Table 4: Output Types

	Output type	UOA 30
A	Authored book	2,071
B	Edited book	262

C	Chapter in book	1,464
R	Scholarly edition	59
D	Journal article	2,479
E	Conference contribution	19
U	Working paper	53
M	Exhibition	2
N	Research report for external body	4
H	Website content	14
Q	Digital or visual media	2
S	Research datasets and databases	16
T	Other	13

10. All forms of publication were treated equally in the grading process for outputs, and every form of publication, including book chapters and working papers, showed examples of the highest grade. The sub-panel did not rank journals in any way. Quality of content, not type of output, dictated scores awarded, and institutions that artificially selected by type of output may have thereby lowered their scores. That said, websites/databases, scholarly editions and monographs were the three types of output which tended, overall, to produce the highest percentage of the highest grade. It was also observable that, in the case of articles and book chapters, relatively short contributions tended to gain fewer higher grades. The focus and cohesion of edited books (including journal special issues) varied considerably; the best of them succeeded in mapping a new research agenda, but this is sometimes hard to demonstrate. In making quality judgements the sub-panel was often only able to judge the editor's contribution by reference to their substantive introductions and authored chapters – even with the help of the additional information supplied, which was in every case read by the sub-panel.

11. Some of the outputs submitted overlapped in content with others. In each case, the sub-panel read both together, so as to assess the research content only once, but in the most generous way possible: in particular, a book chapter/article which overlapped with part of a monograph was assessed first, and then the monograph was assessed with the shorter output omitted. In only a very small number of cases of extreme overlap was it impossible to give a classified grade to both.

12. Double-weighting requests were made for a wide range of output types, of which the sub-panel accepted 99.1 per cent of the requests. The overwhelming majority of these were for books, of which 59 per cent had double-weighting requests attached to them. This accurately reflects the importance of monographs and other books in History as a discipline; double-weighting is a crucial element in a fair assessment for such works, allowing assessors to recognise the degree of research input without privileging this in assessing the quality of the eventual output.

Table 5: Double-weighting requests

Research Outputs	D/W requests	D/W requests approved
6,458	804 (12.5% of outputs)	797 (99.1% of requests)

13. A few submitting units, however, did not ask for double-weighting for any of their submitted outputs, or else they asked for it for a rather smaller percentage than in the requests of other units. In nearly every case, given that the rules did not permit the sub-panel to double-weight if this was not requested, this did harm to the output profile of the submissions concerned.

14. Overall, double-weighted items tended to be graded far more often as world-leading or internationally excellent; so this was an opportunity missed. The sub-panel further noted that there were few double-weighting requests for articles or book chapters, even though these were eligible under the REF rules; and that some units who submitted people with only one output (because of defined circumstances) did not request that the output be double-weighted, even though it could have been. Submitting units also showed a greater reluctance to double-weight scholarly editions than authored monographs, even though such editions tended to score highly.

15. Outputs submitted to UOA 30 were assigned to sub-panel members and five output assessors, recruited to fill in gaps in the sub-panel's expertise, for classification on the basis of the expert knowledge of each member and assessor.

16. Where the output concerned was more appropriately assessed outside SP 30, whether the unit had requested it or not – 238 outputs in all – it was cross-referred to another panel. In the case of Ancient History, Classics, Byzantine Studies (all to SP 31) and Art History (to SP 34) this cross-referring was automatic. Other items were cross-referred to Geography, Environmental Studies and Archaeology (SP 17), Politics and International Studies (SP 21), Area Studies (SP 27), Modern Languages and Linguistics (SP 28), Philosophy (SP 32), Music, Drama and Theatre Arts (SP 35), and Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (SP 36).

