



Association for German Studies
in Great Britain and Ireland

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To HEFCE

REF 2014 Consultation – Summer 2011

Joint Response from the Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland (AGS) and Women in German Studies (WiGS)

The Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland (AGS) and Women in German Studies (WiGS) wish to respond jointly to the summer 2011 consultation on REF 2014. Particularly one issue around the [consultation document](#) has been raised by our memberships, and it has been raised in equal measure in each organisation.

That issue is that a **woman who has had fewer than 14 months of maternity leave would not normally be eligible for any reduction in the number of outputs** in their REF submission. This is seen as blatantly discriminatory in comparison to the rules that pertained in RAE 2008 and will create a severely disadvantageous position for any woman who has a child in the current REF cycle, since she will be expected to publish the same number of high-quality outputs regardless. Though the *intention* may not be to discriminate against women, the *effect* of this provision will certainly be so, especially in Arts and Humanities subjects where work is most frequently single-authored and a monograph is often expected. In stark contrast to disciplines in which teamwork is the norm so that the absence of one member frequently does not prevent a project from moving forward, an absence of twelve months for the single researcher can lead to a real loss of momentum in research that goes beyond the period of maternity leave. Since maternity leave rarely goes beyond twelve months, but the effects clearly do, this provision is almost certain to impact negatively on the ability of women researchers to be returned to the REF.

The alternative "option" is for universities to decide to enter someone who has had a problematic pregnancy via "complex" rather than "clearly defined" circumstances. Thus, HEFCE have decided that an academic who has taken a period of maternity leave in the cycle may only reduce the number of published items that they must submit, from the usual four, if they have had complications arising from the pregnancy. This option, by which institutions make their own case for why an individual has been submitted with less than four items, is equally inequitable, as there is no mechanism that will ensure consistent application of criteria for "complex" circumstances around pregnancy. Given the determination this time around to ensure a far greater degree of consistency across panels than pertained last time, this appears to be a significant weakness.

The practical outcome under either provision is that many women with three excellent items who have had leave will either be left out of the REF and or be entered with a fourth output that is weaker than the other three. Both of these options we consider to be discriminatory, and we urge a rethink. A reduction of one publication/output per child seems to us the fairest solution.

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