Minutes of the REF Steering Group (REFSG)

Date: 24 July 2018
Present: Professor John Derrick (in the Chair) (JD)
         Professor Wendy Baird (WB)
         Professor Nikki Dibben (ND)
         Professor Andrew Fleming (AF)
         Professor John Flint (JF)
         Professor Simon Foster (SF)
         Professor John Haycock (JH)
         Professor Kirill Horoshenkov (KH)
         Professor Jon Sayers (JS)
         Professor Bob Shoemaker (BS)
         Cliona Boyle (CB)
         Sarah Geere (SG)
Apologies: Deborah McClean
           Rob Gower
Secretary: David Jones (DJ)

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

1.1 The Group confirmed the minutes of the previous meeting as an accurate record.

2. Update on latest guidance and intelligence

2.1 The Group received a verbal overview on the draft ‘Guidance on Submissions’ and ‘Panel Criteria and Working Methods’, which had been published the previous day.

2.2 The Group noted that the draft guidance did not contain any immediate cause for concern. They welcomed the increased measures around staff circumstances, whilst recognising the additional administrative burden that this will create.

2.3. The Group noted the timescales for the consultation, and agreed that departments should be invited to contribute before the institutional response is discussed in detail at the next REFSG meeting on 18 September.

3. Update on the 2018 REF Stocktake

3.1 DJ reported that the deadline for submissions to the 2018 REF Stocktake had recently passed. There was a noticeable improvement in engagement compared to previous years, both from departments and individuals.

3.2 The Chair invited the Faculty REF Coordinators to report on progress and areas of concern within their faculties. There was agreement that the process ran broadly smoothly, although there are some improvements that can be made to the systems to streamline the process for future exercises.
3.3. The Group agreed that departments should begin feeding back output scores to individuals now, and that there is no need to wait until after the REFSG review meeting on 18 September. The general advice should that individuals should be given the scores for their outputs, and that feedback should be given verbally. Where appropriate, this can be integrated into research planning.

4. Provisional timetable

4.1 The Group received a provisional timetable through to submission. They were concerned with the provision that all outputs in the submitted pool be re-reviewed in January 2020 in order to be certain of the relative ranking. After discussion, it was agreed that departments should re-visit borderline outputs where there is insufficient granulation in scores to enable an accurate ranking to be undertaken.

4.2. The Group agreed that an updated timetable would be reviewed at the next meeting, reflecting the revised processes and timescales in the recent REF guidance.

5. Process and principles for determining submission strategies

5.1 The Group received the paper on the process and principles for determining submission strategies.

5.2. In light of the recent REF guidance, in which the majority of panels make it clear that they do not welcome multiple submission requests, the Group agreed to streamline the proposed process and move the timescales forwards. The Group agreed to discuss submission strategies alongside the 2018 Stocktake data at the next meeting on 18 September.

6. Use of external assessors and panel members

6.1 Faculty REF leads reported on the use of external assessors in the 2018 Stocktake. There was no consistent approach, with some departments in each faculty using assessors for a limited number of outputs. There was also some limited use of external assessors for impact case studies, which was found to be useful.

6.2. The Group agreed that there is merit to using external assessors for semi-informal evaluation of impact case studies. They should be engaged a year before submission, when the drafts will be sufficiently developed to allow meaningful review, while being not too late to prevent change.

6.3. The Group recommended that all departmental REF panels should have an advisor/observer from another REF committee within the faculty.

6.4. The Group discussed the merits of undertaking cross-faculty calibration exercises, given disciplinary differences. It was agreed to revisit this for the 2019 Stocktake.

7. For information and brief discussion
7.1. The Group noted the indicative QR values of 4*/3* outputs and impact case studies. The agreed that DJ would circulate this to HODs as a PowerPoint slide for use in departmental meetings (ACTION).

7.2. The Group noted the engineering outputs document as an example of best practice activity underway. The faculty has found this particularly useful for ECRs, and other faculties were encouraged to look at the benefits of doing something similar.

7.3. The Group received the report of the internal audit on the University's REF processes.

7.4. The Group noted the University response to the Research England consultation on REF Submission System.

7.5. The Group received the Research England report on “Monitoring sector progress towards compliance with funder open access policies”.

8. Round table / AOB

8.1. The Group thanked SG, who is shortly leaving the University, for her outstanding contribution to REF preparations for both REF 2014 and REF 2021.

9. Future meeting schedule

9.1. The next meeting is the away day on 18 September to review the 2018 Stocktake submissions, the requirements of the Code of Practice, and the draft consultation response.