Table 6: Cross-referrals

	Into sub-panel		Out of sub-panel		Difference		Outputs Submitted
Within MP	59	0.9%	220	3.4%	-161	-2.5%	
Outside MP	33	0.5%	18	0.3%	15	-0.2%	
Total	92	1.4%	238	3.7%	-146	-2.3%	6,458

17. 92 outputs and one case-study were cross-referred into SP 30 by the sub-panels assessing Biological Sciences (SP 5), Business and Management Studies (SP 19), Law (SP 20), Social Work and Social policy (SP 22), Anthropology and Development Studies (SP 24), Sport and Exercise Sciences (SP 26), Area Studies (SP 27), Modern Languages and Linguistics (SP 28), English Language and Literature (SP 29), and Communication, Cultural and Media Studies (SP 36).

18. The sub-panel thought that History was thriving in all chronological periods and in all countries its research covered. But it did note several positive developments in the field since the start of the REF cycle in 2008: some of them new developments, some of them further developments of themes and practices which were older.

19. It was generally agreed that History as a profession in the UK showed itself to very good effect when it confronted topics using an international/transnational perspective. The best history of Britain, in all periods, was often alert to comparisons with, and to alternative historiographies in, the wider world of Europe and beyond, setting UK topics inside wider debates. The history of non-UK topics was, similarly, often at its best when it confronted transnational, international, often global, issues. Global history in general, indeed, taking a broad definition of 'global', has often

resulted in very high quality outputs, from the middle ages to the 21st century. It was noted that high quality work of this type very often needed a good command of languages, whether European or non-European; the sub-panel hoped that the steady decline in language knowledge in the UK would not in future menace this important strength of UK History.

20. Interdisciplinary work was often recognised to be of notable originality and significance; links between History and a very wide range of disciplines were observed, from medicine through social science to literary disciplines. It was also generally agreed that some of the best work was also open to a range of genres of evidence at once, and alert to the different forms of knowledge which could be derived from each, from written texts through oral history to material and visual sources and film. This was indeed one of the clearest directions the discipline appeared to be currently taking.

21. Some other areas of particular quality which the sub-panel noted included: ambitious uses of qualitative methods, environmental and agricultural history, and 'big data', in economic history; a renewed attention to the intersection between cultural and intellectual history (including work on the circulation of ideas); non-UK imperial history; German and eastern European history; colonial American history; Asian and African history, not least of the pre-modern world; American, European and African histories of slavery in a global context; the cultural history of religion (including, not least, medieval heresy studies), which is a field increasingly enlivened by engagement with different methodological approaches; the cultural history of economics; a continued strength in the history of science and medicine, especially, again, where different types of source were used.

22. The sub-panel agreed that the strength of international approaches did not mean that regional, local and micro-historical studies were of less high quality. Similarly, the rise of cultural history has not meant that political and diplomatic history was necessarily of less high quality. The best of these were again world-leading. Some areas of traditional expertise could however have been enriched by using more diverse approaches, such as, apart from the foregoing, gender. Gender history in fact, outside the 20th century, did not seem always to be closely integrated with other forms of study, to the disadvantage of each. The sub-field of memory, commemoration and heritage studies contains some strong work, but outputs which were not informed by wider historiographies were graded less highly. Archival research was seen to continue to be strong and rigorous; when this resulted in the edition of texts, the published results were often world-leading.

23. Finally, the sub-panel was agreed on the notable quality of much ECR publication, including material deriving directly from doctoral work; this was often highly innovative, and promises well for the future development of the discipline.

Impact

Table 7: UOA average impact sub-profile

	% 4*	% 3*	% 2*	% 1*	% uc
Impact	36.1	47.3	15.4	1.1	0.1

24. Overall, the sub-panel found that the impact agenda has been taken very seriously by most submitting units, and some of them, particularly some smaller units, have decided to specialise in the impact arena very substantially. Where that happened, the impact template and the case studies often scored particularly highly. Impact, to be properly achieved, requires

investment, and the most successful submissions (both large and small) generally showed that they were aware of this; smaller units with fewer resources however sometimes struggled.

