16 July 2012

Voice of Young Science Network
c/o Sense About Science
14A Clerkenwell Green
London
EC1R 0DP

Dear colleagues,

Recognising reviewing within the REF

Thank you for your letter which sets out clearly the importance of reviewing activity. You ask whether reviewing will be given due consideration in the REF. One of the three elements of the REF assessment concerns the research environment. Panels will assess the vitality and sustainability of the environment in which the submitted unit’s research takes place, as well as the submitted unit’s contribution to the vitality and sustainability of the wider discipline or research base.

The REF panels developed their detailed criteria through an open consultation exercise in autumn 2011. Under the heading of ‘contribution to the discipline or research base’ the panels outline the types of evidence sought. Various examples of reviewing activity are included. As the REF is an assessment process that differentiates between institutions, the examples focus on exemplars, rather than routine – albeit important – activity that would not enable the panels to differentiate.

More generally, the REF is an assessment process that identifies institutions that have produced excellent research and made strong contributions to the research base and to wider society. While we expect institutions to manage their block grant research funding wisely and to support a range of activities that will lead to these outcomes, we avoid using the REF as a mechanism for directing institutions in how to do so.

I’d like to reiterate HEFCE’s commitment to maintaining the health of research within the higher education sector through supporting research careers, including early career researchers. We are signatories to the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers and contribute to the costs of its implementation. We have also led work to
explore issues of equality and diversity in research careers and recently funded Vitae to carry out a project to raise awareness and increase support in this area.

yours sincerely,

Alan Langlands