

13 June 2026

Professor Greg Walker
Chair, Main Panel D
REF 2029

Dear Professor Walker,

We are writing on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Alliance to express our concerns regarding the proposed weightings within the Strategy, People and Research Environment (SPRE) component of REF 2029, specifically the current balance between the institutional-level statement (ILS) and the unit-level statement (ULS).

We recognise the considerable care that has gone into the development of the SPRE framework, and we welcome the prominence it gives to research environment as a core element of assessment. However, we are concerned that the current weighting of 60% ILS and 40% ULS may not adequately reflect the ways in which research environments are constituted and sustained within the arts and humanities disciplines represented in Main Panel D.

In these fields, research culture, intellectual leadership, and collaboration are often rooted primarily at the level of departments, schools, and subject communities. While institutional frameworks provide important enabling conditions, the distinctive strengths of arts and humanities research environments are frequently generated through local practices: close-knit scholarly communities, disciplinary innovation, public engagement, and the development of inclusive and sustainable research cultures at unit level.

Against this backdrop, the current weighting risks placing disproportionate emphasis on institutional narratives that may not fully capture – and may in some cases obscure – the specific conditions under which high-quality research in the arts and humanities is produced. It also raises the possibility that units may be assessed to a significant degree on factors over which they have limited control, while the more immediate and meaningful dimensions of their research environments are comparatively underweighted.

We are particularly concerned about the potential implications for smaller units and for those located within institutions with differing resource profiles. As presently configured, the weighting structure risks disadvantaging areas of genuine excellence that are sustained through strong local leadership and intellectual community, but which are less well reflected in institution-wide statements. Conversely, it may amplify the role of institutional positioning in ways that mask variation at unit level.

We therefore encourage reconsideration of the balance between the ILS and ULS components and would support a shift towards a model that gives greater weight to the unit-level statement. A weighting of 40% ILS and 60% ULS would, in our view, more accurately reflect the conditions under which arts and humanities research environments flourish, and would provide a fairer and more representative basis for assessment across Panel D.

We understand that similar concerns about the proposed balance between institutional and unit-level weighting are being raised elsewhere in the sector, reflecting a wider view that the current configuration may not fully capture disciplinary differences in how research environments are formed and sustained. We also appreciate that this request is being made at a relatively advanced stage in the process. However, we believe that an adjustment of this kind would strengthen confidence in the fairness and robustness of the REF framework and would signal clear recognition of the distinctive characteristics of research in the arts and humanities.

We would, of course, be very happy to contribute further to discussions on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is 'Emma Cayley' and the signature on the right is 'Thea Pitman'.

Professors Emma Cayley and Thea Pitman
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On behalf of the affiliates of the Arts and Humanities Alliance:

African Studies Association of the UK
African Theatre Association
Anglo-Catalan Society
Architectural Humanities Research Association

Association of Adaptation Studies
Association for Art History
Association for German Studies
Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland
Association of University Professors and Heads of French
British Association for American Studies
British Association for Applied Linguistics
British Association for Canadian Studies
British Association for Chinese Studies
British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies
British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies
British Association for the Study of Religions
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
British Philosophical Association
Council for British Archaeology
Council of University Classics Departments
Drama HE
Economic History Society
English Association
Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas
History UK
Linguistics Association of Great Britain
Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies Association
Music Mark – the UK Association for Music Education
National Association of Writers in Education
Oral History Society
Political Studies Association
Royal Geographical Society
Royal Historical Society
Royal Photographic Society
Royal Musical Association
Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies
Society for French Studies
Society for Italian Studies
Society for Latin American Studies
Society for Neo-Latin Studies
Society for Old Testament Study
Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies
Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
The Folklore Society
Theology and Religious Studies UK
TROPO UK: The Association of Teachers and Researchers of Portuguese Language in the UK

UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment
UK Council of Area Studies Associations
University Archaeology UK
University Council For Languages
University English
Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies

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