

**The Rt Hon David Willetts MP**  
Minister of State for Universities and  
Science

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Dear Professor Beebee,

Thank you for your letter of 8 July, about the proposals for the assessment of impact within the Research Excellence Framework and for providing further detail of your concerns about the potential implications for Philosophy. I apologise for the delay in replying, which was due to an administrative slip.

I have forwarded your proposals to Alan Langlands so that they will be included in the current consideration of impact assessment.

We are all agreed that it is important for researchers to demonstrate the benefits from publically funded work to the economy, society, public policy, culture and quality of life. I appreciate that there are some doubts about whether it is possible to develop an assessment methodology which is robust and broadly applicable across disciplines. I also appreciate that some academics are wary about the approach proposed by HEFCE in their consultation last year. Having discussed with HEFCE, I announced a one-year delay to the implementation of the REF to allow consideration of whether a method of assessing impact can be developed which is sound and is broadly acceptable to the academic community. This longer timetable will allow HEFCE, its devolved counterparts and Government, to discuss further with experts and to make full use of the outcome of the pilot impact assessment exercise which concludes later in the Autumn.

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To address the challenges involved in impact assessment, HEFCE has consulted widely and is conducting a pilot exercise involving 29 HEIs from across the UK and nearly 100 leading academics and expert users. They will be assessing research across a wide sample of disciplines from English, Physics, Medicine, and Social Policy to Earth Science. Both Research Councils and HEFCE policies recognise that the benefits from excellent research are wide ranging and frequently long term. In the pilot impact exercise, HEFCE's guidance for submissions was for impacts that had occurred between January 2005 and December 2009, where the underpinning research could date back to 1993. The pilot methodology involves expert assessment of statements and case studies of impact, informed by indicators suitable to the discipline. As with assessment of research excellence, the proposal is for an assessment not an attempt at "measurement". HEFCE's proposed methodology would only consider the impact arising from excellent research. Any impacts which are not underpinned by excellent research, or where research activity did not contribute, will be deemed "unclassified". HEFCE proposes to assess impacts in terms of both their reach and significance, so that the more profound and wide ranging benefits from excellent philosophy would be rated at a higher level than more local impacts.

A key element in HEFCE's proposed approach to the assessment of research excellence, of impact and of the research environment will be to keep the burden on participating institutions to the minimum necessary to enable panels to make robust assessments on the evidence provided.

May I thank you again for taking the time to set out your detailed thoughts on this pertinent matter.

Yours sincerely  
David Willetts

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