**The funding bodies invite views from institutions and disciplinary communities on any disciplinary developments since REF 2021 that would require changes to be made to the UOA structure**

Health services research has been defined as ‘the discipline which seeks to ‘identify the most effective ways to organize, manage, finance, and deliver high quality care; reduce medical errors; and improve patient safety’. As the health care system grows more complicated and more fully integrated with other aspects of public services (such as social care and education), it increasingly involves different disciplines and draws on a very wide range of methods.

At present, health services research is specifically named in the descriptor of UoA2, although health services researchers are often returned in other UoAs, including those related to social policy, management and nursing.

In UoA2, health services research sits alongside public health and primary care, and there is a perception that UoA2 returns are dominated by certain methods (especially trials and large dataset analyses). There is a risk that, in the context of such dominance, the wider suite of methods used in health services research (such as qualitative research and non-experimental evaluation) may be downgraded in the REF process or may be filtered out by institutions prior to submission because of assumptions about how they might be assessed.

We think it is appropriate that REF allows flexibility in terms of where health services research is returned, and do not think that a fundamental change to REF structures 8is required.

However, to better reflect the contribution of health services research, we suggest:

1. Specific attention to health services research expertise on UOA2 panel, matching in terms of numbers/proportion public health and primary care, to ensure that returns are assessed appropriately and open to diverse methods, including qualitative research, implementation science and policy research.
2. Ensuring health services research expertise on other panels, to ensure appropriate assessment of submissions across the wider UoAs, with appropriate cross referral to UoA2.