

The Research Excellence Framework: principles and practicalities

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REF: key HEFCE principles

- A unified framework for research assessment and funding which accommodates differences between disciplines
- Robust research quality profiles for all subjects across the UK, benchmarked against international standards
- Emphasis on identifying and encouraging excellent research of all kinds
- Greater use of metrics than at present – including bibliometric indicators for all disciplines where these are meaningful
- Reduced burden on HEIs



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Broad approach to assessment

- Assessment will be through:
 - Bibliometric indicators of quality or expert review of outputs (possibly a combination of these)
 - Other quantitative indicators
 - Supplementary qualitative information
- Which of these elements are employed, and the balance between them, will vary as appropriate to each subject
- For all subjects, expert panels will advise on the selection, interpretation and combination of the assessment components to produce overall quality profiles



Timetable

**Up to spring
2009**

Bibliometrics pilot and other development work

Mid 2009

Consult on all main features of the REF including operational details of the bibliometrics process and take decisions

**Calendar
year 2010**

Undertake full nationwide bibliometrics exercise in appropriate subjects. Establish expert panels for all subjects.
Consult on choice and use of assessment components for each subject group.

2011-12

Metrics begin to inform an element of HEFCE funding in some subjects.

2013

Undertake full assessment process for all subjects including light-touch peer review.



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Issues for further work

- How to produce robust bibliometric indicators for different fields
- How to combine metrics and expert input to form quality profiles
- How to group disciplines and configure expert panels
- The role and constitution of expert panels
- Reducing burden on the sector
- Promoting equality and diversity
- Preparing credible and deliverable detailed plans for phasing in and implementing the REF



Progress so far

- Pilot of the bibliometrics process is underway
- Exploring how best to assess the quality of user-valued research
- Identifying available sources of data for potential metrics
- HEFCE is establishing a series of expert groups to advise on the key issues for the design of the REF, drawing in particular on the experience of the RAE
- Work has been commissioned to gather evidence about the accountability burden and equality and diversity implications of the move from RAE to the REF
- Informal discussions with a range of stakeholders on the key questions have begun



Light touch peer review

- Expected to be the dominant mode of quality assessment for most social science, arts and humanities disciplines
- Need to consider workload on institutions and on panels
- Selection of staff and outputs – are there any realistic alternatives?
- HEFCE will consider options for greater use of metrics to inform peer review judgements



Metrics

- HEFCE aims to define a common family of metrics for the REF, that subject groups can draw on:
 - Bibliometrics
 - Research income
 - Research students
 - Esteem indicators?
 - Other qualitative information?
- HEFCE will take advice from expert groups on the choice and use of metrics, and seek to draw on existing sources of data as far as possible



Bibliometrics: principles

- Building on expert advice and consultation, HEFCE has identified the following key features:
 - Bibliometrics have the potential to provide robust proxy indicators of quality across a number of subjects (including most science based disciplines)
 - They need to be used alongside other data and information and taking advice on interpretation from expert panels
 - Indicators to be based on citation rates per paper, benchmarked against worldwide norms for the field (and year and type of publication)
 - Results to be aggregated for substantial bodies of work, presented as a citation profile



The bibliometrics pilot

- The pilot aims to develop and test a number of issues:
 - Which disciplines? (All disciplines with at least moderate citation coverage are included in the pilot)
 - Which staff and papers should be included? Universal or selective coverage? Are papers credited to the researcher or the institution?
 - How to collect data – and the implications for institutions
 - Which citation database(s)?
 - Refining the methods of analysis – including normalisation fields and handling self citation
 - Thresholds for the citation profile
 - Interpretation and use by expert panels



