

Coventry University

Research Committee Document RC11/7
Academic Board Document B85/2

Code of Practice on Selection of Staff for the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Approved by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, July 2012

1 Background and Purpose

.1

For the forthcoming REF, HEFCE requires HEIs to confirm that they have adopted, documented and implemented an appropriate internal code of practice to underpin the preparation of submissions and selection of staff for inclusion in the submission. In summary this must demonstrate how the Institution will adhere to the requirements of UK Equality Legislation, much of which has changed in recent years.

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In the REF HEIs should submit the work of all of their excellent researchers including those whose volume of research output has been limited for reasons covered by Equality and Diversity guidelines, e.g. for reasons appertaining to maternity / adoption leave, part-time working, disability or age.

.3

This document sets out the internal Code of Practice which needs to be applied across all Units of Assessment (UoA) [See Annex A for current list of Units]. The Code is aligned to the equality guidance for the REF (<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/our-projects/REF>). For a summary of the relevant legislation see section 2.2 below.

2 Basic Principles

.1

This Code has been developed to inform and underpin Coventry University's selection of staff for submission to the REF. It is designed to demonstrate how the University includes its excellent researchers in its submission on the basis of processes that are fair and thorough.

As shown in this Code the University will ensure its work in relation to the REF is

- Transparent
- Consistent
- Accessible and
- Inclusive

All staff involved in selecting researchers for the REF are required to familiarise themselves with this Code and to demonstrate adherence to it in their work.

The Institution will thus make clear:

- (a) The responsibilities of the relevant senior staff when undertaking the selection process;

(b) The terms of reference of the Research Committee and the REF Working Group, both of which are central to the decision making concerning the submission;

(c) The Equality Legislation training required and undertaken by those involved in the process;

(d) The criteria for selection of staff for each UoA;

(e) The arrangements for publication and dissemination of this document and access to further information via the University's intranet (Staff Portal).

Equality Legislation

.2

The University will ensure that it adheres to Equality Legislation.

It is important that all staff involved in the University's submission to the REF understand the Equality Act 2010 and, in particular, their duties and rights, be they excellent researchers or involved in the selection process. Specific information on training is given in section 3.5 below. However, below is a summary of this Act.

The Equality Act 2010 harmonised the vast majority of legislation on equality, including the Disability Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act, Sex Discrimination Act and Employment Regulations on age, religion or belief and sexual orientation. In bringing these Acts together, the new legislation strengthened rights of non discrimination and extended coverage of this to nine 'protected characteristics'; namely

- Age
- Disability (including long term health conditions)
- Ethnicity (including nationality)
- Gender reassignment (Trans)
- Marriage or civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity (including adoption)
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

In addition the new concept of 'discrimination by association' extends coverage to others e.g. relatives, carers.

This means in relation to the REF:

For research-active staff: the right to not be treated less favourably for reasons listed above; also the right to request a reduction in the number of outputs (normally four) required due to the impact of one of the above-listed characteristics on their ability to produce outputs or work productively between 1 January 2008 and 31 October 2013 (see section 4.7 below).

For all staff involved in the selection process (as listed in section 3 below): the obligation to not discriminate or treat a person less favourably for a reason related to any of the characteristics listed above; also to disseminate information on how individual staff circumstances will be considered (including Annex B) to all staff within their area.

Equality Impact Assessment

.3

In line with HEFCE requirements, the University is undertaking a longitudinal Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) of the process culminating in the submission to the REF. Coverage of this will include all stages of staff selection, formulation and dissemination of

this Code, training, process for requesting reduced outputs due to personal circumstances, appeals and mock exercises. It will include both quantitative and qualitative data; in particular an analysis (by age, disability, ethnicity and sex) of staff included at all stages of selection compared with those eligible; also of staff utilising the appeals process.

In addition to meeting requirements of HEFCE this process will assist the University in its duty to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

This duty will be central to the work on the University's submission to the REF. When completed the EIA will be posted on the University's web site.

3 Decision-Making Process

Selection and Training of Responsible Senior Officers

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Decisions about submissions for the REF are important to the future of the University and are therefore made by staff at a senior level within the University with guidance from appropriate sources, for example, External Advisers with experience of a recent Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

.2

The Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) has overall responsibility for University's REF submission and the Director of Research has responsibility for the preparation of the submission.

