



# **The Research Excellence Framework (REF)**

## **UCU Survey Report**

October 2013

# The Research Excellence Framework (REF)– UCU Survey Report

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UCU, October 2013

## **Executive Summary**

UCU conducted a survey of members in Higher Education (also open to non-members) on the impact of the REF in May-June 2013. The survey was designed to seek the views of academic staff on the impact of the REF on their career development, working conditions and workload, the fairness and transparency of institutional selection procedures, and the overall impact of the REF on the sector as a whole.

Around 7,000 responses were received from staff across academic grades and in 153 Higher Education institutions (HEIs), demonstrating the strength of feeling on the REF among academic staff in the UK.

Responses to the survey reflected long standing concerns within UCU as regards the detrimental impact of the REF on the working conditions and career development of academic staff as well as on the sector as a whole. For the large majority of respondents, delivery of the necessary REF outputs was not possible without working excessive hours.

A large majority viewed the REF as creating unreasonable expectations as regards the research outputs of academic researchers, yet many institutions are clearly linking REF performance to wider performance criteria and possible career detriment.

Appointment to entry-level academic positions and career progression are increasingly tied to fulfilment of REF submission criteria, with many institutions establishing their own quality thresholds for submission. The survey confirms reports that a number of institutions are warning staff that failure to achieve submission criteria could lead to increases in non-research workload, transfer to teaching-focused career pathways, and/or capability procedures that could lead to staff being 'managed out' of their institutions or targeted for redundancy. As with the RAE before it, the REF has cultivated a climate within a number of institutions whereby the only research viewed as of value is that able to deliver the necessary REF outputs. Not surprisingly, most respondents viewed the REF as responsible for increasing their stress levels.

For a majority of respondents, the REF remains a flawed process in terms of its impact on the sector and the nature of academic endeavour, with large numbers also critical of the way in which institutions have handled the selection process for REF submissions:

The survey revealed considerable levels of concern regarding the lack of transparency in institutional processes for determining which staff are to be included in the REF submission, the methods used for determining the selection, and the way in which decisions relating to submissions are communicated to the staff concerned. This is notwithstanding the emphasis on the principles of

transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity in the official REF guidance produced by the funding councils.

With regards to inclusivity and equality considerations, there were also high levels of dissatisfaction regarding the handling of requests for reduced outputs based on individual circumstances. Moreover, a significant proportion of disabled staff viewed the selection process as discriminatory. The disproportionate impact that workload and performance management pressures derived from the REF had on female staff was also notable in the survey responses.

Most respondents did not regard the REF as an accurate indicator of the quality of academic research, viewed its impact on the sector as detrimental, and favoured its replacement by an alternative method for evaluating the quality of research in Higher Education. The largely negative perspectives on the REF were shared by those expecting to be included in their institution's submission and those expecting to be excluded.

Key findings in the survey were as follows:

### **Perspectives on the REF**

- Over 62% of respondents viewed the REF as creating unreasonable expectations as regards the research output of academic researchers.
- Over 60% of respondents viewed the REF (and RAEs previously) as having had a detrimental impact on the HE sector.
- Over half of respondents did not agree that the REF and its predecessor RAE had resulted in an increase in the quality of academic research, and did not view the REF as a good indicator of the quality of academic research being undertaken in HEIs.
- Over half of respondents (55%) felt that the REF should be replaced by an alternative method for evaluating the quality of research emanating from HEIs.
- Over a quarter of respondents felt that the REF should be abolished and not replaced.

### **Workload**

- Over two-thirds of respondents, and close to three-quarters of women, felt unable to undertake the necessary work to produce the required REF outputs without working excessive hours.
- Over a quarter of respondents felt that they did not have enough time to prepare their teaching because of the need to focus on their REF outputs.
- 29% of respondents found it necessary to work on their REF outputs most evenings, and 31% most weekends, and over a third worked on their outputs during/instead of annual leave.
- Over 60% of respondents (and more women than men) felt that pressure to meet expectations in relation to the REF had increased their stress

levels, and over a third felt that that this pressure had negatively impacted on their health.

- Close to a quarter of respondents indicated that they undertook half or more of their work on REF outputs outside of normal or reasonable working hours.
- Of respondents employed on fractional/part-time or hourly paid contracts, over a third indicated that they undertook half or more of their work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

### **Performance Expectations and Career Development**

- A number of institutions are warning academic staff not included in the REF that they face capability procedures, denial of promotion or progression to the next grade, withdrawal of support to undertake research or transfer to a teaching-focused contract.
- Women were more likely to have been warned about these punitive sanctions than men.
- Over a fifth of respondents thought it likely that they would be transferred to a teaching-focused contract if they did not perform to institutional REF expectations.
- Nearly a quarter were concerned that they would lose their job if they did not perform to institutional REF expectations.
- 45% thought it likely that they would not be supported to undertake research in the future if they were not included in the REF submission.
- More than one in ten staff in probationary periods had been informed that they would not be confirmed in post if they failed to meet REF expectations.
- Close to a half of respondents did not feel that their institution/department provided the professional support needed in order to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF.

### **Equality Principles and Discrimination**

- One in ten of all respondents regarded REF selection processes as discriminatory according to one or more protected equality characteristic.
- One in ten black and ethnic minority respondents regarded their institution's REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to race.
- 17% of respondents who identified themselves as disabled regarded their institution's REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to disability. One in eight felt they had been personally discriminated against on the grounds of disability.
- Of those respondents who had made a 'reduced outputs' request due to 'complex' individual circumstances, two-fifths were dissatisfied with the way it was handled by their institution.

## **REF selection processes**

- Over two-fifths of respondents did not view their institution's REF selection procedures as transparent.
- Two-fifths also felt that certain types of research are favoured over others in deciding which individuals are to be included in the REF submission, irrespective of academic quality.
- Over a third of respondents did not feel that evaluations of their outputs made by their institutions with regard to possible inclusion in the REF had been clearly communicated to them.
- Over a third also disagreed that those involved in the submission decision-making process had the appropriate expertise to make the decision.
- Over a quarter of respondents indicated that journal rankings were used by their institutions in deciding whether their outputs should be included in the REF submission, despite assurances from the funding councils that these will not be used as a criterion in the assessment of outputs.

# UCU REF Survey – Full Report

## 1) Introduction

UCU local branches and members in Higher Education have over a number of years voiced strong concerns about the Research Excellence Framework (REF), and its predecessor Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). These exercises have been viewed as having a detrimental impact on the Higher Education sector in general and on staff in particular: increasing workload pressures, creating unreasonable performance expectations, limiting academic freedom and altering the way in which academics approach their research and publishing strategies for the worse.

With public funding allocations linked to REF (and previously RAE) scores, Higher Education institutions (HEIs) have adopted selective strategies towards their REF submission by establishing their own quality thresholds for inclusion of academic staff in the submission. At a number of institutions this has been combined with performance management or review policies which seek to ensure that academic staff produce the necessary REF outputs at or above the institution's quality threshold, often involving detriment in terms of career development and punitive sanctions for staff who do not meet this threshold.

Given the likely impact of decisions related to inclusion in the REF in terms of career development and possible detriment, UCU members and branches have also raised concerns about the processes adopted by their institutions for deciding which researchers and outputs to include in their REF submission. These concerns relate to a possible bias, inconsistency and lack of transparency in selection procedures (possibly leading to arbitrary decision-making), unequal and unfair treatment of particular individuals or types of research and possible discriminatory impact on certain groups 'protected' under equality legislation, including female, black and ethnic minority, LGBT and disabled staff. This is notwithstanding official REF guidance produced on behalf of the UK Higher Education funding councils, obliging HEIs to publish a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for the REF submission.

UCU opposition to the REF has been reiterated in motions adopted by delegates at successive UCU Higher Education sector conferences since 2010. Motions have condemned the detrimental impact of the REF on the HE sector, and the way in which REF performance is increasingly being used by institutions as the basis of punitive performance management policies. Motions have also called for information to be collected on institutional selection practices in relation to the REF, and for UCU members to be surveyed as to the impact of the REF on their working conditions and career development.

A survey on the REF was thus designed by UCU in order to seek the views of academic staff on the impact of the REF on their career development, working

conditions and workload, whilst also gauging perceptions of the fairness and transparency of institutional selection procedures, and eliciting views as to the overall impact of the REF on the sector as a whole.

### ***The survey***

The survey ran from 2 May to 12 June 2013. The survey was sent to 46,225 UCU members identified as either academics or 'researchers'. These members were also invited to circulate the survey to non-members if they felt appropriate. This elicited a further 147 survey responses from non-UCU members. In total, 7,469 respondents answered at least one of the initial survey questions, although the number completing most questions was around 6,800. Survey responses came from academic staff in 153 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A large majority of responses came from academics employed in pre-92 HEIs, although there was also a significant level of responses from post-92 institutions.

Of those that identified their gender, 43% (2822 respondents) were female and 57% (3693) were male.

Respondents came from across the range of academic career levels: just over 22% of respondents had the job title of 'Professor'; just over 30% were Senior Lecturers; close to 24% were Lecturers; and just over 8% were Readers.<sup>1</sup> Responses were received from academics in all 36 REF units of assessment.

**Table 1 – Job title of Respondents**

<b>What is your job title?</b>	
Professor	22.1%
Associate Professor	2.7%
Reader	8.3%
Principal Lecturer	2.6%
Senior Lecturer	30.5%
Lecturer	23.6%
Senior Research Fellow	2.0%
Research Fellow	3.1%
Research Associate/Associate Research Fellow	1.0%
Researcher	0.5%
Other	2.4%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>7469</i>

## **2) Status of respondents in relation to REF submission**

The REF assessment framework will be based on three elements. As with the previous RAE, the central element is an assessment of research outputs, with institutions submitting outputs of its researchers for expert review by the REF sub-panels, and the normal expectation being that four outputs are submitted

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<sup>1</sup> In the text of this report, the percentage responses discussed will be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number. The tables provide percentage figures to one decimal point.



for each researcher (unless it is agreed on the basis of the researcher's individual circumstances that a reduced number of outputs can be submitted).

The 'outputs' element of the REF constitutes 65% of the overall assessment of each submission by the REF sub-panels. A further 20% is constituted by the 'impact' element, in relation to which the sub-panels will assess the 'reach and significance' of the impact of the submitted unit's research on 'the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia'. A third element – constituting 15% - relates to research environment, with submitted units assessed in terms of their 'vitality and sustainability' and contribution to developing the wider discipline or research base, e.g. through support given to research staff and at all stages of career development (this is not based on an assessment of the contributions of individual researchers).

Overall, just over 80% of respondents stated that they had been considered for inclusion in the REF submission by their institution. Nearly 12% said they had not been considered, and 8% did not know. Of those that had not been considered or did not know, just over 49% stated that they had wished to be considered, just over 18% said that they did not wish to be considered and 27% had no strong view.

Bringing these figures together, 90% of respondents (6569 in total) were either considered or wished to be considered for the REF, 4% (263) were not considered and did not wish to be considered and 6% (391) had no strong view.

Just over 61% of all respondents were currently expecting to be included in their HEIs REF submission (although over half of these were still awaiting confirmation), nearly 21% did not expect to be included, and 13% were still awaiting a decision. 0.4% (29 respondents) were awaiting an appeal.

