

**Joint letter from the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, the Society for Latin American Studies and the Association of British and Irish Lusitanists, to Rebecca Fairbairn, REF Director**

Dear Rebecca Fairbairn,

We write on behalf of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies, the Society for Latin American Studies, the Standing Conference for Latin American Studies and the Association of British and Irish Lusitanists, five major subject bodies in the UK representing Spanish, Latin American and Portuguese Studies to voice concerns in our community about the risks of decoupling staff from outputs without allowing for portability. This is a time of crisis in our sector. News about voluntary severance schemes, redundancies and course/department closures is now a regular occurrence. It is Arts and Humanities subjects that are currently on the frontline, and we are concerned that it will be those same disciplines that are disproportionately affected if the implications of decoupling are not carefully reconsidered.

We hope you will read this letter in the supportive spirit in which it is intended. We want to ensure that REF2029 is fair, transparent, and trusted by our diverse community. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations, the rationale for which is explained below:

- (1) That all units should submit data on the number of compulsory redundancies and restructuring during the REF period as part of the PCE statement.
- (2) That careful thought is given to how PCE statements are read and evaluated to mitigate against unconscious bias. (There is a worry that contracting units may be punished.)
- (3) That due consideration is given to portability so that past and present employers within a census period may each claim a link to a researcher's published outputs (within an agreed number of years following publication).

The decoupling of researchers from outputs was first introduced in REF2021 to address a perception that wealthier institutions were 'gaming' the system, i.e. by poaching staff and their outputs. In these uncertain times, there is now a worry that REF2029 will enable a different injustice: that institutions can hold onto the outputs of staff they have sacked, while making it harder for them to gain new academic employment because they are no longer linked to the work they created. This is an EDI issue since it also affects those on short-term and/or fractional contracts, so often ECRs, at a time when there are so few job opportunities. This issue applies to all

researchers, whatever their discipline, but it is experienced differently in the Arts and Humanities where the pipeline is now a serious issue.

It is also experienced differently in the Arts and Humanities because of the kind of outputs that are valued. Outputs in the Arts and Humanities are often longform; they are researched over many years by individuals. This does not mean that Arts and Humanities researchers do not experiment with different forms of publication, or that they do not collaborate. But it remains the case that the long-form, single-authored monograph, the product of many years of deep research, is still one of the best ways to advance and disseminate scholarly knowledge in the Arts and Humanities. A monograph of 80,000+ words will be many years in the making, while a collaborative, multi-volume scholarly edition of 1,000,000+ words is often a decade or longer in the making. Spending so many years on a project requires

dedication at the best of times. At a time of economic crisis, it now requires personal financial investment. Arts and Humanities researchers have less funding available to them. The AHRC has the smallest budget of all the research councils in UKRI, so when universities spend less on research, and redirect QR money, whether to the bottom line or to support other disciplines, Arts and Humanities researchers are poorly served. With research time and research and library budgets also being cut in universities of all types, it is now common for Arts and Humanities researchers to self-fund research trips and buy the books they need. Arts and Humanities researchers also find themselves increasingly having to produce outputs in their own time (through evening and weekend working). Such circumstances make it feel odd to decouple Arts and Humanities researchers from their outputs, and worse, egregious when that decoupling means those outputs cannot move with the researchers who made them. For these reasons, we are urging the REF team to reconsider very carefully the implications of a blanket decoupling of researchers from outputs to ensure no harm is done.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sarah Wright (AHGBI)

Professor Alison Ribeiro de Menezes (WISPS)

Dr Marieke Riethof (SLAS and the Standing Conference for Latin American Studies)

Dr Carmen Ramos Vilar (ABIL)