Research Impact: Ready for REF 2021

"Some of us are looking at the stars" Thoughts on the longer-term implications of the new REF rules

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Association of Research Managers and Administrators

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Session Structure

- Some personal irritants in REF discussions
- Experience of the REF cycle 2014-2021 summarised in three slides
- An incomplete revolution Consequences and possibilities of:
  - Portability and Retention of Publications
  - Reduction in minimum outputs per researcher
  - Open access

1) Golberg's First Law of Higher Education Research Policy Change
2) Rule X can be gamed = compelling and sufficient argument against X
3) Not distinguishing between problems caused by the REF v. problems caused by institutional and individual responses
4) Belief in Admin Fairy, the Bureaucracy Bunny and the Process Pixie

Fly on the wall documentary footage of Research England's REF policy team at work…

And in Research Offices at every university in the country….

And I applaud you all for it…

Portability and Retention of Publications

An attempt to simplify…

	When an academic moves institution…	REF 2014	REF 2021	Future REFs
Portability	New Institution can return output published at Old Institution	✓	✓	✗
Retention	Old Institution can return output even though researcher has left	✗	✓	✓

It's... well, pick your own analogy...

Non-portability is a paradigm shift

Premier League

Career young researchers have genuine concerns about non-portability that need addressing

Looking forward: A settled portability policy

- No going back
  - Old system profoundly unfair
- Make the temporary fix permanent
  - “Schrodinger’s Publications”
  - Rewards high turnover of staff
- Implement Stern
  - Investment / divestment asymmetry problem
  - Publication filibustering? Affiliation switching?
  - Problem for low output disciplines, esp monographs
- Tweaks:
  - Portability for the academic precariat?
  - Portability for all ECRs?
  - Allowance for small number of portable publications

If we don't resolve this, I predict….

4 publications becomes 1-5: Did the old REF rules force academics to be "all rounders“?

Does the change from 4 to 1-5 outputs create new opportunities to specialize?

But…. industrial relations are not in a good state, and trust is low…

How to solve this?

- Time for an open conversation about the nature of academic careers
- Parity of esteem: teaching, research, knowledge exchange, leadership
- Not a ‘sorting hat’ approach
- Avoiding closing off “all rounder” career
- ‘Honour code’ re redundant staff outputs
- Tip balance back from corporate to democratic model
- Use of deliberative democracy/citizen juries

Open Access… beyond mere compliance

- Make everything new available, not just REFable outputs
- Work backwards… green OA for greatest hits
- Add a lay summary for publications that don’t have one
- Integrating OA/repository into other areas

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