Responses of male and female staff to this question were also analysed separately. It was notable that female respondents were less likely than male respondents to be expecting to be included in the REF submission, and more likely to know that they were not being included, to be awaiting a decision or to 'not know' what their status was in relation to the submission.

**Table 2a – Status in relation to REF submission**

<b>Do you currently expect your research outputs to be included in your institution's REF submission?</b>			
	All respondents	Male	Female
Yes (and it has been confirmed)	28.7%	31.3%	27.0%
Yes (but it has not been confirmed)	32.5%	35.0%	30.7%
No	20.9%	17.5%	22.7%
Awaiting decision	13.0%	12.4%	14.3%
Awaiting Appeal	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Don't know	4.4%	3.3%	5.0%
<i>Answered Question</i>	7238	3692	2820

### ***'Impact' case studies***

The original proposal from the funding councils (following government prompting) to include an impact element in the research assessment was highly controversial. Nearly 18,000 academics signed the UCU 'Stand Up for Research' statement opposing this proposal<sup>2</sup>. Following the UCU-led campaign, the impact proposals were modified, with a lower weighting in the assessment. A case study approach was adopted, with each submitting unit required to submit a certain number of case studies corresponding to the number of researchers submitted in the 'outputs' category (2 case studies where there are up to 14.99 members of staff submitted; 3 where there are between 15 and 24.99 members of staff submitted; 4 for 25 and 34.99 members of staff; and so on).

The case study approach, while limited, has nevertheless led to additional pressure being placed on academic staff to produce work that can be used to demonstrate impact, so as to ensure that the submitting unit has the right number of case studies (of an appropriate nature and quality) that corresponds to the estimated number of researchers being submitted.

Close to 21% (1484) of survey respondents indicated that they had produced an impact case study in relation to the institution's REF submission. Of these, 25% knew that this case study was to be included in the institutional REF submission, while a further 37% were expecting it to be included but were awaiting confirmation.

**Table 2b – Respondents who had produced an impact case study**

<b>Status of case study</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
My impact case study will be included in the submission	25.1%
I expect it to be included but I am awaiting confirmation	37.4%
My case study will not be included in the submission	9.6%
I am awaiting a decision on inclusion	19.3%
I am working on a case study but do not yet know if it will be included	8.7%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>1480</i>

### ***'Research Assistants' or Researchers on Projects***

The official REF guidance states that all staff defined as academic staff with a contract of employment of 0.2 full time equivalent (FTE) or greater are eligible to be included in the REF, where their employment function is to undertake either 'research only' or 'teaching and research'. However, it makes a distinction between independent researchers and those who 'are employed to carry out another individual's research programme rather than as individual researchers in their own right'. It defines the latter as 'research assistants', although they often

<sup>2</sup> see [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/n/q/ucu\\_REFstatement\\_finalsignatures.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/n/q/ucu_REFstatement_finalsignatures.pdf)

have different employment titles, such as 'research associate'. It states that such individuals are not eligible to be returned to the REF unless they are named as principal investigator or equivalent on a research grant or significant piece of research.

While UCU believes that the distinctions made between these different types of researcher and the 'research assistant' definition are highly problematic, we agree that researchers employed in the way outlined – many of whom are employed on fixed term contracts and/or highly vulnerable to redundancy when project funding ends - should not be under pressure to submit outputs to the REF.

Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they were 'employed as a researcher solely to carry out research on another individual's research programme.' 3% (190) of respondents indicated that they were employed in this way. Analysis of their responses suggests that a number of institutions may be contradicting the official guidance as regards 'research assistants'. 27% of these respondents were expecting to be included in the REF submission and just over 10% were awaiting a decision.

**Table 2c – Researchers employed to carry out another individual's research**

Do you currently expect your research outputs to be included in your institution's REF submission for 2014?	
Yes (and it has been confirmed)	10.3%
Yes (but it has not been confirmed)	16.8%
No	38.9%
Awaiting decision	10.3%
Awaiting Appeal	0.0%
Don't know	23.8%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>185</i>

### 3) Institutional Selection Procedures – Methods and Criteria

In the REF assessment, outputs will be assessed and graded according to four starred levels. Research regarded as 'world-leading' will be rated as 4\*; research that is 'internationally excellent' will be rated as 3\*; research that is 'internationally recognised' will be rated as 2\*; and research that is 'nationally recognised' will be rated as 1\*. Reports from UCU branches and additional comments to this survey, together with analysis of institutional codes of practice on REF selection indicate that a number of institutions have imposed a quality threshold requiring staff to have an average predicted grading of somewhere between 2.5\* and 3\* for their four submitted outputs. This move relates to announcements by the funding councils that only research rated at 3\* and 4\* in the REF would be included in the calculations for future funding allocations.

The adoption of quality thresholds based on these gradings means that where an academic's leading research outputs are regarded in the main as merely 'internationally recognised' rather than 'internationally excellent' or 'world leading', then their institution may regard their work as of insufficient quality to be included in the REF submission. Furthermore, decisions on submissions will be based on predicted REF ratings rather than certainty as to the rating any one output might receive from the REF panel assessment.

Among staff who had not been included in the institutional REF submission (or were appealing against a decision to not include them), 26% had been informed that this was because they had not met quality criteria.

The imposition of quality thresholds is part of a wider process of 'gaming' on the part of institutions as they seek to maximise outcomes from the REF and the prestige, reputational boost and future funding allocations associated with the REF results. This could also mean concentrating efforts in a smaller number of research areas, in certain types or areas of research, certain disciplines or sub-fields of these disciplines. In some particular units of assessments, institutions could decide not to make a submission at all, or submit only researchers from a particular research group or only research reflecting a particular research strategy, or to submit a very small elite group of researchers to increase the prospects of appearing higher in REF 'league tables'. Some research, for example that of an interdisciplinary nature, may be regarded as not fitting neatly within one unit of assessment and also excluded for this reason.

As noted above, submitting units within institutions are also required to submit a certain ratio of 'impact' case studies to researchers submitted to the REF sub-panels. Thus if there are not enough impact case studies suitable for inclusion in the submission, then the institution or submitting unit may decide to reduce the number of researchers in the submission, favouring those who have produced impact case studies over others.

Other aspects of institutional gaming not covered by the survey include the practice of appointing academics with potential high REF scores on short-term and fractional contracts to cover the REF census date. These might include prominent retired academics or academics with substantive positions outside of the UK. More generally, the REF and the RAE before it have been criticised for creating a transfer market of REF superstars, brought in by institutions to boost their REF scores, and leaving other academics in the particular schools/ departments feeling marginalised.

Leaving some of the broader aspects of institutional gaming aside, there appear to be a number of reasons used by institutions for not including a researcher in the REF return even if an institutional quality threshold has been reached, although often the reasons are not clear or not explained at all. It was notable therefore that just under 23% of respondents who had been informed that they were not being included in the REF submission indicated that this was for

reasons related to institutional/departmental strategy. Over 16% referred to 'other' reasons. A myriad of 'other' reasons were specified by respondents, which included outputs not fitting the particular unit of assessments, as well as not having enough publications and not undertaking independent research.

While close to 23% of those not included stated that they had not sought inclusion in the submission, it was also notable that just over 12% stated that the reasons for non inclusion had not been explained by the institution or were not clear.

**Table 3a – Reasons provided for non-inclusion in REF submission**

What was the reason provided for non-inclusion by your institution (if any)?	
Not meeting quality criteria	26.2%
Reasons related to institutional/departmental REF strategy	22.6%
Reasons not explained/not clear	12.1%
I did not seek inclusion in the submission	22.7%
Other (please specify)	16.5%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>1518</i>

Concerns about possible bias in selection processes and some types of research being favoured for the institutional submission irrespective of academic quality were also reflected in responses to questions to all survey participants about the REF selection procedures. While close to 32% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that processes were unbiased, it was notable that a significant proportion of respondents – over 27% - disagreed/strongly disagreed with this perspective. Moreover, 40% agreed/strongly agreed with the view that certain types of research are favoured over others in deciding which individuals are to be included in the institution's REF submission, irrespective of academic quality (23% disagreed/strongly disagreed with this perspective).

**Table 3b – Bias in Selection Process**

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Answered Question
The selection processes applied by my institution for inclusion in the institutional REF submission are unbiased	10.7%	16.8%	25%	21%	10.6%	15.9%	6835
Certain types of research are favoured over others in deciding which individuals are to be included in my institution's REF submission, irrespective of academic quality.	7.7%	15.3%	18.2%	19.2%	20.8%	18.8%	6839

In order to predict what scores research outputs would receive from the REF panels if submitted to the REF, institutions have employed a variety of methods. All survey participants were asked which methods had been used by their institutions in making the decision on inclusion. The most common method used (respondents were asked to indicate all those that applied) appeared to be internal peer review (indicated by close to 66% of respondents), followed by external peer review (over 49%), a 'mock' REF exercise (nearly 42%) and assessment by a senior manager/REF-lead (just under 48%).

**Table 3c – methods used in making decision on inclusion in REF submission**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Internal peer review	65.6%
External peer review	49.4%
Mock REF exercise	41.9%
Assessment by senior manager/REF-lead	47.7%
Journal rankings/impact factors	27.7%
Type of publication/output	25.3%
Citation data	9.8%
Don't know	18.0%
Other (please specify)	3.0%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>6902</i>

While all attempts to second guess the REF panels' assessments of outputs are problematic, a number of the methods indicated raise particular concerns. Inevitably, senior managers are likely to make the final decision as to which outputs/researchers to include in the submission. However, allowing the decision to be based on an assessment by a senior manager is highly problematic if this is not also informed by expert peer review. Moreover, leaving evaluations and decisions to the discretion of managers makes it difficult to ensure consistency in the institutional selection process (consistency in REF selection processes is identified in the official REF guidance as a key principle that institutions should follow, as further discussed below). Further analysis of the close to 48% (3289) of respondents who referred to an assessment by a senior manager/REF-lead, shows that 12% (394 respondents, and 6% of the total number of responses to this question) did not also refer to some form of peer review (external or internal) or 'mock REF exercise'.

Of further concern is the significant proportion of all respondents who referred to journal rankings/impact factors (close to 28%), type of publication/output (just over 25%) and citation data (just under 10%).

This is despite the official REF guidance stressing the 'underpinning principle' that all types of research and all forms of research outputs across all disciplines

will be assessed on a fair and equal basis, and that that no REF sub-panel will make use of journal impact factors, rankings or lists, or the perceived standing of the publisher, in assessing the quality of research outputs (paragraph 53 of *Panel Criteria and Working Methods*<sup>3</sup>), and also setting clear limits to the use of citation data.

In relation to citation data, the official guidance states that this will only be used as 'additional information' and in relation to a limited number of sub-panels (sub-panels 1 to 9, 11 and 18<sup>4</sup>). It stresses that even in relation to these sub-panels, expert review will be the primary means of assessing outputs, and also acknowledges a number of problems posed by the use of citation data. Furthermore, it states that given the limited way in which citation data will be used in the assessment '*the funding bodies do not sanction or recommend that HEIs rely on citation information to inform the selection of staff or outputs for inclusion in their submissions*' (paragraph 52 of *Panel Criteria and Working Methods*).