.3

Where UoAs are closely aligned in subject terms with a Faculty or School, the Director of Research requested that the respective Associate Dean (Applied Research) nominate one person with the appropriate experience and management skills to act as Leader for each UoA. This would normally be a member of staff likely to be submitted to the UoA but was not necessarily the case. The major criteria for nomination were that the person should be able to:

- (a) Communicate with and co-ordinate responses from the UoA effectively.
- (b) Organise the submission of the REF documentation to tight deadlines.
- (c) Understand the criteria and standards that will apply to judge the quality of research in one or more UoA.
- (d) Help the REF Working Group reach judgements on the quality of a UoA submission and of individual researchers.

.4

The nomination was normally based on the judgement of the Associate Dean (AR) in consultation with the Dean and with members of the UoA where required. The Director of Research then confirmed the selection to the Dean, the Associate Dean (AR) and the UoA Leader.

Training

.5

The University has an on-line training package on Equality which has been updated following the Equality Act 2010. All staff with a role in determining the University's submission (as listed in this section) will be required to complete this package. It will also be promoted to all academic staff to encourage increased awareness of their rights and responsibilities under the Equality Act.

In addition the Equality and Diversity Manager will deliver training sessions specifically tailored to raising awareness and understanding of the requirements of the REF. The training will use the materials, including case studies, developed by the Equality Challenge Unit to ensure relevance and comprehensive coverage. As above, this training will be mandatory for all staff involved in the selection process but will also be offered to any member of academic staff who wishes to attend.

Identical sessions will be run on different days and at different times to facilitate attendance. The programme for the training will be posted on the Staff Portal site to increase staff confidence that issues relating to personal circumstances will be handled sensitively and treated fairly.

Committees and Decision-making Groups

.6

The University's Research Committee has overall responsibility for overseeing the development and preparation of the University's REF submission. The membership of the Research Committee is drawn from across the University and comprises senior academic staff, professional services staff and postgraduate research students. It recommends to the Academic Executive and University Board for approval relevant policy documents (including this Code of Practice and associated documents) and its selection of UoA and individual researchers for submission. Final decisions concerning the selection of staff and submission of UOAs will be determined by a sub-group of the Academic Executive.

The Research Committee has established an UoA Leaders Forum to undertake the detailed preparation for the REF. This is chaired by the Director of Research. A small advisory group has also been established in order to offer guidance to the Research Committee and UoA Leaders, and to ensure that University processes operate effectively in local conditions. This advisory group meets on an ad hoc basis; its membership comprises the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Associate Deans, and it is chaired by the Director of Research.

4 Guidance on Selection and Submission

Appointment of External Advisors

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External Advisors are appointed by the University in conjunction with each UoA on the basis of their knowledge and experience of the REF within the relevant academic disciplines.

Selecting staff for submission

.2

For the REF, Coventry University will make use of internal and relevant external expertise to select staff:

- (a) For those UoAs where only classified quality profiles will be achieved for research activity;
- (b) Who clearly meet the published UoA's criteria with outputs and other indicators that are likely to be assessed as having an excellent quality profile for their research activity;

(c) Whose research activity matches the overall direction and strategy for the UoA;

(d) To achieve the highest median quality profile for the UoA and University.

.3

In line with HEFCE Guidance each UoA, as part of the description of the research environment, will provide evidence of how the submitted unit promotes equality and diversity.

Communicating the process to staff

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All research-active staff will be contacted by e-mail indicating both the criteria for selection by their respective UoA and the existence of this Code. Staff were requested to provide details of their outputs for a Developmental Review conducted in early 2011 and will be asked to update this information for a Mock Review in 2012.

.5

All staff are made aware by regular email communications that they may be eligible for inclusion in the REF, and that individual circumstances are taken into account. This Code will be made available on the University's Intranet (Staff Portal) and promoted in the staff E-dition bulletins. Staff who are absent from the University for an extended period will be contacted at their home address with information about the Code.

Timescale and Process for Decisions and Feedback

.6

Initial long list selection will take place following a summary Mock REF Review in the Summer Term 2012 (for more details see Annex C – REF Timetable). Staff will be informed at this point whether they are included or excluded from this list by individual letter written by the Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Academic). Outline feedback on performance will be provided to all staff and the UoA as a group, whilst more detailed feedback will be provided on request to individual members of staff.