25. The sub-panel found that it was much less difficult to grade the impact case studies than had been anticipated, and ended up confident in its judgements. The user members came from a variety of professions, including government, the NGO sector, the BBC, education, publishing and museums and the heritage sector; they and the academic panellists were in full agreement about this, and were also fully in agreement over the grading criteria and the final profiles for each submission.

26. The impact of research in History is clearly very considerable. The overall grade averages show it. Historical research provides measurable impact, in many cases very considerable in both reach and significance, in a wide variety of areas as well: in public policy, including both governmental and non-governmental organisations; in developing school curricula; in heritage management and museum practice; in informing local public knowledge about the past; in radio, TV, and trade-book publishing; and it does all of this both in the UK and abroad. There was little difference in the quality of impact across most of these sectors, although the sub-panel thought that there was still room for maximising the potential of collaboration with schools and of the development of school curricula. Historical research sometimes contributed so directly to the impact that it is hard to separate the two out; sometimes the impact was targeted by the researcher; sometimes it was taken up by others by chance; but in each of these there were case-studies in which impact could be shown to be great, and could receive the highest grades. In their impact templates units often demonstrated both a good understanding of the ways in which their research has been achieving impact, and of how to ensure the maximum future impact of existing and planned research. Although the problem of turning public engagement into demonstrable public impact remains necessarily difficult, departments generally had sensible strategies for directing their research to publics beyond the academy most likely to record a measurable response.

27. Submitting units did not, however, always demonstrate a clear understanding of the rules for impact as set out in the REF materials. In particular, they sometimes included impact that was outside the REF period of 2008-13; they sometimes included impact based on research not undertaken in the unit, and also impact which was underpinned by the research activity of academics at other institutions. These could not be taken into account at all and in a small minority of cases, where the impact depended on these elements, they represented a failure of the threshold criteria which meant that the case study could not be classified. In other cases such shortcomings weakened the impact being claimed with a consequent effect on the grade awarded.

28. Units were also sometimes vague about the nature of the relationship between the research and the claimed impact, and it was difficult to be sure (sometimes even after audit) if there was one. And, although the sub-panel took full account of the fact that the impact agenda only became operative half-way through the REF cycle, impact templates in some units were very generic indeed, not engaging with the suggestions in the panel criteria at all. The sub-panel and assessors had clear criteria for assessing them, but it was harder for a very generic template to get the highest grade. The sub-panel hopes that, as with environment templates, this will improve if, after review, the assessment of impact continues.

29. The sort of impact case-study which could usually be graded highest was able to show that an element of human practice and/or understanding had actually been changed as a result of the research undertaken (its 'significance'). It was recognised by the sub-panel that this is sometimes very difficult indeed to demonstrate; the sub-panel indeed recognised that sometimes

the dissemination (the 'reach') of research in itself showed the highest level of impact, and assessed accordingly. But it also noted that some submissions did not try to show 'significance' even when the data were potentially available. External supporting evidence (e.g. letters from external users) was sometimes not targeted to the specifics of the impact, but simply corroborated the activity. This too had an effect on grades. Overall, the sub-panel could and did only assess the evidence presented to it.

Environment

Table 8: UOA average environment sub-profile

	% 4*	% 3*	% 2*	% 1*	% uc
Environment	39.5	45.2	14.2	1.0	0.1

30. The content of environment templates was more closely specified in REF2014 than in RAE2008, and the sub-panel assessed templates according to the vitality and sustainability of the unit, as assessed in five categories, corresponding to the template: research strategy; people (staffing); people (research students); income, infrastructure and facilities; and collaboration and contribution to the discipline. The introduction of a standard template in REF2014 helped the presentation of the environmental material for units very considerably. The grading of each was much easier, and the sub-panel had a good deal of confidence in the result, which also showed, in common with other sub-panels, higher figures than other sectors of REF2014, as well as higher than in RAE 2008 – which shows in itself that units have become more skilled at presenting this material. History as a discipline is clearly sustainable at present, as shown by the steady state evidenced by submissions, and the growth in research students which the sub-panel observed shows that it can continue to be so in the UK.