**Table 3d – methods used in making decision on inclusion in REF submission (sub-panels 10, 12-17, 19 -36 – where citation data will not be used).**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Internal peer review	70.1%
External peer review	55.9%
Mock REF exercise	42.4%
Assessment by senior manager/REF-lead	47.6%
Journal rankings/impact factors	22.2%
Type of publication/output	23.4%
Citation data	4.6%
Don't know	13.7%
Other (please specify)	2.9%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>4460</i>

On the assumption that most of the respondents who indicated that citation data was used to assess their outputs would fall within the units of assessments where citation data is to be used by the relevant sub-panels, the survey results were filtered to exclude respondents working in these units of assessments.

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<sup>3</sup> REF 2014, *Panel Criteria and Working Methods*, January 2012. Available at this link: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2012-01/>

<sup>4</sup> The list of REF units of assessment corresponding to the sub-panels can be found here: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/panels/unitsofassessment/>

Excluding these respondents it is notable that close to 5% of respondents in the other sub-panels (i.e. those where it is explicitly stated that citation data will not be used), indicated that citation data was used in assessing their outputs in relation to the decision on inclusion in the REF submission.

#### **4) Transparency in REF selection processes**

All HEIs intending to make a submission to the 2014 REF were required to publish a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for the REF submission. The official REF guidance produced by the joint funding councils' REF team identifies four key principles – transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity – that these codes of practice should apply (see Part 4 of *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions*<sup>5</sup>).

As well as adhering to the public sector equality duty as set out in the Equality Act (2010), these principles entail the development of a selection framework that is clearly communicated to staff, and which outlines consistent, inclusive and transparent procedures for selecting staff for the submission, with individuals and bodies involved in making the selection clearly identified.

HEIs were required to send their codes of practice to the REF team by the end of July 2012, so that they could be reviewed by the REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP), charged with advising the UK funding councils on the adherence of the institutional codes of practice to the official guidance on submissions produced by the REF team. Following the 31 July deadline, UCU wrote to the REF team to express concern that a number of draft institutional codes that we had seen fell short of the requirements set out in the official guidance. Following its review of the 159 HEI codes of practice submitted, EDAP published a report on good practice in the codes<sup>6</sup>, noting that nearly half of the codes fell short of meeting some aspect of the guidance, and some of the codes required substantial revision.

Where EDAP found that the codes fell short of the guidance, the relevant funding body has corresponded directly with the institution concerned, and requested that they revise their code of practice accordingly in respect of the shortcomings identified.

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<sup>5</sup> REF 2014: *Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions*, July 2011. Available at this link: <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/2011-02/>

<sup>6</sup> REF 2014: *REF Codes of Practice for the selection of staff: A report on good practice by the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel (EDAP)*, October 2012. Available at this link: See <http://www.ref.ac.uk/pubs/refcodesofpracticegoodpracticereport/#d.en.75885>



Nevertheless, reports from UCU branches and responses to this survey suggest that there remains a high level of dissatisfaction with regard to the lack of transparency and accountability in institutional REF selection processes:

Nearly 42% of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that their institutional REF selection procedures were transparent, while just over 35% agreed/strongly agreed.

Nearly 41% disagreed/strongly disagreed that the criteria for selection for the REF submission applied by their institution was easy to understand, while 34% agreed/strongly agreed.

**Table 4a – Transparency in the Selection Process**

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know	Answered Question
Processes for determining who will be included in the REF submission at my institution are transparent	15.6%	26.2%	17.8%	24.9%	10.5%	5%	6878
The criteria for selection applied by my institution for inclusion in the institutional REF submission are easy to understand	12.9%	28%	18.9%	25%	9%	6.2%	6851

The official REF guidance also sets out a number of requirements for staff and committees involved in making decisions as regards institutional REF submissions. It states that staff with such responsibilities must be provided with training on equality and diversity which has been tailored to REF processes. It also states that there should be a clear definition of each person’s role within the selection process, and the rationale for their role. The role and membership of relevant committees involved in the decision-making process needs to be detailed, as does the method and timescale in which feedback is to be provided to staff in respect of decisions made.

Nevertheless, survey responses and additional comments submitted indicate a level of concern regarding the role of those involved in the decision-making process, their level of training and expertise to make such decisions, and the way in which decisions (and the reasoning behind them) are communicated.

While nearly 32% agreed/strongly agreed that those involved in the decision-making process with regard to the REF submission selection had the appropriate training to do so, close to 24% of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed. Of particular note here is that just over 24% responded that they did not know.

Similarly, while just over 38% agreed/strongly agreed that those involved in the decision-making process with regard to the REF submission selection had the

appropriate expertise, close to 26% disagreed/strongly disagreed, and close to 16% did not know.

**Table 4b – Expertise and Training of REF decision-makers**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<i>Answered Question</i>
Those involved in decisions about which individuals/outputs are to be included in my institutional REF submission have the appropriate training to do so	8.4%	15.2%	20.3%	21.3%	10.5%	24.3%	6851
Those involved in evaluating which individuals/outputs are suitable for inclusion in my institutional REF submission have the appropriate expertise to do so	9.3%	16.4%	20.4%	26.1%	12.1%	15.7%	6845

The official REF guidance states that institutions need to put in place appropriate and timely procedures for informing staff not included in the REF submission and the reasons for non-selection. However, in response to the survey question on reasons for non-selection reported above, it was notable that 12% of those who had been informed that they would not be included in the submission stated that the reasons for non-selection had not been explained or made clear.

Overall, there were significant levels of dissatisfaction with regard to communication in relation to REF decisions and evaluations, suggesting that the official guidance was not being correctly adhered to in a number of institutions.

**Table 4c: Communication of REF output evaluations and reasoning**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<i>Answered Question</i>
Evaluations made by my institution of my research outputs with regard to possible inclusion in the REF have been clearly communicated to me	14.8%	21.3%	15.5%	29.5%	15.1%	3.8%	6820
The reasoning behind evaluations made of my research outputs with regard to the REF have been clearly explained to me	17.7%	25.5%	20.2%	21.7%	10.2%	4.6%	6815

Although close to 45% agreed/strongly agreed that evaluations made by the institution of their research outputs with regard to possible inclusion in the REF had been clearly communicated to them, it was notable that over a third – just over 36% of respondents - disagreed/strongly disagreed with this view. Moreover just over 43% disagreed/strongly disagreed that the reasoning behind these evaluations had been clearly explained to them, whereas nearly 32% agreed/strongly agreed.

## 5) Appeals

The official REF guidance states that institutions should put in place appropriate and timely procedures to allow members of staff to appeal REF submission decisions. These procedures should allow enough time for staff to appeal after the decision, and for that appeal to be considered by the HEI before the final selection is made. The individuals handling the appeals should be separate to and independent of the individuals involved in the initial decision on selection (see paragraph 227 of *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions*).

Institutions were required to detail their appeals procedures in their code of practice. However, the EDAP report on good practice in the codes noted that this was an area where a number of Codes of Practice fell short of the guidance, for example by establishing processes that lacked sufficient independence, or where there was no assurance that appeal outcomes could be implemented before the submission deadline.

Prior to making a formal appeal, we would expect that members of staff would make an informal appeal or complaint with the relevant person in order to seek to resolve the issue. Close to 11% (762) of respondents to the survey indicated that they had made an informal appeal/complaint to a Head of Department/REF lead or other relevant person/committee in relation to a decision on REF inclusion or evaluation of their outputs. Breaking this figure down by gender, it was notable that a higher proportion of women (12%) than men (10%) had made an informal appeal/complaint.

**Table 5a – Satisfaction with response to REF complaints/informal appeals**

Answer Options	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Answered Question
All respondents	1.9%	8.6%	26.7%	32.8%	30%	753
Male	2.1%	9.6%	24.9%	29.7%	33.7%	374
Female	1.8%	8.0%	28.0%	35.7%	26.5%	339

Just under 63% of respondents who had made an informal appeal/complaint indicated that they were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the way this was

handled by their institution. Male respondents were slightly more likely to express both dissatisfaction and satisfaction with the way this was handled than their female counterparts (who were more likely to be neutral on the matter).

Respondents who had made an informal appeal/complaint were also asked if they had taken a formal appeal. 5% of these (31 respondents, and 0.5% of the overall total number of respondents) indicated they had done so.

Of those who had taken a formal appeal, just over 57% had submitted an appeal in relation to a decision on non-inclusion in the REF submission, and just under 43% on a decision related to a request for submission of reduced outputs due to individual circumstances.

Where a formal appeal had been submitted, and had taken place/was ongoing, 70% indicated they were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the way it was handled by the institution (and less than 7% indicated satisfaction).

**Table 5b – Satisfaction with REF formal appeals process**

Answer Options	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
	0.0%	6.7%	23.3%	30%	40%

Of those respondents who had submitted a formal appeal, there appeared to be a complete absence of faith as regards the degree of fairness, transparency and bias of institutional appeal procedures:

Asked whether they regarded their institution’s appeals process as fair, no respondents answered with a yes, close to 67% answered with a no, and just over 33% responded don’t know.

Asked whether they regarded their institution’s appeals process as unbiased, no respondents answered with a yes, just over 69% answered with a no, and close to 31% responded don’t know.

Asked whether they regarded their institution’s appeals process as transparent, no respondents answered with a yes, just over 83% answered with a no, and close to 17% responded don’t know.

**Table 5c – fairness of REF appeal process**

Do you regard the institution’s REF appeal process as fair?	
Yes	0.0%
No	66.7%
Don’t know	33.3%

**Table 5d – bias in REF appeal process**

Do you regard the institution's REF appeal process as unbiased?	
Yes	0.0%
No	69.4%
Don't know	30.6%

**Table 5e – transparency in REF appeal process**

Do you regard the institution's REF appeal process as transparent?	
Yes	0.0%
No	83.3%
Don't know	16.7%

## **6) Reduced Output Requests and Individual Circumstances**

The official REF guidance sets out the individual circumstances on the basis of which staff will be able to request that a reduced number of outputs be included in the institutional REF submission. Institutions are required to set out robust and confidential procedures within their codes of practice on REF selection to enable staff to make such requests.

The official guidance sets out a number of clearly defined circumstances, such as career breaks, part-time working, maternity, paternity or adoption leave and secondments outside of the sector, in relation to which decisions relating to reduced output requests should be reasonably clear cut. However, it also identifies more complex circumstances, relating to disability, ill health, caring responsibilities and other circumstances related to protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act. In relation to these, institutions will be required to take a decision on the basis of the circumstances disclosed. The funding councils' REF team recommends that institutions refer to the set of 'complex circumstances' example case studies and decisions produced by the Equality Challenge Unit, and approved by EDAP and the REF panel chairs, to guide their decision-making.<sup>7</sup>

Over 19% of respondents to the survey indicated that they had made a request for inclusion in the REF submission with reduced outputs. It is notable that the proportion of female respondents who had made a request for reduced outputs was two and a half times higher than that of male respondents. 30% of female respondents had made such a request, compared to 12% of male respondents. Female respondents (840) who had made such a request outnumbered male

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<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/documents/ref-materials/complex-circumstances-examples>

respondents (456), despite male survey respondents outnumbering female respondents by a ratio of 57:43.

The survey data was also filtered in order to analyse responses of staff identifying themselves as disabled (427 in total). Of disabled respondents, nearly 37% had made a request for inclusion in the REF due to individual circumstances.

