

# **De Montfort University**

## **REF 2014 Code of Practice**

### **Introduction**

Each institution making a submission for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 is required to develop, document and apply a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for their REF submissions. Institutions will be required to submit their Codes of Practice to the REF team by 31 July 2012. All Codes of Practice will be published with the rest of the submissions at the end of the assessment process.

This document sets out the approach which will be taken by De Montfort University in preparing its REF 2014 submission.

De Montfort University has a genuine commitment to equality and values the diversity of its staff and students. There are a number of active involvement groups that provide opportunities for both staff and students to have their say and contribute to service improvement. The University's Equality and Diversity policies, Equality Schemes and Reports are published on the University's web site/Intranet. See [Equality and Diversity](#)

Plans and Procedures for the preparation of DMU REF Submissions have been Equality Impact Assessed in accordance with University's Equality and Diversity policies and procedures. See [Equality impact assessment/equality analysis](#)

Further details of the Equality impact Assessment process is given on page 6 of this Code of Practice

### **University Research Strategy/Strategic Plan for Research**

Preparations of REF submissions will be guided by the University's Research Strategy approved by the Board of Governors in 2009, and by any new Research Strategy approved by the Board of Governors. The 2009 Strategy's stated objective is 'to expand the range and volume of research activity across the University, while continuing to drive up quality, so that a mature and sustainable research environment is created' and the draft 2012-15 strategy articulates the desire to 'attain, at a minimum, internationally recognized research excellence in *all* areas of DMU research activity ... We recognize the necessity of placing research at the heart of our learning community and remain committed to a programme of not only expanding our research base but also deepening our research interventions.' It is recognised that the external environment is challenging and that DMU needs to prepare for the REF whilst also ensuring that research supports our teaching programmes and underpins our commercial activity and community links. Research excellence comes from expert, committed research teams in the Faculties, and the recruitment, retention and development of excellent research staff, alongside a robust funding base, is all-important.

The primary consideration underpinning all decision making in relation to the REF 2014 will be to ensure that submissions are of the highest possible quality.

## **Management structure and responsibility for decision making**

A University REF Steering Group has been established to guide the University's REF submission process. (The membership and Terms of reference for the Group are attached as an Appendix.) The group is chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and is ultimately responsible for decisions on submission of staff to the REF 2014 exercise and approving the final version of the submission. Final decisions on staff inclusion will be guided by comments from external reviewers, Pro Vice-Chancellor/Deans of Faculties, Heads of Schools/Departments, Faculty Heads of Research and Unit of Assessment Co-ordinators.

The membership of the Steering group is as follows:

Vice Chancellor  
Pro Vice-Chancellor Research and Innovation  
Director of Research, Business and Innovation Office  
Deputy Vice Chancellor  
One Professor, appointed by the Vice Chancellor  
REF Director

## **Approval of the Code of Practice**

This code of practice has been approved by the University Executive Board after consultation with the Research Committee, relevant trade unions, and Black, and Minority Ethnic (BME), Lesbian Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LBGT) and Disabled staff groups.

A copy of the code will be made available on the University Web site and Intranet. Copies in alternative formats will be made available if required. Attention will be drawn to the Code of Practice during internal staff briefings and workshops relating to the REF. Attention will also be drawn to the Code of Practice when information is sent to all staff (including those absent from the University) regarding the arrangements for considering individual circumstances as detailed on page 5 of this document.

## **Training**

All staff involved in making decisions about staff to be submitted to REF 2014 (Steering Group Members, Faculty Heads of Research, UoA Co-ordinators, Individual Circumstances Review Group and REF Appeals Review Group members) will have undertaken appropriate Equality and Diversity training offered by the University's People and Organisational Development Directorate (POD). In addition, specific training in relation to selection of staff for the REF will be arranged by the Research, Business and Innovation Office (RBI) in conjunction with POD. Use will be made of training material made available on the Equality Challenge Unit web site. Attendance at this REF specific training will be mandatory. Adherence to this policy will be monitored and attendance at all training recorded on individual staff records.

