

December 2014

RESPONSE TO THE REF RESULTS

We wish to congratulate all staff who contributed to the REF and enabled us to maintain our relative UK position.

Analysis by THES (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/ref-2014-results-table-of-excellence/2017590.article>) indicates that the university has fallen from 45th to 49th.

After considerable investment in new research staff this must be viewed with concern and throws doubts on both the REF process and the University's strategy.

Undoubtedly, excellent new staff have been recruited but compliance with the REF 'revolving door' led to many excellent staff leaving. This must also be seen against a challenging background at City University, with the impact of PSR 1 and 2 on staff, increased workloads and resulting stress levels, and failures to consult and communicate with staff – all borne out by the appalling staff survey results taken at the same time as the REF submission was drawing to its conclusion.

Over the holidays the UCU will be preparing detailed analysis which we circulate throughout the University and to members of University Council. Serious questions need to be raised and must be answered by the Vice Chancellor. The potential impact on staff will be clear to all and we wish to place on record that the UCU will not see our staff as the victim of a failed strategy and vision. Now is not the time for blind panic but to build on where we are now and engage with staff to ensure a secure and collegiate environment for both work and study.

What did it cost nationally?

University staff spent months preparing REF submissions. Then the 1,100 members of the 36 panels spent the last year grading 191,232 research outputs. It has been estimated that this cost universities £47m plus HEFCE's £12m administrative costs.

Was it peer reviewed?

The outputs submitted to the REF will all have been peer reviewed anyway. The panels covered a wide range of disciplines, so the panel members will not have had the specialist knowledge to cover the full range.

What was the impact on staff?

Whether or not staff were selected for inclusion in the REF submission had a drastic impact on some people's careers, with senior staff who were not included being pressured to leave. Across UK universities, investment in 'REF superstars' has reduced the funds available to employ adequate numbers of teaching staff.

Does it encourage innovation in research?

The REF created pressure to do research which led to 'outputs' which it was thought panels would like, at the expense of more fundamental long term research whose results could be less readily packaged in this way.

Do we need the REF?

The REF rankings are highly correlated with other university rankings which are compiled in less labour intensive ways. The time effort and money spent on the REF would be better spent directly on research and teaching.