**Table 6a – requests for reduced outputs**

Have you requested inclusion in your institutional REF submission with reduced outputs due to individual circumstances?				
	All respondents	Male	Female	Disabled
Yes	19.5%	12.3%	30.1%	36.8%
No	80.5%	87.7%	69.9%	63.2%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>7187</i>	<i>3690</i>	<i>2815</i>	<i>427</i>

**Table 6b – clearly defined or complex individual circumstances**

If Yes, did your circumstances fall into the category of:				
	All respondents	Male	Female	Disabled
Clearly defined individual circumstances	77.2% (1078)	72.4% (330)	79.6% (669)	52.3% (81)
Complex circumstances	22.8% (318)	27.6% (126)	20.4% (171)	47.7% (74)
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>1396</i>	<i>456</i>	<i>840</i>	<i>155</i>

Looking at the data from all respondents, just over 77% of reduced output requests related to clearly defined circumstances, whereas just under 23% related to complex circumstances. Female respondents who had made a request for reduced outputs were more likely than their male counterparts to have done so on the basis of 'clearly defined circumstances' and less likely to have done so on the basis of 'complex circumstances.' One obvious explanation for this is the inclusion of maternity leave under 'clearly defined circumstances'. However, female respondents were also almost twice as likely as their male counterparts to be employed on a part-time contract, which would also be a clearly defined reason to request reduce outputs (nearly 5% of all female respondents to the survey were employed on part-time or hourly paid contracts, compared to just under 3% of men).

Disabled respondents who had made a request for reduced outputs were far more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have done so on the basis of 'complex circumstances' (which would include circumstances related to disability and ill health).

All respondents who had made a reduced outputs request were also asked to indicate their level of satisfaction with the way in which the request had been handled by their institution. Levels of dissatisfaction were considerably higher in relation to the way in which requests based on complex circumstances were dealt with by institutions than they were in relation to requests based on clearly defined circumstances (although still significant for the latter).

In relation to complex circumstances requests, over 40% of those who had made such a request indicated that they were dissatisfied/very dissatisfied with the way in which the request had been dealt with by the institutions (35% indicated that they were satisfied/very satisfied). Dissatisfaction was slightly higher among men than women. Women were more likely to indicate they were satisfied with the way the request was handled (and less likely to be neutral on the question).

Disabled respondents who had made a request based on complex circumstances were more likely than their non-disabled counterparts to indicate satisfaction with the way in which their request was handled, and less likely to indicate dissatisfaction.

**Table 6c – complex circumstances requests: level of satisfaction**

Level of satisfaction with the way in which request for a reduction in outputs dealt with by HEI					
	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
All respondents	15.3%	19.8%	24.6%	21.7%	18.5%
Male	15.2%	16%	26.4%	20.8%	21.6%
Female	15.4%	21.9%	22.5%	23.1%	17.2%
Disabled	23%	17.6%	21.6%	18.9%	18.9%

While a significant proportion of respondents who had made a request for reduced outputs on the basis of clearly defined circumstances remained dissatisfied/very dissatisfied (just over 15%), the level of satisfaction was considerably higher, with just under 64% indicating that they were satisfied/very satisfied with the way in which their institution handled the request. Satisfaction was slightly higher among women than men, while men were more likely to indicate dissatisfaction.

This time, disabled respondents who had made such a request were less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to indicate satisfaction with the way in which their request was handled, and more likely to indicate dissatisfaction.

By definition, fairly clear parameters are set out for decision-making by institutions on clearly defined circumstances requests, leaving less scope for inconsistencies and subjective judgements by institutions when making decisions, and less potential for the decision-making process to lead to dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, the level of dissatisfaction among all respondents who had made a reduced outputs request, even in relation to clearly defined circumstances cases, remains significant.

**Table 6d - clearly defined circumstances requests: level of satisfaction**

Level of satisfaction with the way in which request for a reduction in outputs dealt with by HEI					
Answer Options	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
All respondents	32.6%	31.3%	20.9%	10.3%	4.9%
Male	33.6%	30.9%	18.5%	9.9%	7.1%
Female	33%	31.6%	21%	10.6%	3.7%
Disabled	28.4%	24.7%	23.5%	16%	7.4%

## 7) Equality Principles and potential discrimination

The official REF guidance stresses equality principles, notably in encouraging HEIs to submit the work of all their excellent researchers, setting out a framework to enable researchers to be submitted with reduced outputs due to individual circumstances, and outlining principles and recommendations for institutional codes of practices on 'fair and transparent selection of staff' with reference to the public sector equality duties, the Equality Act and other relevant legislation.

Given continuing concerns about the possible discriminatory impact of the REF, raised by UCU members, branches and national equality committees, survey respondents were asked to indicate both whether they regarded their institution's REF selection process as discriminatory, and also whether they felt personally discriminated against (in relation to one of the protected characteristics identified in the Equality Act).

Nearly 10% of respondents regarded REF selection processes as discriminatory: over 4% of respondents viewed REF processes at their institution as discriminatory in relation to age; over 3% in relation to sex and in relation to pregnancy and maternity; nearly 2% in relation to disability; just over 1% in relation to race; 0.5% in relation to religion and belief; and 0.4% in relation to sexual orientation (see table 7a).

Asked about their personal experience of discrimination, nearly 5% of respondents indicated that they felt they had been discriminated against in relation to one of the protected characteristics defined by the Equality Act (see



table 7b). Nearly 91% indicated that they did not feel discriminated against, although it was notable that over 4% indicated that they 'prefer not to say.'

**Table 7a – perceptions of discrimination in institutional REF processes**

<b>Do you regard your institution's REF selection processes as discriminatory, in relation to any of the following protected characteristics as defined under the Equality Act (2010)?</b>	
Age	4.1%
Disability	1.9%
Gender reassignment	0.3%
Marriage and civil partnership	0.4%
Pregnancy and maternity	3.2%
Race	1.2%
Religion and belief	0.5%
Sex	3.4%
Sexual orientation	0.4%
No, none of the above	90.2%
<i>Answered Question</i>	6601

**Table 7b – Respondents who feel discriminated against in REF processes**

<b>Do you feel that you have been discriminated against by your institution in relation to the REF? (in relation to one of the protected characteristics listed)</b>	
Age	1.9%
Disability	1.0%
Gender reassignment	0.1%
Marriage and civil partnership	0.1%
Pregnancy and maternity	0.8%
Race	0.7%
Religion and belief	0.3%
Sex	1.5%
Sexual orientation	0.1%
Prefer not to say	4.2%
No, none of the above	90.9%
<i>Answered Question</i>	6683

This data was further analysed by filtering the responses of staff covered by the protected characteristics. Thus nearly 6% of female staff regarded their institution's REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to sex, and over 5% viewed it as discriminatory in relation to pregnancy and maternity.

Over 3% felt that they were discriminated against in relation to sex, while close to 2% felt discriminated against in relation to pregnancy and maternity.

**Table 7c – Female respondents: discrimination in REF processes**

<b>Do you regard your institution’s REF selection processes as discriminatory, in relation to any of the following protected characteristics?</b>	
Pregnancy and maternity	5.5%
Sex	5.9%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>2670</i>

**Table 7d – Female respondents who feel discriminated against in REF**

<b>Do you feel that you have been discriminated against by your institution in relation to the REF? (in relation to one of the protected characteristics listed)</b>	
Pregnancy and maternity	1.8%
Sex	3.3%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>2706</i>

6% of all respondents identified as belonging to a black or ethnic minority (BME) group. Of these, over 10% regarded their institution’s REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to race, and 2.5% in relation to religion or belief.

Over 7% of BME respondents felt that they had been discriminated against in relation to race, and nearly 2% in relation to religion or belief.

**Table 7e – BME respondents: discrimination in REF processes**

<b>Do you regard your institution’s REF selection processes as discriminatory, in relation to any of the following protected characteristics?</b>	
Race	10.2%
Religion and belief	2.5%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>364</i>

**Table 7f – BME respondents who feel discriminated against in REF**

<b>Do you feel that you have been discriminated against by your institution in relation to the REF? (in relation to one of the protected characteristics listed)</b>	
Race	7.2%
Religion and belief	1.7%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>363</i>

7% of all respondents identified themselves as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender/transsexual (LGBT). Of these, 3% regarded their institution’s REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to sexual orientation, and 1% in relation to gender reassignment.

1.4% felt that they had been discriminated against in relation to sexual orientation, and 0.2% in relation to gender reassignment.

**Table 7g – LGBT respondents: discrimination in REF processes**

Do you regard your institution's REF selection processes as discriminatory, in relation to any of the following protected characteristics)?	
Sexual orientation	3.0%
Gender reassignment	1.0%
<i>Answered Question</i>	495

**Table 7h – LGBT respondents who feel discriminated against in REF**

Do you feel that you have been discriminated against by your institution in relation to the REF? (in relation to one of the protected characteristics listed)	
Sexual orientation	1.4%
Gender reassignment	0.2%
<i>Answered Question</i>	497

Of particular note was the significant proportion of staff with a disability who regarded REF selection processes as being discriminatory in relation to disability. Nearly 7% of all respondents indicated that they regarded themselves as disabled. Of these 17% regarded their institution's REF selection process as discriminatory in relation to disability. Over 12.5% felt that they had been discriminated against in relation to disability.

**Table 7i – Disabled respondents: discrimination in REF processes**

Do you regard your institution's REF selection processes as discriminatory, in relation to any of the following protected characteristics?	
Disability	17.0%
<i>Answered Question</i>	407

**Table 7j – Disabled respondents who feel discriminated against in REF**

Do you feel that you have been discriminated against by your institution in relation to the REF? (in relation to one of the protected characteristics listed)	
Disability	12.5%
<i>Answered Question</i>	416

## **8) REF and Performance Expectations**

As with the RAE previously, institutional strategies to maximise REF performance have led to a number of institutions introducing performance criteria for academic staff based on REF outputs and quality thresholds. Academic performance is thus increasingly judged on whether or not criteria for inclusion in the institution's REF submission have been met.

This has also led to individual academics altering their own research and publication strategies in order to maximise performance in the REF. This might mean, for example, focusing on more short-term research projects suitable for maximising journal article outputs for peer-reviewed journals, rather than more speculative research, longer term book-length projects or work for edited volumes.

Even where there are no formal procedures or sanctions in place to ensure that academic staff produce the necessary quantity and 'quality' of research outputs for REF submission, there is now a common perception among academics that inclusion in the REF is critical in order to progress one's career as an academic researcher. Irrespective of specific institutional procedures, this impacts on the way in which academics manage their own work and plan their research strategy. Moreover, many recent and new entrants to academia have had to demonstrate that their research is geared to producing REF outputs and have REF outputs in production/already published in order to get appointed to their positions.

Asked whether they base their research strategy/planning on maximising potential performance in the REF, over 35% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed (although 41% disagreed/strongly disagreed).

Survey respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of statements relating to performance expectations. The responses clearly illustrate the extent to which REF criteria have become central to the way in which academic performance is judged by institutions. Nevertheless, there is a significant level of concern about the level of professional support provided by institutions to enable staff to meet these expectations.

Over 88% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that there is a clear expectation at their institution that 'research active' staff produce outputs (both in terms of quantity and quality) that are suitable for inclusion in the REF submission.

Nearly 37% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that there is a clear expectation at their institution that 'research active' staff should produce work that can be included as an 'impact case study' in the REF submission.

Close to 54% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that they were frequently reminded at their institution of the need to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF.