Bibliometrics pilot institutions

Bangor University

University of Bath

University of Birmingham

Bournemouth University

University of Cambridge

University of Durham

University of East Anglia

University of Glasgow

Imperial College London

Institute of Cancer Research

University of Leeds

London Sch of Hygiene and Trop Med

University of Nottingham

University of Plymouth

University of Portsmouth

Queens University, Belfast

Robert Gordon University

Royal Veterinary College

University of Southampton

University of Stirling

University of Sussex

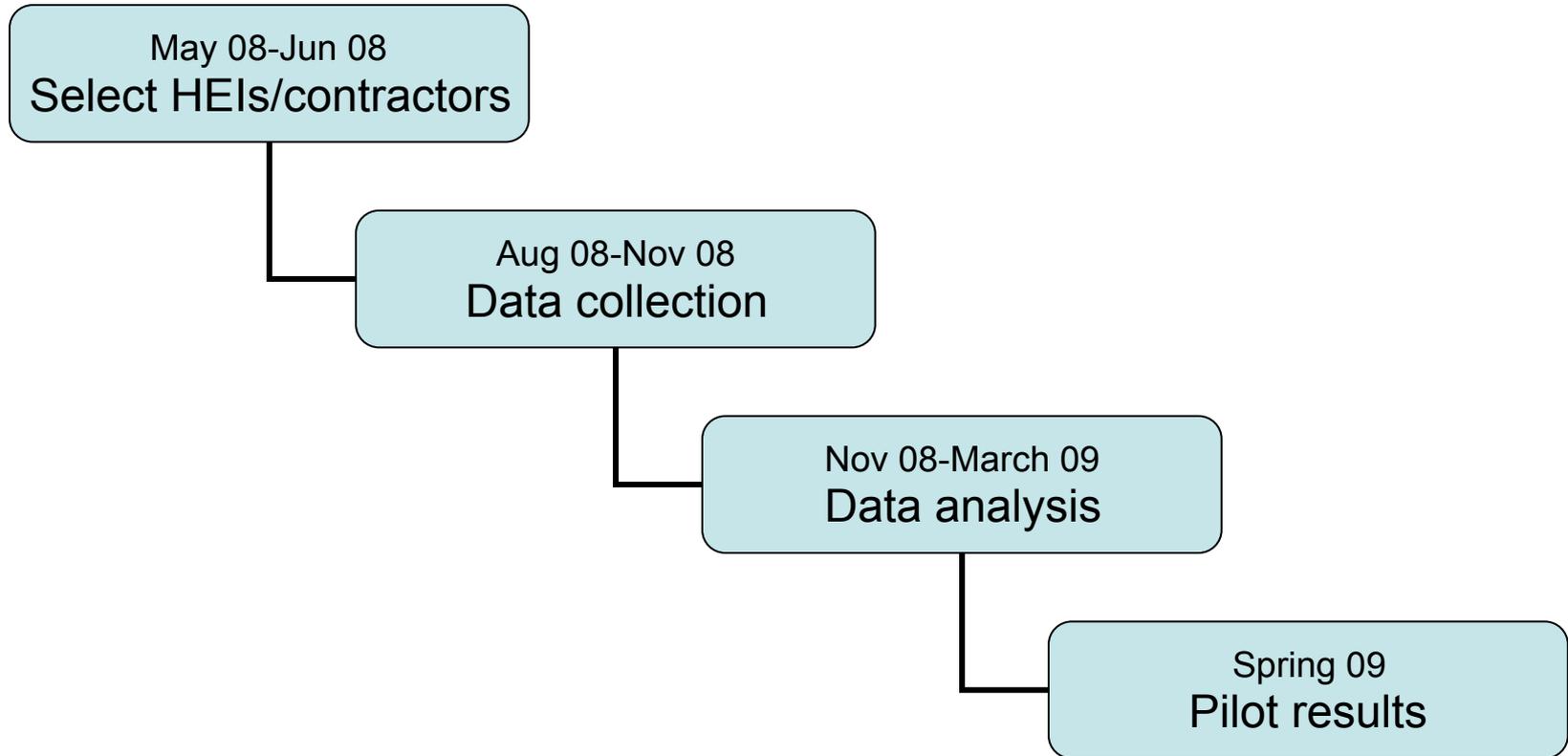
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The bibliometrics pilot - timetable



The pilot so far

- Evidence Ltd has been commissioned to run the pilot
- Mainly using the Web of Science data, but HEFCE will also explore SCOPUS
- The institutions have provided initial data about all known research staff and outputs for the period Jan 2001 to Dec 2007 (in relevant disciplines)
- This will be supplemented by records identified in the Web of Science
- JISC project to produce case studies of pilot institutions' data collection systems
- HEFCE are currently commissioning a project to identify lessons learned by the pilot HEIs and disseminate these to the wider sector



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Working with the pilot data

- Once HEFCE has citation data for the pilot HEIs:
 - HEFCE will undertake a number of different analyses in order to understand the pros and cons of different approaches and which of these might produce the best quality indicators for our purposes
 - Working with “real” data, HEFCE will investigate the options for combining these with other metrics and information to produce robust and fully rounded quality profiles
 - Then HEFCE will consult on the way forward



Further information

www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref

REF-NEWS mailing list

Queries to ref@hefce.ac.uk



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