Minutes of the REF Steering Group

Date: 24 January 2018
Present: Professor John Derrick (in the Chair) (JD)
        Professor Nikki Dibben (ND)
        Professor Andrew Fleming (AF)
        Professor John Flint (JF)
        Professor John Haycock (JH)
        Professor Jon Sayers (JS)
        Sarah Geere (SG)
        Rob Gower (RG)
        Deborah McClean (DM)
Apologies: Professor Bob Shoemaker
Secretary: David Jones (DJ)

1. Terms of reference

1.1 The Group discussed and agreed the draft terms of reference, noting that its responsibility for overseeing the REF Stocktake Exercise should be included. The group were satisfied that the membership was appropriate, fair and equitable. It was agreed that Faculty Impact Coordinators should be invited to attend meetings where appropriate.

2. Update on current guidance and timetable

2.1 The Group received a brief verbal overview of the latest available guidance and timescales. It was agreed that most of information needed to undertake detailed planning is now available.

2.2 It was agreed that DJ will provide a short synthesis of the latest guidance to Faculty REF Coordinators for onward distribution to Heads of Department and other relevant parties (ACTION).

3. Code of Practice development

3.1 The Group received a paper outlining a process for developing the Code of Practice and proposing draft principles for output selection. All institutions will be required to provide a Code of Practice that outlines our processes for (a) ensuring a fair approach to selecting outputs; and (b) identifying ‘Category A submitted’ staff in any UOA where less than 100% of ‘Category A eligible’ staff are submitted. HEFCE will provide guidance and a template later in 2018, with submission expected in spring 2019. The Group agreed that it was timely to discuss the approach now to enable us to meet the submission timetable.

3.2 The Group agreed with the proposed principles, noting that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) should be undertaken on the outcome of the next Stocktake Exercise. The Group agreed with the proposed approach to developing the Code of Practice.
4. Staff contracts

4.1 The publication of the two ‘Initial Decisions’ documents by HEFCE provided some further clarity on the rules for staff selection and inclusion. REF Coordinators discussed how the guidance might apply to their own faculty, and in particular whether there are any groups of staff that may require further investigation. The Chair focussed the discussion on identifying groups that may be on the wrong contract type, rather than on identifying individuals that may have a performance management issue. The research status of staff in the AMRC and those on clinical contracts were noted as particular areas of uncertainty. It was agreed that the next Stocktake Exercise will be used to accurately identify and classify all REF eligible staff.

5. Impact case study action planning: progress and concerns

5.1 SG provided a verbal update on progress towards impact case study action planning. The REF Coordinators then discussed progress and issues in their faculties. The Group agreed on the benefit of the funding made available following the 2017 Stocktake and recommended that a case should be made to the Vice-President for Research and Innovation that another funding round should be provided following the 2018 Stocktake (ACTION). This will enable case study authors to apply for funding at the most appropriate time for impact to develop.

6. REF roadmap and next stocktake

6.1 JD, DM and RG provided a verbal update on the roadmap activity following the UEB Away Day in October 2017. A draft roadmap and accompanying paper on the performance management of individuals was received by the UEB in December. They agreed that Campus Trade Unions needed to be consulted before further action was taken, with a meeting scheduled for 6 February. Following this an updated and revised version of the roadmap will be shared with HoDs.

6.2 Faculty REF Coordinators updated the Group on progress towards appointing departmental REF and impact coordinators. They were asked to provide an updated list to DJ (ACTION).

6.3 DJ provided a verbal update on the proposals for the 2018 Stocktake Exercise. The group agreed that:

- The Stocktake will be undertaken between March and July, followed by an assessment period in August and September, with the recommendations to be presented to UEB in late September.
- The Stocktake will be used to accurately identify and classify all REF eligible staff.
- The assessment of outputs will follow the new guidance, with departments required to submit a total number of outputs equal to FTE x 2.5, with a minimum of one output per person and a maximum of five.
- Outputs should be scored on a more granular scale to enable better ranking, however outputs assessed in the 2016 and 2017 Stocktake Exercises do not need to be re-assessed unless the department or faculty have concerns with the original scoring.
• Departments should prepare the actual number of impact case studies required plus a buffer of one. The submission should consist of the ongoing action plan, together with a short skeleton outline of the underpinning research and impact achieved to date, and details of further support required.
• Time should be built into the Stocktake process, following submission, to enable Research Services to verify the quality of the impact material submitted.
• Environment should not be included in the 2018 Stocktake Exercise given the current uncertainty about what will be assessed and what metrics will be used.

6.4 The Group agreed that they should take a collective approach to reviewing the 2018 Stocktake submissions, rather than each Faculty being reviewed in isolation. It was agreed that this would take the form of an away day to be held in September.

6.5 The Group noted that the 2019 Stocktake will be the final iteration, after which JD would like all selected outputs to be re-reviewed. The Group requested that a timetable for the remainder of the REF period be drafted for discussion at the next meeting (ACTION) to help departments with workload planning.

6.6 The Group discussed the merits and practicalities of using external reviewers to benchmark output assessment. Although the Group recognised the need to have confidence in the output scores, they did not agree that the routine use of external reviewers in all departments was necessary. The Group had confidence in departments with appropriate structures and processes in place for assessing outputs, and further good practice will be shared as part of the next Stocktake. In some areas article-level metrics may provide a better benchmark. The Group did support the flexible use of external reviewers where there are particular concerns, to be agreed by the Faculty REF Coordinators on a case-by-case basis.

7. Future meeting schedule

7.1 The Group agreed that the next meeting should take place in July, by which time the detailed guidance may have been published. The Group will also discuss the most appropriate methods for benchmarking impact case studies.

7.2. The Group agreed that there will be an away day to review the Stocktake submissions in September, with a further meeting to discuss the Code of Practice once the guidance and timescales have been published.

8. AOB

8.1 DJ reminded the Group of the scheduled change to the REF Open Access policy that will come into force on 1 April 2018, whereby outputs must be deposited within three months of acceptance rather than publication. However, the Group noted that HEFCE have provided a general exception to the policy that will enable outputs deposited within three months of publication to be submitted, and therefore agreed that to avoid confusion amongst researchers and departments the University policy will remain deposit within three months of first publication.