31. That said, units were uneven in their use of the template. In some cases, they diverged from it considerably, placing important information in unexpected places, including the introductory section which is not graded. The sub-panel was able to mark them appropriately, seeking out information wherever it was presented, but it is fair to say that in most cases the units which did this did not receive the highest grades on other grounds as well. In general, too, units which missed out sections of the template were graded less highly in those areas, for the sub-panel was unable to assess information that was lacking. Environment templates which appeared to have been written by non-historians tended to score less highly; the best templates showed an effective relationship between the submitting unit and its HEI.

32. Submitting units showed a wide range of research strategies, from the highly managed, which seemed sometimes to depend for their sustainability on the presence of particular individuals, to the laissez-faire. Many units had a very clear strategy for research development; some restricted themselves to listing past achievements, with a strategy for the future which did not add much to the phraseology of the template itself. The latter submissions tended to get less high grades as well.

33. A significant number of submissions did not demonstrate fully satisfactory working practices, particularly with regard to the treatment of early career staff (including lighter workloads), post-early career staff development, regular study-leave with transparent procedures, and equality and diversity (units that discussed gender often did not address other forms of diversity). Frameworks of support for staff and their research (at all stages of their careers) did not always appear to be as robust as those for research students. Staff development is however a crucial part of a sustainable research environment, and the sub-panel took the REF guidelines for

what to include in the template as seriously here as it did elsewhere. Overall, that sub-section scored less highly than others.

34. The sub-panel laid some stress on the overall scale per FTE of research grants gained and the numbers per FTE of research degrees completed whilst recognising that the data referred in many cases to a larger cohort than the FTE submitted. In each case, however, it did so against the background of the infrastructure described in the text, so as to be able to assess the vitality and sustainability of each; and in each case it also did so by comparing units of similar size and type. As such the data were used to inform, but did not determine, the sub-panel's deliberations. Credit was given, in particular, for the recent development of a good graduate infrastructure even where student numbers were not yet great, or where funding was not currently available.

35. Like the staffing section, collaboration and contribution to the discipline tended to score less highly than others, with some submissions resorting to undifferentiated lists of memberships of editorial boards and seminar papers given; lists which were hard to grade highly. Those who did score highly usually presented the material more discursively and selectively (see Main Panel report, paragraph 86). Here, institutional support (for, for example, time-consuming journal editorial work and grant assessment) often helped higher assessments, but the sub-panel also recognised editing, peer review, and international collaboration as important features of wider professional service.

36. Units of every size and type showed the highest-scoring levels of environment; there was widespread evidence of people working effectively with scarce resources.

Overview

37. Overall, the sub-panel saw much evidence that the submissions returned to UOA 30 were extremely lively, strongly engaged with research in History, and pursuing research strategies that could be sustained long-term, with many signs of good practice, healthy investment, and a great deal of individual and collective devotion to the subject. The strongest submitting units often showed awareness that to make the most of their limited resources they needed to target their research towards areas of common interest, and to take full advantage of relevant research priorities and support mechanisms in their institutions; small submissions which concentrated on specific areas often received high grades. Conversely, a diversity of research areas was often also a strength.

38. The sub-panel saw evidence of much good practice with regard to research students and of their integration into the research of the submitting unit as a whole. There has been good investment during the assessment period both in infrastructure and in staffing. The units submitting to UOA 30 showed themselves very generally to be closely concerned with the health of the discipline as a whole, contributing to the wider discipline by both outward-looking research activities (including by 'lone scholars') and short- and long-term collaborations; and also, importantly, through active leadership of and participation in national and international bodies. Nevertheless, in some units such wider activities seemed to be left to a limited sub-section of staff, rather than to involve the full staff of the unit.

39. To repeat, finally: the sub-panel concluded that History as a discipline is in extremely healthy shape across the UK University sector. The REF2014 exercise demonstrated the major contribution which researchers in UK universities make to the discipline world-wide, and that the results of this research can be seen to have been disseminated very widely through committed public engagement.