## **Process for developing the submission**

In early 2010 a list of potential UoA submission areas was drawn up. PVC / Deans of Faculties were asked to nominate appropriately experienced senior staff to lead the preparation of UoA submissions. These nominations were approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation. A list of REF UoA co-ordinators was made available on the University intranet site. It is anticipated that all co-ordinators will work closely with Faculty Heads of Research and Heads of Schools/ Departments to identify appropriate staff, 'outputs' and case studies to be included in draft UoA submissions. The process will normally involve talking on a one-to-one basis with individual staff. The list of UoA submission areas/UoA co-ordinators will be reviewed and adjusted should circumstances require this (ie loss of staff, etc).

Information about the REF and about plans and preparations for submissions has been made available on the University Intranet and has been communicated to all staff through meetings, events and briefings. Staff have been encouraged to participate in discussions about the issues relating to the REF and to raise any concerns they may have with their line manager, relevant senior staff with responsibility for research coordination and review, the RBI or POD.

For each of the years 09/10, 10/11 and 11/12 Faculties/Research Institutes have been asked to carry out a 'Readiness for REF' exercise in which each member of academic staff in the Faculty/Institute whose primary employment function is to undertake 'Research' or 'Teaching and Research' is assessed according to the number and quality of their research 'outputs'. All relevant staff, including those who are part-time and/or fixed term whose contracts continue past the census date, have been included in these reviews. An important element of these exercises is staff development and mentoring to ensure the highest quality and volume of submissions.

'Readiness for REF' assessments will continue to be carried out by Faculty Heads of Research in consultation with Department/School Research Co-ordinators /Heads of Departments/Schools through 2013. In most cases the process will involve discussions with the individual members of staff concerned who will have been asked to identify their 'best' outputs to form a portfolio of work for possible inclusion in the REF submission.

To facilitate these annual 'Readiness for REF' exercises a standard Research Record template has been created. All academic staff are asked to return/update their Research Record on an annual basis, with nil returns recorded. The records can also be used by individual staff as part of the Annual Development Review (ADR) procedure, if they so wish.

## **External Review of outputs and draft submissions**

As part of the preparations for REF submission, the University has already sought, and will continue to seek, external advice on the quality of outputs being put forward for inclusion in a REF submission. External Advisors have been selected on the basis of their relevant experience, e.g. being a member of a previous RAE Panel. External Advisors have been given guidance as to the appropriate level of detailed comment they should provide on individual outputs. Comments made by External Advisors appointed by the University will be viewed alongside other evidence about the quality of outputs and appropriateness of draft submissions. All External Advisors appointed by the University are made aware of the Code of Practice.

## **Criteria for selection of staff for inclusion in the REF submission**

As stated above, the primary consideration underpinning all decision making in relation to the REF 2014 will be to ensure that submissions are of the highest possible quality. The University Steering Group aims to maximise the University's performance in terms of number of FTEs submitted and quality profile. However, it will be necessary to make decisions that are strategic and in the best interests of the university and although the university aims to submit the work of as many of its excellent researchers as possible, any decision not to include a member of staff should not be taken as an indication that the University considers the research carried out by those staff to be unsatisfactory. For example, it may not be possible to include the work of researchers whose areas of expertise fall outside of the UoAs to which DMU will submit.

All decisions on whether to include individual members of staff in the submission will be made on the basis of the quality of research outputs and contribution to the research environment made by each researcher. Account will be taken of the weightings given to elements which make up the submission and to REF Panel Criteria and Working Methods.

Only academic staff in post on the census date (31<sup>st</sup> October 2013), with a contract of 0.2 FTE or greater, and whose primary employment function is to undertake 'Research' or 'Teaching and Research', can be considered for inclusion in the submission.