7

The final decision on the UoAs to be submitted and the staff to be included will be made following a final REF Review in September 2013. Staff included within the submission will be informed in writing. Staff not included in the UoA will be informed in person by the Deputy-Vice Chancellor (Research) who will also provide written feedback on the reasons for not putting them forward to the REF.

Personal and Individual Circumstances

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In determining the number of outputs staff are required to submit, the institution will observe the definitions of individual staff circumstances provided in the published REF 'Panel criteria and working methods' (January 2012) available at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/pubs/2012/01_12/

.9

To ensure that REF processes are fair, Coventry University is collecting data on individual circumstances from all staff eligible for submission. The data will be used to identify which staff are eligible for submission with fewer than four outputs. Summary level data collected may also inform Coventry University's monitoring of staff selection procedures at the institutional level.

In determining whether eligible staff may be submitted to the REF with fewer than four research outputs, the University's REF Personal Circumstances Panel (PCP) will take the following circumstances into consideration:

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- Early career researcher (started career as an independent researcher on or after 1 August 2009)
- Part time employment
- Career break or secondment outside of the higher education sector in which the individual did not undertake academic research
- Maternity leave, statutory adoption leave, and additional paternity leave (taken by partners of new mothers or co-adopters)
- Disability (including conditions such as cancer and chronic fatigue)
- Ill health, injury or Long term Health Condition
- Mental health conditions
- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, adoption, paternity or childcare **in addition to** periods of maternity, statutory adoption or additional paternity leave taken. This could include for example, pregnancy related illness and health and safety restrictions in laboratory and field work.
- Other caring responsibilities (including caring for an elderly or disabled relative)
- Gender reassignment

All staff will be notified about these procedures and are encouraged to consider completing a personal circumstances disclosure form (Annex B). Within Coventry University, the information that is thereby provided will be seen only by members of the REF PCP: Professor Ian Marshall, Deputy-Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor Neil Forbes, Director of Research, and Sarah Lewis, Equality and Diversity Manager.

Confidentiality will be observed and information will be stored securely.

Information provided on the form may be shared externally as directed by HEFCE for the purposes of evidencing any reduction in the number of research outputs.

Fixed-term and part-time staff

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The University is mindful of the Fixed-term and Part-time Regulations and will ensure it does not discriminate against staff on grounds of their contract status. Thus employees whose contract is either fixed-term or part-time will have equality of opportunity and access to the same facilities and training programmes as full-time, permanent members of staff.

5 Appeals

An appeals process is required for two scenarios:

- 1) Where an individual has produced the requisite outputs within the required time frame and believes they should be submitted for the REF, but has not been selected.
- 2) Where there are personal mitigating circumstances that have prevented an individual from producing the requisite outputs in the relevant period and they have made a request to the 'Personal Circumstances Panel' (PCP) to be submitted on the basis of fewer outputs, but the PCP has decided their case is not strong enough.

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Where an individual wishes to make an appeal, in the appropriate circumstances, against either the decision to not submit them for assessment in the REF or the decision of the PCP, a panel will be convened to consider the appeal.

The panel will be chaired by the Dean of the individual's own Faculty, and will also include another senior member of Academic staff (e.g. a Dean, Associate Dean, PVC or Head of Department) and a member of staff from Human Resources (e.g. a Business Partner, or another member of the senior management team).

The individual will be required to make a written submission to the panel explaining why they believe they should be included in the REF submission or their required number of outputs reduced, and the panel may make enquiries of the PCP and/or relevant members of staff within the appellant's Faculty, e.g. as to the reasons for the decision not to submit the appellant or to seek corroboration of any evidence presented by the appellant.

The panel may meet to discuss the appeal or, to expedite the process, may consider the evidence remotely and share feedback by telephone, email or other appropriate means. The panel will consider all of the available evidence and the Chair will inform the individual and (if appropriate) the PCP of the outcome within 10 working days of receiving the appeal.

The outcome of the appeal will be recorded in writing, detailing the rationale for the decision.

6 Further Information

.1 Information about the University's procedures and arrangements for submitting to the REF is available on the Staff Portal.

.2 Information on equality within the University is available from the Equality and Diversity Manager; ext. 7148 or e-mail sarah.lewis@coventry.ac.uk .

.3 Additional information on equality, including the texts of legislation, is available from the Equality Challenge Unit – www.ecu.ac.uk
