

**POSTSCRIPT OUTLINING AND COMMENTING ON THE FINDINGS FROM THE STERN
REVIEW OF REF2014**

The following post-script has been written in light of the 2016 Stern Review published on 28th July, 2016. Because of the timings of this research, it has not been possible to submit equality and diversity and general recommendations to the Stern Review, as the analysis of the findings was still being carried out during the call for responses, the deadline that closed on 24th March, 2016. Further, where relevant, reference has been made to the Stern Review in the thesis to demonstrate the similarity of some elements of the findings. However, throughout the report there are only three explicit references to gender, thus again demonstrating the need for this research.

The following key points have been extracted from the review and commented upon in light of their relevance to this study and it is of note to acknowledge the potential impact of the findings and recommendations arising from the Stern Review on this study, as well as the gaps of the review which this research can empirically contribute to answering:

Stern Review Finding	Research finding and commentary
'It provides a periodically updated reputational benchmark, which is based on rigorous peer judgment by fellow academics' (2016, p.9)	This comment in itself is not untrue, but this thesis has found that there are equality and diversity issues imbued in the peer review process, and the report does not consider existing research, which demonstrates the in-built gender issues of peer review. This is demonstrative of the fact that research evaluation processes continue to rely on a process that has been proven to potentially discriminate against women.
'Concern was expressed about the practice of making a highly selective submission to the REF that does not represent the overall research activity in that area in the institution. Other negative consequences cited were the	This finding is also echoed in the findings of this research, and it is argued that this has potential gendered implications in that women are disproportionately those who may be 'good research staff who do not fit the HEI selection strategy'.

<p>exclusion of good research staff who do not fit the HEI selection strategy, potentially demotivating some staff, and reducing the completeness of the picture of UK research strength' (2016, p.13).</p>	
<p>'Measures to promote equality and diversity and mitigate the impact of individuals' special circumstances in the REF are vital. HEFCE analysis of staff selection for the REF showed a marked difference between the rate of selection for men and women. 67% of men were selected, compared with 51% of women. Black, Asian UK and non-EU nationals had lower selection rates, and the selection rate for staff with declared disabilities was lower than for those without' (2016, p.13).</p>	<p>This is a consistent issue and has again been highlighted in the findings of this thesis, as well as in multiple other studies. Whilst the Stern review nods to equality and diversity issues, the concrete ways in which this may be tackled are unclear; this was also discussed with specific reference to the HEFCE analysis, which again was found to merely identify the issues.</p> <p>It is here where this thesis aims to make a valuable empirical contribution to knowledge to deepen not only the understanding of these issues, but to provide also strategic recommendations.</p>
<p>'In the REF, arrangements were made for enabling staff whose circumstances had constrained their ability to work productively throughout the assessment period, to be returned with fewer than four outputs without penalty in the assessment. These were successful in improving the number of staff submitted with "individual staff circumstances" as 29.2% of staff were submitted with less than 4 outputs, up from 12.2% of staff in RAE 2008. However, respondents questioned whether the focus on evidencing individuals' circumstances actually resulted in additional pressure and</p>	<p>Whilst this also occurred in the study, it is argued that this is still insufficient, and it was found that in a small number of individual instances, as outlined in the report, 'the focus on evidencing individuals' circumstances actually resulted in additional pressure and even distress to those individuals'; this was of particular note from one participant who made it explicit that this actually worsened her mental health condition, for example.</p>

<p>even distress to those individuals. Some respondents to the Call for Evidence advocated instead exploring how best to reward departments and research units that demonstrate best practice on equality and diversity measures (2016, pp.13-14).</p>	
<p>28. The requirement to return a fixed number of outputs per individual may encourage a focus on 'safer' publication strategies, and this may involve short-termism in individual researchers' research strategies. More generally, the need for HEIs to "optimise" the output grade profiles from REF may lead to a distortion of career choices, where the outputs from researchers who do not produce the requisite number of outputs within the census period are not visible to the REF. This may also lead to the tying of research quality too closely with individual performance, as opposed to the team-based research activity that characterises modern approaches to research in many disciplines, and indeed in multi-disciplinary teams. It might also discourage collaboration within departments in individual HEIs</p>	<p>This was found in the case study university and particularly in the departments of Business and Law. It is argued here that the REF is indeed contributing to some academics pursuing more conservative but potentially better rewarded in terms of REF results.</p>

(2016, p.15).	
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