

**Written Evidence Submitted by the Department for Business, Energy and
Industrial Strategy
(RRE0102)**

Dear Greg,

INQUIRY ON REPRODUCIBILITY AND RESEARCH INTEGRITY – FOLLOW UP

I was delighted to meet you and other members of the Select Committee on Wednesday 2 February 2022 to give evidence at this inquiry. I was grateful for the opportunity to set out my priorities as Science Minister and look forward to working with you.

In response to the Committee's questions, I offered to respond with more detail on the following areas:

- Where regional development funds fit into R&D spending plans;
- The latest on publication timelines for the Grant, Tickell, and Nurse reviews;
- Launch timings for both the Shetland and Sutherland spaceports; and
- Government plans to reform the REF, including on whether there are any specific provisions on:
 - Removing 'originality' as a factor required to reach the top score, and
 - Institutions submitting the work of staff they have made redundant

Regional development funds and R&D spending plans

The Government recognises the role that EU structural funding plays in supporting opportunities across the UK. Leaving the European Union enables the UK to identify UK-specific priorities and to create a fund which invests in UK priorities and targets funding where it is needed most.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) will support the UK Government's ambitious Levelling Up agenda. It provides £2.6 billion of new funding for local investment by March 2025. We are ensuring that domestic UK-wide funding will at least match EU receipts for each nation, reaching around £1.5bn a year in 2024-25 when EU funding ceases, whilst also providing a smooth transition onto the new, domestic regime.

The UK government is committed to ensuring that all areas will receive an allocation from the Fund. The exact allocations will be published in due course.

The UKSPF will empower places to identify and build on their own strengths and needs at a local level. Places will be able to tailor interventions and investment to support local businesses to thrive, innovate and grow. The Government will publish a full Prospectus on the fund later in Spring 2022.

The latest on publication timelines for the Grant, Tickell, and Nurse reviews

We expect all three reviews to be published before Summer Recess 2022.

Launch timings for both the Shetland and Sutherland spaceports

SaxaVord Spaceport (Shetland)

Lockheed Martin were awarded £13.5 million in grant funding to develop UK launch operations from Shetland. The launch service provider is ABL Space Systems. ABL's first vertical launch from Shetland, Scotland was originally planned for September this year. However, the first test flight in the US was recently delayed to May/June 2022 due to a testing incident in mid-January which destroyed the upper stage of their rocket.

ABL are urgently seeking to correct the cause of failure and assess if they can recover any time lost. Their preliminary estimate is that this will delay the UK launch date from September to **December 2022**.

Space Hub (Sutherland)

Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) were awarded £2.5 million in grant funding to support the development and construction of Space Hub Sutherland and enable commercial satellite launch operations from 2023.

Separately, Orbital Express (Orbex) were awarded £5.5 million to support the research and development of their 'Prime' launch vehicle which aims to operate from SHS. Orbex have indicated launch will take place in **early 2023**, but this is dependent on the development of the spaceport which aims to begin construction in Spring 2022.

Government plans to reform the REF

Removing 'originality' as a factor required to reach the top score

The Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP) was launched in May 2021 at the request of UK and devolved government ministers and the four UK Higher Education Funding Bodies.

FRAP is a significant piece of work aimed at exploring possible approaches to the assessment of UK higher education research performance. It seeks to identify those approaches which can encourage and strengthen the emphasis on delivering excellent research and impact, and support a positive research culture, while simplifying and reducing the administrative burden on the HE sector.

It is important that the programme seeks to understand – through dialogue with the higher education sector and its key stakeholders – what a healthy, thriving research system looks like and how an assessment model can best form its foundation. An open consultation on the design of the UK’s future research assessment system was launched on 22 February. The consultation poses questions on:

- the purposes of a future exercise,
- the principles that should guide its development and
- the assessment criteria and processes.

Responses to this consultation will be one of the key inputs that shape the future exercise. They will be considered alongside a range of internal and commissioned evaluations, feedback on the current exercise (gathered separately from institutions and individuals), and advice from the Programme’s International Advisory Group.

The consultation includes questions on the appropriateness of the current assessment criteria, including that of ‘originality’. As the criteria for assessment are still under discussion, it is too soon to say whether ‘originality’ will be part of a future framework. Decisions on the design, processes and criteria of a future assessment system will be made on the basis of a wide evidence base, taking into account views from across the sector.

Institutions submitting the work of staff they have made redundant

The four HE funding bodies¹ are collectively responsible for the detailed development and implementation of the REF. All stakeholders had opportunity to express views on whether REF2021 “should allow submission of work by staff who had been made redundant” as part of the consultation on draft guidance in July 2018. A broadly similar percentage of responses were received to the consultation both in favour of and against this change.

Having considered the balance of arguments, the HE funding bodies decided to permit the submission of the outputs of former staff made redundant for the following reasons:

¹ Research England, Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, and Department of Economy, Northern Ireland

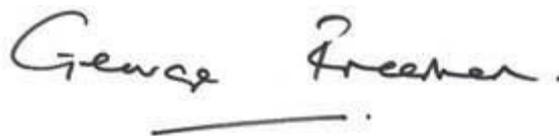
- Disallowing the outputs of staff on fixed-term contracts, such as early career researchers on research fellowships, would disincentivise institutions from employing these individuals.
- An exception for fixed-term contracts could equally provide an incentive for HEIs to move staff onto fixed-term contracts and, in doing so, increase the precariousness of academic employment.
- HEIs would otherwise need to share highly sensitive information on staff made redundant so that departments could identify ineligible outputs. Without permission from all affected individuals (which may have been impossible to obtain), sharing information on redundancy would be without the consent of the staff member concerned, who may not wish this to be known beyond HR.

The four HE funding bodies encouraged institutions to carefully consider their approach to submitting the outputs of former staff who had since been made redundant. In particular, institutions should have reflected on whether it was compatible with the intentions of the policy of non-portability, which seeks to recognise the investment made by institutions and reduce game-playing.

Higher education institutions were required to set out their approach to selecting outputs, including those of former staff, in their codes of practice and in the unit of assessment environment statements.

The REF Steering Group was aware of no evidence showing a link between REF2021 and redundancy. Redundancy – as noted in the Key Decisions document² published on 31 January 2019 – is a highly complex issue and there are many reasons why an institution might make the decision to make redundancies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "George Freeman." The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

GEORGE FREEMAN MP
Minister for Science, Research and Innovation

(16th March 2022)

² <https://www.ref.ac.uk/about/key-decisions/>