

IMPLEMENTATION

STORIES



FAIRSFAR
Fostering Fair Data Practices in Europe



THEME



**PROFESSIONALISING ROLES THROUGH
TRAINING, MENTORING, AND RECOGNITION**

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TRAINING, MENTORING, AND RECOGNITION

Celebrating all research outputs and the people who generate them: The hidden REF

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With support from the other hidden REF committee members, especially chair
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Declaration: The author Patricia Herterich is a hidden REF committee member.



Software
Sustainability
Institute

Introduction

Current debates not only call for a culture change in the way research outputs are shared, but also in the way research is assessed. **Responsible research assessment (RRA)** covers assessment approaches that incentivise, reflect and reward the plural characteristics of high-quality research, in support of diverse and inclusive research cultures. While funders are working on policies that reflect these debates (Curry et al., 2020), there are a range of initiatives that are exploring new aspects of recognising the quality and value of research.

In the UK, research activities in higher education institutions are assessed by a system called the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The hidden REF is a grassroots initiative that ran from February 2020 to September 2021 in the UK in an effort to highlight that a change is needed in how we reward the production of all kinds of research outputs and how we can give better recognition to all roles in research. The hidden REF was inspired by the Research Excellence Framework system in the UK and ran as a friendly competition organised by a committee of volunteers, chaired by the UK's Software Sustainability Institute's deputy director Simon Hettrick.

FAIRsFAIR recommendation

Recognise and reward FAIR data and data stewardship

FAIRsFAIR Recommendations on practice to support FAIR principles

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'We want to start a discussion about the different roles that are necessary in modern research and understand how their contribution should be recognised.'

(Simon Hettrick)

■ Approach taken

Research assessment in the UK is dominated by the Research Excellence Framework (REF). First conducted in 2014, the REF is an assessment exercise carried out by the four national UK higher education funding bodies to create benchmarking information and inform the future allocation of research funds. Submissions to the REF are assessed by expert panels using three main criteria:

- Quality of outputs
- Their impact beyond academia, and
- The environment that supports research¹.

Though the REF allows for a wide range of research outputs to be submitted, the submissions focus on traditional publications, such as journal articles and books, which accounted for 97% of submissions in REF2014². The hidden REF competition is a voluntary initiative and encourages submissions of work that contribute towards research success but are not represented by traditional publications, as well as highlighting the roles that contribute to making research possible.

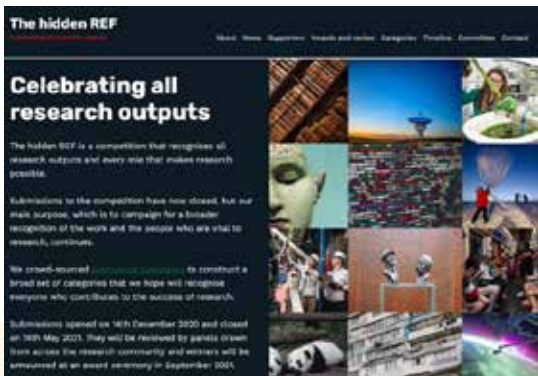
Launched in February 2020, the campaign started raising awareness for the competition, and thus the range of outputs and roles they were looking for. The campaign is run by a committee of volunteers. Some of these volunteers are employed by supporting organisations that contributed time or other resources to raise awareness. These supporting organisations represent professional roles which support research, publishers, and other initiatives that have as their goal changing research culture and recognition of research contributions.

Starting with the non-publication categories of the REF, the initiative crowdsourced additional suggestions for categories of work that have so far been overlooked. This resulted in a total of 20 submission categories for research outputs as well as a 'hidden role' category that allowed the nomination of a person whose work has been instrumental in the conduct of research. Submissions consisted of 300-word descriptions of the work or role put forward for consideration; they opened in December 2020 and closed on 14 May 2021.

Similar to the REF, hidden REF submissions were assessed by expert panels made up of volunteer judges⁴. Criteria used in the assessment were:

- Visibility: the hidden REF should include everyone and everything and leave nothing behind.
- Significance: the hidden REF should assess contributions made across the diversity, richness, and variety of UK research.

The panels were looking for work that was impactful but under-recognised. Winners were announced as part of an award ceremony on 2 September 2021⁵.



The hidden REF site provides a central point for all information about the initiative⁶.

1. Detailed information about the REF can be found at <https://www.ref.ac.uk/>
2. <https://www.ref.ac.uk/2014/results/analysis/outputprofilesanddiversity/>
3. A full list of supporters can be found at <https://hidden-ref.org/supporters/>
4. <https://hidden-ref.org/panels/>
5. <https://hidden-ref.org/hidden-ref-award-ceremony/>
6. Main page of the hidden REF's internet presence <https://hidden-ref.org/>

■ Challenges encountered and addressed

As a volunteer-run initiative, the hidden REF was heavily shaped by the viewpoints and networks of the committee members and of other contributing individual volunteers. There was no explicit effort to reach out to disciplines and communities less represented by the committee. However, committee members reflected about their privileges and possible blind spots that might result (Baker, 2021).

As the initiative ran throughout a period that coincided with Covid-19 related restrictions and lockdowns in the UK and the rest of the world, timelines were adjusted several times to balance workload for the committee, submitters and judges. However, it is likely that this initial competition still excluded researchers most affected by e.g. additional caring responsibilities or other adverse effects caused by the pandemic.

■ Impacts and related developments

The committee hoped to receive 100 submissions across all categories. In the end, 120 submissions were received. Thirty-one people volunteered their time as expert panellists to help assess the submissions. Winners were announced in an award ceremony, a virtual event that was joined by 106 attendees. All nominated people as well as supporters were invited to join in the session and an additional 33 people followed the YouTube live stream. The ceremony celebrated 7 winners and 12 highly recommended outputs and roles. As of October 2021, the initiative's Twitter account has almost 1300 followers.

The committee has received interest in setting up something similar in other organisations or countries and will share lessons learnt and discuss how similar initiatives can be supported in a workshop in summer 2022. Ahead of the workshop, submissions to the hidden REF will be anonymised and made available as a dataset that shows the variety of roles and research outputs that exist and allows for further awareness raising. There are also plans to analyse that dataset within the committee to identify categories that received lower numbers of submissions and learn how an improved competition can be run again in the UK.

Related developments

While the hidden REF was underway, UK Research and Innovation – the umbrella organisation for the UK's seven research councils and its innovation agency - launched their '101 jobs' campaign to highlight the wide range of often under-recognised roles that contribute to research. This is very similar to what the hidden REF's hidden role category tried to achieve, demonstrating that the research outputs and roles recognised by the hidden REF are coming more into focus for funding organisations.

While the hidden REF had submission categories for datasets and data stewards and managers via the 'hidden role' category, it did not highlight the FAIR principles as an explicit criterion. Despite this, there were some submissions that related to the inclusion of the FAIR principles in training sessions and the creation of resources that include guidance on the management of FAIR data and software. Data managers and research software engineers were put forward in the 'hidden role' category. The EOSC Co-Creation projects "European overview of career merit systems" and "Vision for research data in research careers" final reports explore the roles of FAIRness in responsible research assessment in more detail than the hidden REF did. (Mustajoki et al., 2021)

The Swiss National Science Foundation has initialised work on making academic CVs fairer and more inclusive, which includes recommendations around acknowledging a wide range of contributions and CVs presenting all research outputs equally (Strinzel et al., 2021). Following this recommendation would be in line with the spirit and ambitions of the hidden REF and the committee will be monitoring discussions about narrative CVs in the UK⁸.

7. The resulting profiles can be found at <https://www.ukri.org/our-work/101-jobs-that-change-the-world/>

8. <https://royalsociety.org/topics-policy/projects/research-culture/tools-for-support/resume-for-researchers/>

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■ Further information

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■ *About FAIRsFAIR Implementation Stories*

FAIRsFAIR Implementation stories illustrate good practices in research communities and organisations to support the implementation of the FAIR principles. These practices encompass 'FAIR-enabling' actions as recommended in the EC Expert Group on FAIR report [Turning FAIR into Reality](#) and the [FAIRsFAIR Recommendations on practice to support FAIR principles](#). FAIRsFAIR "Fostering FAIR Data Practices In Europe" has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 project call H2020-INFRAEOSC-2018-2020 Grant agreement 831558. The content of this document does not represent the opinion of the European Union, and the European Union is not responsible for any use that might be made of such content.

■ *FAIRsFAIR - Fostering FAIR Data Practices in Europe*

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