

Prof Jane Falkingham
Chair, Main Panel C & SPRE
Research and Excellence Framework 2029

cc. Prof Greg Walker, Chair Main Panel D

13 May 2026

Dear Jane

The Academy of Social Sciences is writing to express the concerns that it, and many of its 46 member Learned Societies, have regarding the statements that are to be required in the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) component of REF 2029.

Specifically, we have serious concerns at the ratio of the weightings of the two statements, currently set at 60% institutional level statement (ILS) and 40% unit level statement (ULS).

We present below the reasons why we think the weightings should be changed – effectively switched - to 40% institutional level and 60% unit level.

We are supported in this by the learned societies listed at the end of this letter, who have been consulted and expressly wish to add their 'signatures' to this request. They include most of the larger social science discipline societies that align closely with the units of assessment in Panel C.

Our case for this request rests on the following concerns and opportunities:

- Most of the social sciences (and the humanities) do not require the types of research environment infrastructure and investment that the STEM and bio-medical sectors do. While the institution level approach to SPRE is important in setting a context, the key driver of strategy, people and research for Panel C will be at the school/faculty of social sciences level or the unit level. In this setting, for the same ILS to account for up to 12% of the total for each UoA, while the ULS accounts for just 8% is under-representing the unit level role and replicating an over-emphasis of the same ILS across each UoA.
- It follows that the greater weighting given to the ILS creates a risk that units across the social sciences, including for example law schools and business and management schools, are overly assessed against criteria that they have limited control over (the ILS) and do not accurately reflect the organisation and support requirements of their unit-level strategy, people, and research environments (ULS). To quote from the Society for Legal Scholars: "*whilst certain forms of institutional support are important, including centrally coordinated doctoral*

training partnerships, and equality, diversity and inclusion frameworks, the proposed weighting under-estimates the extent to which the research environment for law is created and sustained at unit level.”

- The proposed change would offer a fairer weighting for (a) smaller units/institutions where some social science disciplines undertake outstanding research and impact programmes, that generally do not require a broad institutional infrastructure; and (b) which exist within institutions that are less able to evidence a strong and broad ILS such as would be required for a more science-oriented and larger institution. Specifically, there is likely to be an unintentional impact of the overall 12% weighting of the ILS on pockets of research excellence based in post-92 and/or dual-intensive institutes.
- It follows that there is a risk that the current proposed weightings may systematically penalise high-performing UoAs in less wealthy institutional contexts and may serve to unfairly inflate the scores of weaker UoAs in better funded-institutions. Thus, it risks perpetuating existing inequalities between institutions and reduces the potential of research brilliance to break through those barriers when situated in a ‘lower-SPRE’ institutional context.

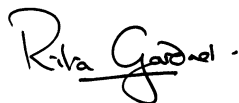
We appreciate this request is being made late in the day. It follows discussion at a recent learned society CEOs meeting convened by the Academy. We firmly believe that this adjustment to the weighting ratios would make the process fairer and signal the seriousness with which unit level SPRE frameworks and support should be taken within the context of the broader institution levels of support for all.

Finally, we think it is important that there is broad representation on the panel assessing the ILS’s. We would like to see representation both across the main research sectors (bio-medical, STEM, social sciences and A&H) and across different institutional types.

Several of our member societies will also be writing to you separately on behalf of their disciplines.

We hope that the REF2029 team will be open to making this change.

Yours sincerely



Dr Rita Gardner CBE FAcSS
Chief Executive

On behalf of:

1. British Academy of Management
2. British Accounting and Finance Association

3. British Association for Applied Linguistics
4. British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society
5. British Educational Research Association
6. British International Studies Association
7. British Psychological Society
8. British Society for Population Studies
9. British Sociological Association
10. Economic History Society
11. Housing Studies Association
12. Leisure Studies Association
13. Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association
14. Political Studies Association
15. Regional Studies Association
16. Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)
17. Royal Economic Society
18. Royal Statistical Society
19. Royal Town Planning Institute
20. Society of Legal Scholars
21. Society for Research into Higher Education
22. Socio-Legal Studies Association
23. UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment