

## **Publication of contextual data to the Research Excellence Framework 2014**

This note announces plans for publication by HESA of contextual data for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in December 2014.

In their publication [REF 02/11](#), the HE funding bodies stated:

“Separately to the REF outcomes, we expect the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) will during 2015 publish data based on HESA staff returns about the proportion of eligible staff submitted by each HEI”. (paragraph 37)

In responding to this published expectation HESA, in consultation with its Board of Directors, has identified the following data for publication in December 2014.

Within a week following publication by the funding bodies of the REF 2014 outcomes, HESA will publish the count of total full-time equivalents (FTE) of staff identified as eligible to be submitted to the REF 2014, according to a closest approximation to REF definitions of FTE (see below) disaggregated by each REF ‘Unit of Assessment’ within each UK HE institution.

This will be made freely available to the general public via the HESA website as an Excel tabulation with accompanying definitions. In addition to definitions, the publication will include a prominent ‘health warning’ about direct comparisons between HESA and REF FTE figures, outlining the main reasons for difference. However, assessment of the definitional differences indicates that these are not of sufficient impact to undermine the value of publishing the contextual data.

These data will be drawn from the HESA Staff record 2013/14 and will be made available for each HE institution to preview during collection of the record in autumn 2014. During this process each HE institution will be at liberty to request that HESA does not publish contextual data for that institution. However, it must be borne in-mind that any request to with-hold data from publication may simply result in a request being made by third parties direct to the institution under Freedom of Information legislation.

### **Approximation to REF eligible staff and full-time equivalents**

The coverage of REF contextual data to be published will be:

1. Staff holding academic contracts for which the academic employment function is recorded as ‘research’ or ‘teaching & research’  
AND
2. Staff holding contracts that were active on the REF census date of 31 October 2013  
AND
3. Staff who were not recorded as research assistants  
AND
4. Staff who’s scaled ‘full-year’ FTE is 0.2 or greater (to align with the REF 2014 eligibility criterion).

The definition of FTE as used within the HESA Staff record differs from the definition used in REF 2014 in one key area. REF FTE refers to a ‘snapshot’ value at the REF reference date of 31 October 2013 whereas the HESA definition is a retrospective measure which accounts for both the full-time

equivalence of any contracts held and the proportion of an academic year served. Therefore a staff member who was full-time on 31 October 2013 but who left their post half-way through the academic year 2013/14 may be recorded as 1 FTE in the REF submission but would typically represent 0.5 FTE within the HESA Staff record.

In order to compensate for this difference, HESA will 'scale-up' the reported FTE according to the proportion of year served. In other words, for those staff members who left within the year, we will calculate what FTE they would have represented if they had been in-post for the whole academic year. In the above example therefore, the 0.5 FTE for half of an academic year would be assumed to be equivalent to 1.0 FTE over a whole year.

The 'health warning' to be published alongside the data would cover the following:

1. An explanation of the differences in definition of FTE alongside a detailed account of the scaling process. The scaling process will bridge the definitional gap to a large extent but is dependent on the accuracy and consistency of FTE calculations and recorded contract start and end-dates submitted by HE institutions.
2. The exclusion of research assistants is qualified in REF 02/11 by saying that exceptionally, some research assistants may be submitted if they fulfil certain criteria (at paragraph 81). HESA would have no way of knowing this on an individual basis. However, it is considered highly unlikely that the numbers involved would have any material effect on the contextual data published.
3. There are known to be staff employed by the Colleges of Oxford, Cambridge and the University of the Highlands and Islands who are eligible for submission to REF but are not included in the HESA Staff record.

#### **Note**

The FTE scaling process will be dependent upon accurate recording of staff FTE and start and end dates of contracts within the HESA Staff record 2013/14. The preview of the REF contextual data to be provided during collection of the record will be an opportunity for HE institutions to identify any anomalies caused by misreporting of FTE or contract dates, which may be corrected before closure of the record collection process.

If you have any queries on the above planned publication please contact [information@hesa.ac.uk](mailto:information@hesa.ac.uk)