Close to 58% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that their performance was assessed by their institution in relation to their ability to meet REF submission criteria.

Over 47% of respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed that their institution/ department provides the professional support they need in order to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF.

**Table 8a - REF and performance expectations**

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Answered Question</b>
I base my research strategy/planning on maximising potential performance in the REF	11.9%	29.1%	23.7%	26.4%	8.9%	6708
There is a clear expectation at my institution that 'research active' staff should produce research outputs (both in terms of quantity and quality) that are suitable for inclusion in the institutions' REF submission	1.9%	3.7%	6.2%	31.9%	56.3%	6738
There is a clear expectation at my institution that 'research active' staff should produce work that can be included as an 'impact case study' in the institutions' REF submission	4.3%	21.5%	37.2%	26.3%	10.6%	6706
I am frequently reminded by managers at my institution of the need to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF	7.4%	18.8%	20.1%	33.8%	20%	6708
Performance in my role is assessed by my institution in relation to my ability to meet the criteria for inclusion in the REF	4.5%	14%	23.6%	39.3%	18.5%	6695
My institution/department provides the professional support I need in order for me to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF	20.4%	26.9%	25.9%	22%	4.8%	6709

## 9) Impact on career development and terms and conditions

Reports from UCU branches and members indicate that in setting out performance expectations for academic staff based on REF criteria, institutions are increasingly linking these to punitive sanctions for staff not meeting these expectations. This includes subjecting staff to enhanced 'performance management' processes and/or 'capability' processes which could lead to eventual dismissal if performance does not 'improve'. In a number of cases, institutions have indicated that failure to meet REF-based criteria will lead to changes to terms and conditions and academic duties, for example increased teaching and other duties or a switch to a teaching-focused contract (UCU would oppose such staff being designated as 'teaching-only' staff, given the need for HE teaching to be informed by scholarly activity<sup>8</sup>).

<sup>8</sup> The view of UCU is that teaching staff not engaged in original research or in publishing research nevertheless need time within their working hours to keep abreast of scholarly

Given that a number of institutions have introduced high quality thresholds for staff in order to be deemed suitable for inclusion in the REF submission, this means that even where academics have produced 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent' research (graded 4\* or 3\* in the REF) but an insufficient number of outputs of this calibre (or research of this calibre not easily compartmentalised into submissable outputs), or they consistently produce research that is judged to be internationally or nationally recognised (graded 2\* or 1\* in the REF), they could be deemed to be falling short of the expected level of performance and thus be subjected to the career detriment and/or punitive sanctions outlined above.

In order to gauge the extent to which this is occurring, respondents were asked to indicate if they had been informed by managers or senior colleagues that failure (either their own failure or that of colleagues) to meet institutional REF expectations was likely to lead to a range of detrimental sanctions (respondents could tick all of the processes which applied).

Table 9a provides responses from all respondents, and gender breakdowns. It was notable that female respondents were more likely than male respondents to have been informed that a number of these detrimental sanctions might occur, particularly in relation to denial of progression to the next higher grade, denial of promotion and transfer to a teaching-only/teaching-focused contract.

It was also notable that the proportion of both male and female respondents indicating a particular response was higher in relation to some of the processes indicated than that for all respondents. This could be explained by the significant proportion of respondents who did not indicate their gender.

Table 9b provides a further breakdown in terms of level of seniority, from lecturer to senior lecturer and professorial level.<sup>9</sup> Staff at lecturer level were more likely than those at more senior level to have been informed of potential detrimental consequences for not meeting REF expectations. A breakdown is also provided of responses of staff undertaking research in their role who knew that they would not be included in their institution's REF submission. Analysis of these responses show that this group of staff was also more likely to have been informed of specific detrimental sanctions. Staff at lecturer level who are not included in the REF are therefore likely to be particularly vulnerable. This is reflected in the additional breakdown provided of responses from lecturers who know they will not be included in the REF.

Over 13% of all respondents, and 16% of lecturers, had been informed (by managers/senior colleagues) that failure to meet institutional criteria on REF

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developments in their field and relevant pedagogical developments. Such staff should be designated as 'teaching and scholarship'.

<sup>9</sup> Only staff who indicated that their role required them to undertake research were included in this analysis.

inclusion would lead to an increase in non-research (teaching and administration) workload. Close to 21% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

12% of all respondents had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations would lead to a reduction in time allocated/support to undertake research. Nearly 18% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Close to 12% of all respondents, and 16% of lecturers had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations would lead to a transfer to a teaching only/teaching focused contract. Over 22% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Over 9% of all respondents, and nearly 15% of lecturers had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations would lead to a denial of promotion. Nearly 21% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Close to 7% of all respondents, and 10% of lecturers had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations would lead to a denial of progression to the next higher grade. Nearly 14% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.<sup>10</sup>

Over 4% of all respondents, and 5% of lecturers had been informed that this would lead to redundancy. 8% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Over 4% of all respondents and more than 5% of lecturers had been informed that this would lead to capability procedures. Close to 7% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Nearly 4% of all respondents and over 5% of lecturers had been informed that this would lead to transfer to inferior terms and conditions. Over 7% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

Nearly 2% of all respondents and 3% of lecturers had been informed this would lead to disciplinary procedures. Close to 5% of lecturers not included in the REF had been informed that this was likely.

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<sup>10</sup> Under the national pay framework agreement (agreed by the HE employers and trade unions in 2004) there would be a normal expectation of automatic progression of academic staff from level 2 to level 3. This equates to progression from Lecturer A to Lecturer B in the pre-1992 HEIs, and from Lecturer to Senior Lecturer in the post-92s.

**Table 9a – implications for career if do not meet REF criteria (all, male/female)**

Have you been informed by a manager/senior colleague at your institution that failure (by you or others) to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF is likely to lead to any of the following?			
	All respondents	Male	Female
Disciplinary procedures	1.9%	2.0%	2.1%
Capability procedures	4.2%	4.3%	4.4%
Denial of progression to next higher grade	6.8%	6.5%	7.6%
Denial of promotion	9.5%	9.7%	10.1%
Non-confirmation in post following probation	2.7%	2.7%	2.9%
Transfer to inferior terms and conditions	3.8%	3.8%	3.9%
Transfer to teaching only/teaching focused contract	11.6%	11.4%	12.4%
Increase in non-research (teaching or administration) workload	13.4%	13.7%	13.6%
Reduction in time allocated/support to undertake research	12.2%	12.8%	12.4%
Redundancy	4.3%	4.5%	4.1%
None of the above	59.1%	60.7%	56.7%
Don't know	15.6%	13.9%	16.8%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>6822</i>	<i>3666</i>	<i>2802</i>

**Table 9b - implications for career: different career levels, respondents not included in REF**

Have you been informed by a manager/senior colleague at your institution that failure (by you or others) to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF is likely to lead to any of the following?					
	Lecturers	Senior Lecturers	Professors	Not in REF (all levels)	Lecturers Not in REF
Disciplinary procedures	3.0%	1.5%	1.7%	2.9%	4.7%
Capability procedures	5.5%	3.7%	5.2%	5.3%	6.8%
Denial of progression to next higher grade	9.6%	7.2%	4.3%	9.9%	13.9%
Denial of promotion	14.8%	9.9%	5.1%	13.1%	20.6%
Non-confirmation in post following probation	3.9%	1.8%	2.7%	3.0%	5.6%
Transfer to inferior terms and conditions	5.2%	3.9%	3.0%	5.0%	7.4%
Transfer to teaching only/focused contract	15.9%	11.9%	10.9%	14.9%	22.4%
Increase in non-research (teaching or administration) workload	16.0%	16.1%	10.7%	17.2%	20.6%
Reduction in time allocated/support to undertake research	13.5%	15.0%	10.1%	16.1%	17.7%
Redundancy	5.1%	4.3%	3.0%	6.2%	8.0%
None of the above	49.8%	56.0%	68.8%	49.7%	39.8%
Don't know	18.6%	16.9%	9.5%	17.4%	16.8%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>1557</i>	<i>1968</i>	<i>1523</i>	<i>1218</i>	<i>339</i>



All survey respondents were also asked to indicate their level of agreement with a number of statements regarding the relationship between REF expectations and performance at their institution. It is notable that the numbers expressing a general level of concern about the impact on their career development and employment were higher than those indicating that they had been informed specifically about likely consequences. This may reflect the general climate of uncertainty and insecurity created among academic staff by the REF and institutional policies in relation to REF and performance management. Whilst staff may not have received specific warnings from their institutions about detrimental consequences arising out of failure to meet REF expectations (although many clearly have), most institutions have been unwilling to meet UCU's request that they issue non-detriment statements (i.e. an undertaking that academic staff not included in the REF will not suffer detriment in relation to their terms and conditions and career development).

Responses in relation to this group of statements were also filtered specifically for lecturers and 'research active' staff not included in the REF, given that they were more likely to have been informed of specific detrimental consequences arising from non-inclusion in the REF. Similarly, concerns about specific detrimental consequences were higher for lecturers and for staff not included in the REF.

Close to 22% of all respondents, and over 26% of lecturers agreed/strongly agreed that it was likely that they would be transferred to a teaching only/teaching focused contract if they did not perform to institutional REF expectations. 33% of lecturers not included in the REF (and over 27% of all respondents not included in the REF) felt that this was likely.

Over 23% of all respondents and close to 31% of lecturers agreed/strongly agreed that they would be concerned that they would lose their job if they did not perform to institutional REF expectations. 39% of lecturers not included in the REF (and close to 30% of all respondents not included in the REF) expressed this concern.

Nearly 45% of all respondents, and 48% of lecturers, agreed/strongly agreed that it was likely that they would not be supported to undertake research in the future if not included in the REF submission. Close to 57% of lecturers not included in the REF (and over 52% of all respondents not included in the REF) felt that this was likely.

Close to 72% of all respondents, and over 81% of lecturers, agreed/strongly agreed that they would be concerned about their future career prospects if they were not included in their institution's REF submission. Close to 74% of lecturers not in the REF (and over 62% of all respondents not included in the REF) expressed this concern.

**Table 9c - REF and career development: all respondents**

Answer Options		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
I would be concerned about my future career prospects if I was not included in my institution's REF submission	All respondents	3.5%	9.9%	15%	35.1%	36.5%
	Lecturers	1.9%	5.4%	11.2%	37.3%	44.1%
	All – not in REF	3.8%	13.8%	20.1%	34.7%	27.6%
	Lecturers – not in REF	2.1%	6.8%	17.5%	40.5%	33.1%
If I do not perform to institutional expectations in relation to the REF, it is likely that I will not be supported by my institution to undertake research in the future	All respondents	7.5%	17.5%	30.2%	29.2%	15.7%
	Lecturers	5.6%	15.3%	31%	30.3%	17.7%
	All – not in REF	4.7%	13.9%	29%	28.4%	24.1%
	Lecturers – not in REF	4.2%	10.4%	28.8%	30.3%	26.4%
If I do not perform to institutional expectations in relation to the REF, it is likely that I will be transferred to a teaching only/teaching focused contract	All respondents	12.1%	29%	37.3%	15%	6.6%
	Lecturers	8%	25.6%	40.1%	17.7%	8.6%
	All – not in REF	9%	24.9%	38.9%	16.8%	10.5%
	Lecturers – not in REF	4.8%	18.5%	43.8%	20.2%	12.8%
If I do not perform to institutional expectations in relation to the REF, I am concerned I will lose my job	All respondents	20.9%	31.8%	23.9%	16.1%	7.2%
	Lecturers	14.8%	30.2%	24.2%	20.6%	10.2%
	All – not in REF	13.6%	30.2%	26.5%	19.8%	9.8%
	Lecturers – not in REF	8.6%	30.1%	22.3%	25.6%	13.4%

***Variation in Institutional Approaches to REF Performance and Career Detriment***

Given the high level of concern expressed by a number of UCU members and branches about the potential for career detriment, further analysis was undertaken of the responses from particular HEIs with regard to staff being informed of specific detrimental sanctions. This reveals a considerable variation in the response rate between institutions, and particularly high response rates in some institutions as regards specific detrimental consequences being indicated to academic staff if they did not meet institutional REF expectations. It is notable also that the 'favoured' detrimental sanction varies across institutions.

