Notes of REF audit meeting, 23 September 2019, UCL

This meeting was a follow-up to the REF ARMA Audit Meeting in August 2019, following which ARMA and others are coordinating light-touch best practice sharing, including notes and possible webinars, in discussion with UKCORR.   The Head of REF Data Verification and Information Management, is leading a session at the UKCORR Members' Day on 30th September.

The notes of the ARMA REF Audit Meeting (http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/195014/) were reviewed. The numbers below relate to actions from that meeting.

Open Access
- [2] It was felt that the Audit Guidance (https://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/audit-guidance-201904/) provides sufficient opportunity for institutions to demonstrate their procedures for managing open access compliance. Those present were not concerned about fairness between institutions.
- [3] In the light of experience of previous REF exercises, it was agreed that the REF Team would be unlikely to require evidence of extenuating circumstances that would breach GDPR. It was not felt that specific clarification of the evidence that might be required for Other exceptions relating to long-term absence is required at this stage.
- [5] The group would appreciate confirmation from RE (perhaps at the UKCORR Members' Day) that it understands that the metadata in CORE and Unpaywall (deposit date, publication date and open access status) is often unreliable, but felt overall that the wording of the Audit Guidance makes it clear that these sources will only be used to inform the initial risk ranking, on which basis institutions may be asked to provide evidence of their procedures. Sampling will only happen if that evidence is insufficient. Even at that stage, institutions can provide evidence of compliance for specific outputs. The group agreed that the most important action in response to the Audit Guidance is that institutions ensure that their open access procedures are documented by the time of the REF submission.
- Dates of open access:
  - [6] The group was unsure how RE intended to collect date of open access, since it is not included in the openaccessStatus fields that will be submitted (https://www.ref.ac.uk/guidance/submission-system-data-requirements/). It was suggested that if this will be audited, a technical exception might be appropriate if there were difficulties in obtaining dates to ensure release of items one month after deposit, or one month after the embargo period.
  - Similarly, the group doubted that date of papers becoming Gold open access could or would be audited, and saw the requirement that HEIs confirm that outputs were available immediately after publication via the Gold route as a way to prevent HEIs trying to remedy non-compliance retrospectively. Again, it was felt that robust procedures, and documentation evidencing them, would be sufficient to demonstrate that this requirement has been met.
- [19] It was noted that panels can query open access compliance, and that audit queries from panels can begin as early as mid-December, and continue until July, but that staff contract enquiries are sent first. It was agreed that as long as procedures are in place, open access queries should not be burdensome.
- It was noted that a lot of REF open access discussion takes place on the UKCORR list (https://www.ukcorr.org/membership/email-list/). There are also discussions and event adverts on the ARMA OA and REF Special Interest Group mailing lists and others.

Other audit matters

- [12] the group agreed that HESA/subject mapping on an individual researcher basis is not likely to be an issue if the data broadly matches at institutional level.

Actions

VM to discuss setting up webinars and other methods of sharing best practice between institutions following the OA Scotland meeting this week and the UKCORR Members' Day on 30th September.

Potential topics for best practice sharing include the following. A document has been started as a result of the ARMA meeting and will be discussed with UKCoRR chair.

1. Institutions' documentation of their process for managing open access (Audit Guidance para 47 and Appendix with suggested framework: https://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/audit-guidance-201904/)
2. Exceptions:
    a. How they're interpreted (e.g. Other, Gold)
    b. How they're applied
        i. who applies them;
        ii. who doesn't;
        iii. how far UoA leads/authors are responsible for exceptions and how far Library/REF managers sanction them;
        iv. how far institutions are checking HR data in relation to 252(c) or 254(a) exceptions for staff previously at a non-UK HEI or a different UK HEI.
    c. When they're applied (pre-/post-selection)