Royal Historical Society

Response to REF2021 Consultation

May 2021

In April 2021, in response to COVID-19, REF 2021 invited views from the HE sector on two central issues for the revised exercise: the timing of the new submission deadline; and the broad approach to taking account of effects on impact case studies.

For further information: [https://www.ref.ac.uk/news/views-invited-on-first-questions-about-ref-timetable/](https://www.ref.ac.uk/news/views-invited-on-first-questions-about-ref-timetable/)

Following discussion in Council (Friday 1 May 2020), the Royal Historical Society submitted the following responses to the two questions posed.

**Question 1**

At this point in time, what is your preference for the revised REF submission deadline?

A. A single deadline, by 31 March 2021

B. A phased deadline, starting with staff & outputs in March 2021

C. A delay of six months or more for all aspects

D. Other (please specify)

The RHS is neutral on the date of the new submission deadline, but advocates retaining the current output deadline. Outputs whose publication was demonstrably delayed beyond the deadline due to the COVID crisis should be eligible for case by case mitigation, enabling them to still form part of the submission.

• Please provide a brief rationale for your answer (350 words)

The Society does not wish to express a preference for the REF revised submission date itself. This is best determined in consultation with participating HEIs, REF panels and sub-panels.

However a key concern for historians in relation to any revised submission deadline will be its impact upon the eligibility of outputs. Early indications suggest some outputs due to appear in 2020 are being delayed as a consequence of the effects of the Covid crisis upon journals and publishers. Consequently outputs that historians (and HEIs) planned to include in the submission, may not be publicly available by the current deadline.

A blanket extension of the publication deadline could however result in the reverse problem. History as a discipline tends to yield relatively few outputs per head over the course of one cycle, and many researchers carefully time publications to ensure they have sufficient high-quality outputs available for inclusion in each exercise. In the RHS book series, several agreements were made in 2019/20 with ECR authors to delay
publication until 2021 to allow monographs to be eligible for the subsequent REF. Many of these ECRs lack permanent academic posts; these publications are key to their future employability. Should there be a blanket extension, we would urge that individuals (not institutions) retain the right to withhold publications produced after 31 December 2020 for submission to the subsequent REF.

Extending the publication deadline for all outputs will likely result in further burdens upon institutions and individuals. Some HEIs have already begun assessing outputs due to be published shortly after the current deadline raising concerns re gaming and pressures on individuals. Impediments to productivity caused by COVID-19 delays may fall disproportionately to researchers with protected characteristics: for example data on journal submissions since lockdown shows a disproportionate decline in submissions by female authors. Extending the publications deadline will likely exacerbate inequalities within submissions.

The Royal Historical Society therefore advocates retaining the current output deadline but operating a case by case mitigation scheme for outputs with demonstrable COVID-related delays, enabling them to still be included in the submission. This will be especially beneficial for smaller UoAs.

**Question 2**

*The end of the assessment period for impact is 31 July 2020. Which of the following options would you prefer as an initial step towards taking account of the effects of Covid-19 on impact submissions?*

A. **Universal extension to the assessment period for impact to the 31 December 2020.**

B. Keep 31 July 2020 in place as the end of the assessment period, but ensure a case-by-case mitigation route for individual, affected case studies that have been delayed past this point.

C. Other (please specify) 50 words

Please provide a brief rationale for your answer (max 350 words)

Many of the impacts arising from case studies in History, and across Main Panel D will have been disrupted as a result of the Covid-19 crisis. In particular the inability to stage public events and the closure of cultural institutions means that many planned activities that will have underpinned or otherwise created pathways to impact during the period will now not take place. We note, for example, that a high proportion of national museum staff are now on furlough, and thus lack access to institutional databases and email accounts and are unable to continue to work with academic partners on Impact case studies. This is merely one specific example of a much wider phenomenon across the cultural and charity sector, which is central to Impact for Panel D in particular.

With many studies likely to be affected to varying degrees by the situation, it would be difficult to operate any meaningful case by case mitigation process. It would be both simpler, and more equitable, to grant a universal extension to December 2020. A case by case mitigation process might still be necessary thereafter for those cases where a major component of the intended impact had been unable to be realised as a result of the crisis. For example, impacts upon the school curriculum are tied to the point that the relevant topics are reached over the course of the academic year. Such mitigation will be especially important for smaller UoAs required to return 2 case studies with very low eligible staff members.