Of the 21 HEIs shown in table 9d, most were selected for analysis because they appeared to have a relatively high proportion of respondents indicating that they had been informed of the potential for transfer to teaching-focused contracts, capability procedures or redundancy should they fall short of institutional REF expectations. Some were included to illustrate the level of variation between HEIs. Indeed, variation between HEIs is considerable, and it is also notable that other sanctions such as increase in non-research workload or reduction in time/support to do research were also prominent. It should also be noted that the prominence of some of these sanctions (and others such as denial of promotion or progression) was higher at HEIs not included in this analysis.

**Table 9d – Non-inclusion in REF implications: HEI breakdown**

	Aberystwyth	Birmingham	Cardiff	City	Dundee	East Anglia	Essex	Hull	Kent	Leicester
Disciplinary procedures	5.6%	11.4%	1.8%	0.0%	0.0%	14.5%	7.2%	0.0%	0.0%	11.1%
Capability procedures	22.2%	6.7%	2.6%	15.9%	4.1%	36.4%	7.2%	5.5%	0.0%	22.2%
Denial of progression to next higher grade	11.1%	7.6%	3.5%	13.6%	6.1%	14.5%	21.7%	1.8%	5.8%	11.1%
Denial of promotion	11.1%	20.0%	11.4%	18.2%	6.1%	16.4%	29.0%	7.3%	11.6%	17.8%
Non-confirmation in post following probation	8.3%	5.7%	0.0%	2.3%	10.2%	10.9%	15.9%	0.0%	7.2%	4.4%
Transfer to inferior terms and conditions	16.7%	6.7%	3.5%	4.5%	8.2%	14.5%	20.3%	3.6%	2.9%	14.4%
Transfer to teaching only/ focused contract	58.3%	38.1%	22.8%	13.6%	26.5%	43.6%	59.4%	14.5%	23.2%	56.7%
Increase in non-research (teaching/ admin) workload	41.7%	27.6%	16.7%	22.7%	34.7%	30.9%	34.8%	16.4%	11.6%	33.3%
Reduction in time allocated/support to undertake research	22.2%	20.0%	12.3%	18.2%	34.7%	29.1%	29.0%	18.2%	13.0%	30.0%
Redundancy	5.6%	13.3%	10.5%	20.5%	4.1%	9.1%	8.7%	3.6%	1.4%	24.4%
None of the above	27.8%	32.4%	62.3%	34.1%	34.7%	30.9%	24.6%	65.5%	39.1%	24.4%
Don't know	11.1%	12.4%	9.6%	20.5%	16.3%	12.7%	7.2%	7.3%	24.6%	11.1%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>36</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>55</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>90</i>

	Manchester	Middlesex	Newcastle	Queen Mary	Queen's Belfast	Southampton	Strathclyde	Sussex	Swansea	Ulster	Warwick
Disciplinary procedures	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	12.8%	4.4%	2.2%	1.5%	0.0%	1.7%	17.4%
Capability procedures	2.7%	0.0%	4.3%	4.0%	34.0%	10.5%	6.7%	7.6%	6.7%	6.7%	12.8%
Denial of progression to next higher grade	3.7%	6.5%	11.3%	6.7%	18.1%	13.2%	6.7%	9.1%	6.7%	20.0%	11.6%
Denial of promotion	8.6%	6.5%	15.7%	13.3%	22.3%	19.3%	13.3%	13.6%	13.3%	21.7%	12.8%
Non-confirmation in post following probation	1.1%	6.5%	0.9%	6.7%	16.0%	7.9%	4.4%	6.1%	5.0%	5.0%	14.0%
Transfer to inferior terms and conditions	1.6%	3.2%	7.0%	8.0%	5.3%	11.4%	4.4%	1.5%	6.7%	8.3%	11.6%
Transfer to teaching only/ focused contract	17.1%	6.5%	27.0%	20.0%	7.4%	33.3%	26.7%	4.5%	31.7%	26.7%	27.9%
Increase in non-research (teaching/ admin) workload	11.2%	16.1%	28.7%	17.3%	8.5%	28.1%	17.8%	6.1%	20.0%	50.0%	18.6%
Reduction in time allocated/support to undertake research	11.8%	12.9%	27.8%	17.3%	7.4%	22.8%	11.1%	6.1%	15.0%	38.3%	12.8%
Redundancy	2.7%	29.0%	2.6%	4.0%	18.1%	9.6%	6.7%	10.6%	5.0%	10.0%	10.5%
None of the above	62.6%	45.2%	48.7%	56.0%	30.9%	36.8%	46.7%	48.5%	41.7%	21.7%	43.0%
Don't know	10.7%	19.4%	10.4%	20.0%	13.8%	17.5%	11.1%	28.8%	18.3%	11.7%	20.9%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>115</i>	<i>75</i>	<i>94</i>	<i>114</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>66</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>86</i>

Among the notable findings from this analysis of HEIs were that:

At Aberystwyth, Essex and Leicester universities over half of respondents indicated that they had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations was likely to lead to a transfer to a teaching only/teaching focused contract. Over a quarter of respondents had been informed this was likely at Birmingham, Dundee, East Anglia, Newcastle, Southampton, Strathclyde, Swansea, Ulster and Warwick universities.

At the University of East Anglia and Queen's University Belfast, over 30% of respondents indicated that they had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations was likely to lead to capability procedures. At Aberystwyth and Leicester over 20% were informed of this. At City, Southampton and Warwick over 10% were informed of this.

At City, Leicester and Middlesex universities over 20% indicated that they had been informed that failure to meet institutional REF expectations was likely to lead to redundancy. At Birmingham, Cardiff, Queen's, Sussex, Ulster and Warwick over 10% of respondents indicated this. The figure was highest at Middlesex (29%), also the only post-92 university to figure prominently in this analysis.

Clearly, a variety of approaches to 'manage' REF performance are being adopted within the sector, with some institutions preferring the more subtle approach of withdrawing support for research activities and increasing non-research workload for those who fall short of expectations, while others are adopting a more aggressive approach by moving staff to different career pathways (i.e. teaching-focused ones) or at worse, placing staff on capability procedures and/or targeting them for redundancy. Approaches may also vary within institutions, between different schools and departments.

### ***Probation and Early Career Researchers***

Reports from a number of UCU branches and members indicate that some institutions have also made fulfilment of REF-based criteria a requirement for confirmation in post for academic staff in probationary periods. This impacts on early careers academics in particular: Staff employed in probationary periods will often be early careers' academics employed in entry-level, 'permanent/open-ended' academic positions for the first time. Nevertheless, reports from UCU members/branches suggest that the expectations placed upon them in terms of REF outputs will often be the same as those applying to colleagues at more senior grades. Indeed, a scan of job adverts for such positions indicates that it is common for institutions to include in the role specification a requirement that applicants already have produced/or be in the course of producing outputs suitable for inclusion in the REF (job adverts/specifications often refer to 4 outputs, notwithstanding the possibility that early careers researchers can be

submitted to the REF with reduced outputs depending on date of appointment). These might be regarded as rather onerous expectations for applicants for entry-level positions, particularly given that they may not be in continuous, full-time or regular employment elsewhere in the sector, or may be employed in teaching-focused or other roles within the sector which afford little time for the pursuit of independent academic research.

Responses to the survey question regarding staff being informed of specific detrimental sanctions was filtered in order to examine the extent to which respondents who indicated that they are currently in probation periods (418 in total - nearly 6% of all respondents) had been informed that confirmation in post was dependent on meeting institutional expectations in relation to REF outputs.

Close to 11% of staff in their probationary period indicated that they had been informed by a manager/senior colleague at their institution that failure to meet institutional REF expectations was likely to lead to non-confirmation in post at the end of the probation period.

**Table 9e - non-inclusion in REF for staff in probationary period**

<b>Have you been informed by a manager/senior colleague at your institution that failure (by you or others) to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF is likely to lead to...</b>	
Non-confirmation in post following probation	10.7%
<i>Answered Question</i>	384

## 10) Workload

High workloads are of critical concern to UCU members working in HE. In UCU's 2012 Stress at Work survey<sup>11</sup> over 59% of respondents in HE indicated they worked 46 or more hours a week, and over 35% worked 51 or more hours. Nearly 52% felt pressured to work long hours. Pressure to perform to REF expectations and produce the necessary outputs has often being cited as a central contributing factor to high workloads and long hours. This pressure has also been cited as negatively impacting on the health of academic staff and increasing stress levels.

At the same time, increases in tuition fees have led to greater demands from students for more and better quality contact time with teaching staff, and a more rapid turnaround from teaching staff in relation to responses to student queries and feedback on coursework. However, pressure to perform to REF expectations, as well other pressures on 'research active' staff (including expectations that they bring in significant external funding through grant applications), has made it difficult for academics with teaching and research responsibilities to meet rising student expectations.

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.ucu.org.uk/workloadcampaign>

This is combined with the increasing administrative duties that academics face, including teaching-related administration, grant applications and the significant amount of bureaucracy related to the REF itself. A number of additional comments to this survey have highlighted the huge amount of paperwork generated by the REF, as well as the need to attend REF-related meetings, which are additional factors to consider when assessing the impact of the REF on academic workloads.

In order to gauge the extent of these problems, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of statements relating to their workload. Responses were also analysed separately for male and female respondents.

