

Dear Rebecca

Thank you for your email of 16<sup>th</sup> August updating the EPC on changes that relate to how you will recruit members of our discipline-based Unit of Assessment expert panels. We are delighted to offer our continued support to this exercise, having successfully supported many high-calibre EPC members to join REF panels in the past. We welcome your commitment to removing potential barriers for applicants and offer a level playing field to increase diversity. In Engineering, we particularly hope this will enable women academics to be better represented.

We have actively shared the details you have provided with our network – which represents over 8,000 engineering academics from 85 UK university Engineering departments – to encourage members who would be well suited to sit on the expert panels to apply, paying particular attention to the diversity of potential applicants. We eagerly await details of the process for full expert panel membership so we can provide further support. In particular, we are keen to ensure that a wide range of our members from a diversity of Engineering disciplines are represented.

### **Main Panel Chair Recruitment**

With reference to the REF Main Panel Chair Recruitment, in the absence of the nomination process and in addition to promoting the opportunity to our members, we believe we also can play a useful role in ensuring inclusivity in the process and assurance that applicants would enjoy the confidence of the engineering academic community. To that end, we intend to provide letters of support to a small number of candidates who meet the REF person specification and we believe to be exceptionally capable, particularly focusing on individuals from underrepresented groups in our network.

We trust that this will be a helpful input and hope that you will value the letters of support alongside the rest of the candidates' submissions.

### **People, Culture and Environment Survey**

We have shared the link to the People, Culture and Environment Survey with our Engineering Academics network to encourage individuals to respond.

In addition, the EPC's Research, Innovation & Knowledge Transfer Committee has considered the questions and would like to offer the following reflections on the survey. These reflections are, of course, from the perspective of Engineering and we are aware that we are highlighting issues that may not apply equally to all disciplines (although Engineering is a field in which interdisciplinarity is critical).

1. Overall, we believe you have identified the right issues that are of moderate or great importance with regard to People, Culture and Environment. We look forward to further details to explain the changes in more granular detail.

2. **Environmental Sustainability:** This issue is a case in point. It should be further defined to avoid misunderstanding and enable meaningful assessment. Does 'environmental' refer to the research environment or to the ecological environment? Does sustainability mean financial viability or conservational balance? In any case, judgement about environmental sustainability should be at a Unit level (not institutional) as in Engineering this is a core focus. Further clarity as to how it will be assessed and used would be useful.
3. **Diversity of research ideas and practices:** Small teams / departments in some areas are producing excellent and impactful research, and at Unit level this criterion could potentially be damaging by suggesting that a department needs to be big enough to have adequate internal diversity. We would urge that this should not exclude smaller or specialist institutions nor bring any disadvantage for smaller research units and departments.
4. **Openness and open research:** It is of vital importance that the REF process recognises that national security could bring potential conflicts of interest with openness. A significant amount of high-quality work in Engineering cannot possibly be open access in the national interest. While we wholly support greater openness whenever practical, we are concerned that, due to national security, this criterion will disadvantage excellent work. Indeed, a significant amount also cannot be open access for commercial reasons, but it is research of no less importance or quality. The criterion for openness needs to be considered in the context of the reasons that such research may or may not have been funded (which often goes far beyond business interests).
5. **Diversity:** Defining what needs to be returned could help units and assessors. In the previous REF, the Engineering sub-panel report concluded that defining equality and diversity metrics might be necessary and helpful, including a range of approaches covering different areas. A better steer towards baseline data would be helpful in assessing the national picture and making sure that the assessment is robust.

I trust this response is helpful, please do not hesitate to reach out to the EPC for further support.

Yours sincerely,

Johnny Rich

Chief Executive  
Engineering Professors' Council