

## **A response from Newton's Apple to the Higher Education Funding Council for England's proposed Research Excellence Framework**

### **Newton's Apple**

Newton's Apple is a new charity and the only neutral organisation with a complete focus on science policy for the public benefit. Through training, consultations, events and other activities, the organisation formulates tools and recommendations on how the processes at the interface of science and policy can be improved. The objectives are to create an enhanced appreciation of the policy process among those studying and working in science, as well as enabling those producing policy - whether in Government, business, learned societies or the third sector - to more effectively identify, evaluate and use science in their policy-making.

A major programme recently initiated by Newton's Apple is Newton's Heirs – Science Policy Explained & Explored. This is a neutral and inclusive programme developed with and organised for scientists, engineers and policymakers. It offers opportunities to debate and formulate ideas at the interface of science and policy through training, consultations, events and other activities. The objective of the programme is to create an enhanced appreciation of the policy process among those studying and working in science and engineering, as well as increasing the opportunities policy-makers have to identify, evaluate and use science in policymaking. The idea is that this will produce three main outcomes:

- Provide transferable skills for scientists, and increase their awareness of the wider relevance of their research to society, which might lead to a greater retention of scientists in the workforce.
- Enhance the skills of policy makers in interpreting scientific evidence.
- Encourage the improved use of science in policy, which will ultimately benefit the public.

As part of this programme, the organisation is also consulting with stakeholders in formulating submissions to consultations which cover the above areas.

### **Research Excellence Framework**

Newton's Apple believes that encouragement of outreach activities for scientists is essential and that the proposed Research Excellence Framework (REF) does not recognise and reward scientists who participate in outreach activities (such as media training, public engagement or science policy training) that have a societal impact. The failure to recognise outreach activities is, we believe, a serious omission and therefore a system must be established to allow such activities to be recognised within the Framework.

To address the above issue and identify additional quantitative information that could be used in the proposed assessment and funding framework, Newton's Apple conducted a collaborative consultation with the National Endowment for Science, Technology and Arts (NESTA). Academic fellows, professors and PhD students (all of whom have been directly affected by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE)) were surveyed on additional metrics that could be used within the proposed REF.

An overwhelming number of respondents felt that the proposed use of bibliometrics, research income and student numbers alone were not adequate and stressed the need for additional quantitative information to successfully capture all features of research excellence.

Respondents welcomed those additional indicators highlighted by HEFCE in its initial consultation; user value, quality of applied research and economic impact. In addition to these indicators, respondents believe the quality of the proposed framework would be greatly enhanced by the consideration of interdisciplinarity and social impact (including outreach activities).

However, when respondents were asked to identify practical metrics to capture these indicators, they found it extremely difficult to do so. Some viable metrics were suggested, but none of them were considered by stakeholders to be applicable to all disciplines. Respondents felt that to be specific in terms of what essential element of research the metrics would cast light on and how it may be found or collected, the terms (user value, quality of applied research, interdisciplinarity, and social and economic impact) and the activities which contribute to these (and therefore must be measured) need to be better and more clearly defined.

Before any additional indicators can be used in the proposed REF, Newton's Apple recommends that HEFCE should give appropriate organisations(s) the task of carrying out extensive consultation of stakeholders to:

1. Identify the definitions of user value, quality of applied research, interdisciplinarity, economic and social impact.
2. Identify and/or develop metrics to capture user value, quality of applied research, interdisciplinarity, economic and social impact.
3. Explore ways of administering accreditation.

By following these recommendations HEFCE would work towards ensuring that all aspects of research in all disciplines are properly captured and rewarded. This would encourage the research community to share their knowledge with the rest of Society, benefiting the UK public as a whole.

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