**Table 10a – REF impact on workload**

Answer Options		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	n/a
I am able to combine the research work required to produce the required REF outputs with my other academic duties without working excessive hours <i>All: 6666; M: 3671; F: 2797</i>	All	37.1%	30.2%	11.9%	12.8%	5.5%	2.5%
	male	33.3%	30%	13.4%	15.6%	5.8%	1.9%
	Female	42.7%	30.3%	9.5%	9.5%	5.1%	2.9%
Pressure within my institution to meet expectations in relation to the REF makes it difficult to manage my workload <i>All: 6660; M: 3664; F: 2797</i>	All	5%	19.2%	21%	28.2%	24%	2.6%
	male	6.2%	21.4%	21.6%	27.1%	22%	1.7%
	Female	3.3%	16.2%	20%	30.1%	27.2%	3.1%
I do not have enough time to prepare my teaching because of the need to focus on my REF outputs <i>All: 6648; M: 3665; F: 2786</i>	All	6.3%	30.1%	27.5%	19.7%	9%	7.4%
	male	7.4%	31.8%	27.5%	18.7%	8.9%	5.7%
	Female	4.7%	27.6%	27.6%	21.1%	9.5%	9.3%
I do not have enough time to provide feedback and support to students because of the need to focus on my REF outputs <i>All: 6643; M: 3660; F: 2785</i>	All	7.4%	32.2%	26.8%	18.3%	8.6%	6.7%
	male	8.6%	33.1%	26.1%	18.2%	8.8%	5.2%
	Female	5.6%	30.6%	27.8%	18.8%	8.8%	8.5%
Pressure within my institution to meet expectations in relation to the REF has increased my stress levels <i>All: 6663; M: 3671; F: 2794</i>	All	5.7%	15.1%	15.9%	29.8%	30.7%	2.7%
	male	6.7%	15.8%	16.5%	30.9%	28.2%	1.9%
	Female	4.4%	14%	14.9%	28.8%	34.4%	3.4%
Pressure within my institution to meet expectations in relation to the REF has had a negative impact on my health <i>All: 6657; M: 3667; F: 2792</i>	All	12.8%	24.5%	25.7%	17.7%	16.4%	3%
	male	15.3%	25.7%	25.8%	16.5%	14.8%	2%
	Female	9.5%	22.7%	25.5%	19.6%	19%	3.8%

While responses from both men and women seemed to confirm that the REF is a major contributing factor to excessive and difficult to manage academic workloads and increased stress levels, it was also notable that the impact of the REF on workload, and stress arising from this, appears to be higher among

female staff than their male counterparts. In addition, over a third of respondents felt that REF pressures had negatively impacted on their health. Furthermore, although more respondents disagreed with the proposition that the REF was making it difficult to give enough time to teaching preparation and student feedback, over a quarter agreed that this was the case.

Over 67% of all respondents (and 73% of women responding) disagreed/strongly disagreed that they were able to undertake the necessary work to produce the required REF outputs without working excessive hours.

Over 52% of all respondents (and over 57% of women responding) agreed/strongly agreed that pressure within their institution to meet institutional expectations in relation to the REF had made it difficult to manage their workload.

Nearly 29% of all respondents (and close to 31% of women responding) agreed/strongly agreed that they did not have enough time to prepare their teaching because of the need to focus on their REF outputs (over 36% of all respondents and 32% of women disagreed/strongly disagreed).

Nearly 27% of all respondents (and close to 28% of women responding) agreed/strongly agreed that they did not have enough time to provide feedback and support to students because of the need to focus on their REF outputs (close to 40% of all respondents and over 36% of women disagreed).

Over 60% of all respondents (and over 63% of women responding) agreed/strongly agreed that pressure to meet expectations in relation to the REF had increased their stress levels.

Over 34% of respondents agreed/strongly (and close to 39% of women responding) agreed that pressure to meet expectations in relation to the REF had negatively impacted on their health.

The survey also sought to measure the extent to which pressure on academic staff to produce work on REF outputs was leading to this work being undertaken beyond normal working hours. There were difficulties in framing questions around this given that specific working hours are often not stated in the employment contracts or terms and conditions of academic staff. Thus respondents were asked to indicate the proportion of work on their REF outputs that they undertake outside of normal working hours, or hours that they regarded as 'reasonable' (making an estimate as to hours they would regard as 'reasonable').

Clearly there are a number of variables that would have affected the responses to this question: estimates of 'reasonable' working hours will vary among respondents. Some academics might work very long hours out of a sense of vocation, enjoyment and immersion in their work, and may regard this as reasonable. For many, having to frequently work in the evenings and weekends

and not take holidays in order to get work done would be regarded as unreasonable.

There are also difficulties in disentangling work undertaken on 'REF outputs' from other academic duties. For example, it may well be that work is undertaken on REF outputs in normal working hours, while other work such as teaching preparation, marking and administration is undertaken outside of normal hours. Aside from this consideration there are difficulties in separating work on REF outputs from other research activities and writing/publishing commitments, and from work that would still had been done whether or not the REF or a similar exercise actually existed. Many current research activities would still have been undertaken if the pressure to produce outputs for the REF did not exist, making it difficult to categorise some work as work specifically for REF outputs. Nevertheless, pressure to produce by certain points in time and to publish in certain quantities and in particular journals might be less if the REF did not exist, meaning that academic staff might not therefore feel the need to work the number of hours they currently do in order to meet REF expectations.

Notwithstanding these considerations, the responses to the question indicated in table 10b provide a useful indication of the extent to which workload pressures, including those emanating directly from the REF, require academic staff to undertake work on REF outputs outside of normal or reasonable working hours. Male and female responses to this question were also analysed separately. This separate analysis also illustrated the higher impact of REF pressures on female staff, with female respondents more likely than their male counterparts to be undertaking work on REF outputs beyond normal/reasonable working hours.

**Table 10b – Proportion of work on REF outputs undertaken outside of normal/reasonable working hours**

<b>How much of the work that you do on your REF outputs is undertaken outside of (and on top of) normal working hours or hours that you would regard as reasonable?</b>			
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
None	10.3%	11.3%	8.6%
Under 10%	10.8%	11.4%	9.8%
10-24%	24.9%	27.5%	21.5%
25-33%	18.4%	17.8%	19.2%
34 to 49%	11.1%	11.1%	11.2%
50 to 74%	13.0%	11.7%	14.9%
75 to 99%	7.7%	6.2%	9.7%
100%	3.8%	3.0%	5.1%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>6580</i>	<i>3642</i>	<i>2750</i>

Over 24% of all respondents (and close to 30% of women) indicated that they undertook half or more of their work on REF outputs outside of normal working hours or hours that they would consider reasonable.



54% of all respondents (and over 60% of women) indicated that they undertook a quarter or more of their work on REF outputs outside of normal working hours or hours that they would consider reasonable.

A further question was asked to ascertain the frequency by which academic staff felt it necessary to work outside of normal or reasonable working hours (again asking respondents to estimate what was 'reasonable' for themselves). Again, the separate analysis of male and female responses showed that female respondents were working beyond normal/reasonable working hours more frequently than their male counterparts. See breakdown of responses in table 10c (respondents could indicate all the categories which applied).

While 19% of all respondents (and 14% of female respondents) indicated that they could generally get all their work done on their REF outputs within normal or reasonable working hours, 29% of all respondents, and 30% of women, indicated that they found it necessary to work most evenings.

31% of all respondents, and 35% of women found it necessary to work most weekends.

Nearly 34% of all respondents, and 39% of women, often worked on their outputs during/instead of annual leave.

Close to 36% of all respondents and over 41% of women often worked during public holidays/closure days.

**Table 10c – Work on REF outputs outside of normal working hours – Frequency**

<b>How often do you work on your REF outputs outside of normal working hours or hours you would regard as reasonable (tick more than one box if applicable)</b>			
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Occasional evenings	44.9%	46.9%	42.4%
Most evenings	29.0%	28.4%	30.0%
Occasional weekends	42.1%	42.2%	42.3%
Most weekends	31.0%	27.9%	35.1%
During/instead of annual leave – occasionally	26.5%	25.0%	28.5%
During/instead of annual leave - often	33.8%	30.3%	38.8%
Public holidays/closure days – occasionally	25.6%	25.8%	25.6%
Public holidays/closure days - often	35.6%	31.2%	41.4%
I can generally get all my work done on my REF outputs within normal working hours	5.3%	6.2%	4.0%
I can generally get all my work done on my REF outputs within reasonable working hours	13.8%	16.5%	10.2%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>6439</i>	<i>3589</i>	<i>2699</i>

### ***Workloads of part-time/fractional staff***

Reports from UCU branches and members indicate that some institutions are employing staff on hourly paid or part-time fractional contracts to cover teaching and/or other duties, whilst also seeking to include their research outputs in their REF submissions. There are indications that this occurs even where paid hours only cover teaching activities and all research undertaken by the particular researcher is done in his/her own time 'unpaid'. Again, staff in this position will often also be early careers' researchers seeking full-time and permanent employment and for whom inclusion in the REF will be critical in getting appointed to such a position.

Survey respondents employed on fractional/ part-time or hourly paid contracts (1008 respondents in total) were asked how much of their work on REF outputs was undertaken outside of paid working hours. Responses indicated that this practice was widespread with only a very small proportion of such staff able to do the necessary work on REF outputs within their paid hours, and most having to undertake a substantial proportion of this work outside of paid hours. Again, a breakdown of male and female responses indicates that women are more likely to find it necessary to work outside of paid hours, and more likely to undertake high proportions of their work on REF outputs outside of paid hours.

**Table 10d – Work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours - fractional/part-time/hourly-paid staff**

<b>How much of the work that you do on your REF outputs is undertaken outside of (and on top of) paid working hours?</b>			
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>All Respondents %</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
None	9.2%	11.7%	6.4%
Under 10%	10.2%	10.7%	9.9%
10-24%	23%	27.6%	17.8%
25-33%	12.5%	11.3%	13.8%
34 to 49%	8.6%	8.3%	9.3%
50 to 74%	14.6%	14.5%	14.5%
75 to 99%	11.4%	7.7%	15.3%
100%	10.4%	8.1%	12.8%
<i>Answered Question</i>	<i>1008</i>	<i>504</i>	<i>483</i>

Over 10% of respondents, and nearly 13% of women, on fractional/part-time or hourly paid contracts indicated that they undertook all work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

Nearly 22% of respondents on these contracts, and over 28% of women, indicated that they undertook three-quarters or more of their work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

Over 36% of respondents on these contracts, and close to 43% of women indicated that they undertook half or more of their work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

Close to 56% of respondents on these contracts, and close to 66% of women, indicated that undertook a quarter or more of their work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

Only 9% of respondents on these contracts, and 6% of women, indicated that they did not undertake any work on REF outputs outside of paid working hours.

## **11) Overall Assessment of the REF**

The survey concluded with a number of questions designed to elicit a broader perspective from respondents regarding the impact of the REF on academic researchers and on the sector as a whole. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of statements in this regard.

While responses indicated a reasonable level of support among academics as to the desirability of some kind of assessment of the research outputs of individual academic staff and for the view that academic research needs to demonstrate some kind of societal, cultural or policy impact beyond academia, there was also a marked rejection of the REF as currently constructed as the appropriate instrument for achieving these ends. Most respondents did not regard the REF as an accurate indicator of the quality of academic research, and a large majority viewed it as creating unreasonable expectations as regards the research outputs of academic researchers. Most agreed that the REF (and its predecessor, the RAE) had not had a positive impact on the quality of academic research, and that rather it had had a detrimental impact on the sector, and should be replaced by an alternative method for evaluating the quality of research emanating from HEIs.

In order to check that these largely negative perspectives on the REF were not just a reflection of discontent among respondents not expecting to be included in the REF, the responses of those respondents who were expecting to be included in the REF were also analysed separately. However, it was notable that the largely negative perspectives of the REF were also shared by a majority of those respondents expecting to be included. Indeed, the responses from this group were generally only slightly less negative than those from all respondents.

Over 57% of respondents (and 53% of respondents expecting to be included in the REF submission) disagreed/strongly disagreed that the REF and its predecessor RAE had resulted in an increase in the quality of academic research.

**Table 11a – Perceptions of the REF and its impact on the HE sector**

<b>Answer Options</b>		<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<i>Answered Question</i>
The REF and its predecessor RAEs have resulted in an increase in the quality of academic research	All Respondents	25.3%	32.1%	26.4%	13.6%	2.6%	6577
	Respondents expecting REF submission	22.3%	31.2%	26.3%	16.6%	3.6%	4134
The REF is a good indicator of the quality of academic research being undertaken in HEIs	All Respondents	23.9%	32.3%	23.7%	18.2%	1.9%	6570
	Respondents expecting REF submission	19.6%	30.7%	23.9%	23.3%	2.5%	4128
It is important that academic research demonstrates an impact on the economy, society, culture, public policy, or the quality of life, beyond academia	All Respondents	10.1%	17.2%	19.5%	40.5%	12.8%	6567
	Respondents expecting REF submission	11.3%	18.6%	18.8%	39.3%	12.1%	4127
The REF creates unreasonable expectations as regards the research output of academic researchers	All Respondents	3.9%	13.8%	20.1%	38.4%	23.8%	6568
	Respondents expecting REF submission	4.8%	18.9%	21.5%	36.2%	18.5%	4130
The REF and its predecessor RAEs have had a detrimental impact on the higher education sector	All Respondents	4.2%	10.8%	24.3%	32.8%	27.9%	6548
	Respondents expecting REF submission	5.1%	13.7%	24.9%	32.6%	23.6%	4117
Some kind of assessment of the research outputs of academics engaged in research is necessary in order to ensure that they are adequately performing their role	All Respondents	4.4%	9.5%	18.1%	55.7%	12.3%	6570
	Respondents expecting REF submission	4.1%	8.6%	16.1%	56.8%	14.4%	4129
A sector-wide system for evaluating the quality of research produced by individual academic staff within HEIs is necessary where institutions receive a publicly funded block grant* for research activities.	All Respondents	5.6%	14.2%	26.6%	45.6%	8.1%	6545
	Respondents expecting REF submission	5.5%	13.7%	24.9%	46.6%	9.3%	4115
The REF should be replaced with an alternative method of evaluating the quality of research emanating from HEIs	All Respondents	3%	8.3%	33.8%	33.4%	21.4%	6532
	Respondents expecting REF submission	3.1%	9.3%	36.3%	32.1%	19.1%	4105
The REF should be abolished and not replaced by an alternative method for evaluating the quality of research emanating from HEIs	All Respondents	9.7%	31.4%	32.4%	13.5%	12.9%	6473
	Respondents expecting REF submission	12.1%	33.9%	30.4%	12.5%	11.0%	4073

Over 56% of respondents (and 50% of those expecting to be included in the REF) disagreed/strongly disagreed that the REF is a good indicator of the quality of academic research being undertaken in HEIs.

Over 53% agreed/strongly agreed that it is important that academic research demonstrates an impact on the economy, society, culture, public policy, or the quality of life, beyond academia. The figure was actually slightly lower (just over 51%) for those expecting to be included in REF.

Over 62% of respondents (and nearly 55% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that the REF creates unreasonable expectations as regards the research output of academic researchers.

Nearly 61% of respondents (and just over 56% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that the REF (and RAEs previously) had had a detrimental impact on the HE sector.

68% of respondents (and just over 71% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that some kind of assessment of the research outputs of academics engaged in research is necessary in order to ensure that they are adequately performing their role.

Close to 54% of respondents (and nearly 56% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that a sector-wide system for evaluating the quality of research produced by individual academic staff within Higher Education institutions is necessary where institutions receive a publicly funded block grant for research activities.

Nearly 55% of respondents (and just over 51% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that the REF should be replaced by an alternative method for evaluating the quality of research emanating from HEIs.

Over 26% of respondents (and over 23% of those expecting to be included in the REF) agreed/strongly agreed that the REF should be abolished and not replaced by an alternative method of evaluation (over 41% of all respondents and 46% of REF-included respondents disagreed/strongly disagreed).

## **12) Conclusion**

The large number of responses to this survey from UCU members and non-members has illustrated the strength of feeling amongst academic staff regarding the impact of the REF on the sector. Responses to this survey have also reflected long standing concerns within UCU as regards the detrimental impact of the REF and its predecessors on the working conditions and career development of academic staff as well as on the sector as a whole. Not only does it distort the nature of academic research, but it also creates unreasonable expectations regarding the research outputs of academic staff and exacerbates already highly demanding workload pressures, with much of the work on REF

outputs being done outside of reasonable working hours. These largely negative perspectives on the REF emerged from the survey despite the vast majority of respondents not feeling personally discriminated against by the REF, and were shared by those expecting to be included in their institution's REF submission and those not expecting to be included.

Respondents were invited to add additional comments to their survey responses. This elicited a huge number of comments, many of them scathing about the impact of the REF on their own academic research and working lives, and about the way in which their institutions or particular departments/schools had handled the process of selecting the REF submission.

These included comments about the huge amount of bureaucracy created by the REF and the time and effort involved in addressing this, the lack of transparency and the arbitrary nature by which selection processes have been conducted and the power and control the process has afforded senior managers to make subjective judgements which have significant impact on the career development of individual members of staff.

Although most respondents agreed on the need for academic research to resonate beyond academia, the inclusion of an 'impact' element within the REF and the operation of this part of the assessment was severely criticised by many. It was viewed as critically undermining academic freedom, distorting the nature of academic endeavour and hugely frustrating for researchers asked to justify their research in this way. Overall, the need to tailor research outputs for the REF was viewed negatively by many, leading to a narrowing of research possibilities and the compartmentalising of research into certain kinds of publication outputs, and an unhealthy climate of competition between academic researchers favouring certain types of research over others. The sector-wide emphasis on the REF was viewed as discouraging more speculative or exploratory research where there is no guarantee of measurable REF-suitable outputs. This was also viewed as putting the UK at a disadvantage internationally, with academics in other countries not being placed under the same kind of constraints in exploring new avenues of research.

The REF (as with the RAE before it) has cultivated a climate within a number of institutions whereby only research that can be measured in terms of potential REF outputs is deemed as worth undertaking (possibly with the exception of research attached to large funding grants). Despite assurances to the contrary in the official REF guidance, it appears from the survey responses and numerous comments that many institutions are still basing their decision-making on journal rankings or prestige (and in some cases, citation data), and favouring journal articles over other kind of outputs. This means that producing one or more well-regarded books over the REF cycle is not seen as having much value if this cannot be supplemented with a few articles in the right journals in order to meet both the quality and quantity threshold for submission. Similarly, edited

volumes, often the product of national and international academic collaboration, are viewed of less value in terms of the REF, disincentivising this form of collaboration.

For the majority of respondents to the survey, the REF remains a flawed process both in terms of its impact on the HE sector, and the way institutions have approached the selection process. The absence of faith in institutional appeal processes in relation to the REF was notable alongside the broadly negative views of the selection process.

The survey revealed a serious disconnect between the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity, stressed in the official REF guidance from the funding councils, and the way in which institutional REF selection processes were experienced by academic staff. Most respondents did not regard institutional selection processes as transparent or easy to understand. There were also high levels of concerns about the clarity with which decisions and evaluations were communicated, if communicated at all. Moreover, there were significant levels of scepticism as regards the degree of expertise and training of those involved in the decision-making process, possible bias in decision-making, and the favouring of certain types of research over others. Many comments to the survey referred to the discriminatory nature of the REF, not just in terms of protected equality characteristics, but also in terms of types of research and research fields. The considerable level of dissatisfaction with regards to the handling of reduced output requests (particularly in relation to complex circumstances) and the significant proportion of disabled staff who viewed institutional REF selection processes as discriminatory are also a particular cause for concern.

As with previous RAEs, the REF has established particular obstacles for early career researchers who are expected to have already met submission criteria, or to be well on the road to them, when they apply for entry level lecturer or equivalent positions (often expected to have 4 potential REF outputs ready, notwithstanding the possibility that early careers researchers can be submitted to the REF with reduced outputs depending on date of appointment). As the survey showed, the sector-wide emphasis on the REF and its critical importance for career progression (and to getting initial entry-level appointments) has led to academic staff (often early career researchers) working on REF submissions in their own time whilst employed on part-time/fractional contracts, and to institutions also submitting project researchers (often early career researchers on fixed-term contracts) possibly in contravention of the official guidance rules on eligible 'independent researchers'. As the survey also shows, early career academics can then find that confirmation in post following probation periods is also dependent on meeting REF submission criteria.

Both individual comments and survey responses indicate that the impact on the workloads of academic staff, and the performance expectations placed on staff

are particularly pronounced. Over two-thirds of respondents referred to the excessive working hours required to produce REF outputs. The disproportionate impact that workload and performance management pressures has on female academics is also noticeable in the survey responses. The linking of performance expectations to REF-based criteria is particularly problematic given the lack of transparency in institutional selection procedures highlighted, and the flawed nature of the assessment framework. Nevertheless, a number of institutions have made clear that academic staff who do not meet REF-based criteria will suffer career detriment, and this was reflected in the survey responses, which also revealed considerable variation between institutions in terms of the types of detriment being used or threatened and the level of pressure being exerted. At worst, failure to meet REF expectations can lead to staff being managed out of the institution, through capability processes or targeting for redundancy. It can also mean being switched to a 'teaching-focused' academic pathway or (perhaps more subtly) increases in teaching or administration workload and/or denial of institutional support to undertake research in the future.

While UCU believes that there should be 'parity of esteem' between the teaching and research elements of the academic role, the reality in many institutions is that 'teaching-focused' academics are not afforded the same opportunities for career development and progression, and are sometimes placed on worse terms and conditions. UCU has serious concerns about an approach within institutions whereby transfer to a teaching focused role is viewed as 'punishment' for poor research performance, particularly where this is measured in terms of REF performance, and where teaching is viewed as secondary to research and teaching-focused staff are regarded as second class academics. UCU has called on institutions to provide assurances that they will not seek to transfer staff who are excluded from the REF submission to teaching-focused contracts without their consent, and not place undue pressure on staff to accept such a transfer. More broadly, we have called on institutions to recognise that inclusion in the REF is not an accurate indicator of an individual academic's ability to do his/her job, and to issue assurances that REF outputs or predicted REF scores will not be used in performance management policies or used to justify changes to terms and conditions or other career detriment.

Essentially, the link between REF and performance management processes means that decisions which will make or break academic careers are being made on the back of a flawed assessment process, and one which has seriously distorted the nature of academic endeavour. It is therefore not particularly surprising that a majority of respondents reported increases in their stress levels due to the REF, and a significant number reported a negative impact on their health. Even where there are no formal performance management processes related to REF criteria or the link to career progression or detriment is not made explicit, it is clear that the sector-wide emphasis on the REF has effected a change in academic behaviour. Inclusion in the REF is now viewed as critical to



progressing one's academic career in the UK, impacting on research choices and publication strategies.

UCU's response to HEFCE's consultation on the REF in December 2009<sup>12</sup>, stated our view that its predecessor RAE had had a detrimental impact on the UK higher education system, leading to the closure of departments with strong research profiles and healthy student recruitment, the undermining of the relationship between teaching and research, job losses, discriminatory practices, and the widespread demoralisation of staff. It is clear that these problems are recurring with the REF, and that the expectations it generates of academic 'output' are causing serious damage to the health of the higher education sector, the nature of academic research and the working conditions of academic staff in the UK.

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/1/h/ucu\\_REFresponse\\_dec09.pdf](http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/1/h/ucu_REFresponse_dec09.pdf)