## **Treatment of Individual circumstances**

The REF guidelines clearly indicate that equality-related individual circumstances that might have had an effect on an individual's contribution to a submission should be taken into account by REF panels. All staff will be made aware of this provision through briefings and direct communication and will be requested to inform the University confidentially of any circumstances that may have had a material impact on their ability to produce the expected volume of research outputs. To ensure fairness UoA co-ordinators, Heads of Research, etc, have been advised to consider the quality of outputs first, then the quantity. If a member of staff has fewer than the required number of outputs of the appropriate quality, then equality related circumstances may be considered.

Circumstances that may significantly constrain a member of staff's ability to produce four outputs include:

- Early Career Researcher status (defined as staff who started their careers as independent researchers on or after 1 August 2009; full definition of Early Career Researcher given in the Guidance for REF Submissions documentation)
- Part-time working
- Absence due to maternity/paternity or adoption leave
- Constraints related to pregnancy or maternity in addition to a clearly defined period of maternity leave (e.g. medical issues, health and safety restrictions in laboratories, constraints on the ability to travel due to breast-feeding)
- Child care or other caring responsibilities
- Disability, including temporary incapacity that lasts for at least 12 months
- Ill health or injury
- Mental health conditions

- Breaks for gender reassignment related processes and procedures
- Secondments or career breaks outside of HE sector during which the individual did not undertake academic research

The University HR database holds details of those staff who have had significant periods of absence (e.g. long term sick leave, maternity leave). These records will be used to confirm information provided by individual staff.

At an appropriate time in advance of the deadline for submissions for the REF, the University POD Directorate will communicate with all relevant academics (those on FT and PT, 'Research' and 'Teaching and Research' contracts) asking them to indicate if there are any individual circumstances that may have constrained their ability to produce four outputs. Staff will be invited to provide information 'in confidence' to a named individual within POD by returning an Individual Staff Circumstances Disclosure Form. POD will make special arrangements to communicate with any member of staff absent from the University on long term sick leave/maternity leave, etc. by email and through other personal communications. Staff will be invited to discuss their circumstances and/or the support provided with an appropriate person, for example a HR Partner/HR Officer or line manager. It is recognised that staff circumstances may change right up to the REF submission date. Staff will be able to download copies of the Individual Staff Circumstances Disclosure Form from the University web site and submit it at any stage up until end of March 2013.

A 'REF Individual Circumstances Review Group', consisting of the PVC Research & Innovation, Deputy Director of HR, Research Strategy/REF Manager, and University Head of Equality & Diversity will meet as appropriate to review the circumstances put forward to ensure that they fall within the criteria indicated in the REF2014 Guidance on Submissions and to make recommendations to the REF Steering Group. Sensitive information submitted by individual members of staff will be kept confidential to the Individual Circumstances Review Group. The DMU REF Steering group will not be given details regarding any individual's circumstances and will only receive a recommendation if it is felt appropriate that fewer than four outputs can justifiably be included in the submission.

### **Early Career Researchers**

The REF submission guidelines allow for staff with less than four outputs who are 'early career researchers' to be indicated in a submission. Every effort will be made to identify staff who can be considered 'early career researchers' and to encourage their inclusion in a submission. At De Montfort University it is recognised that research staff at all levels make a very important contribution to the creativity, reputation, and financial strength of the institution and we are fully committed to the principles of the 'Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers' which relates to all research staff, from Research Assistant to Professor.

The focus of activity in different part of the University is different – some areas have particular strengths in teaching, vocational training and corporate development activities. Some academic staff join the university with significant business or industrial experience. Such staff may become research active at a later stage than an average researcher who follows the UG/PG/PhD student/Post doctoral researcher route. Consideration will be given to including such staff in the REF submission as an 'Early Career Researcher' with fewer than four outputs if they fit the REF definition of early career researcher and if the quality of their research warrants this.

## Appeals Procedure

At an appropriate time well before the deadline for submissions the POD Directorate will work with the RBI Office to arrange for all relevant academics (those on FT and PT, 'Research' and 'Teaching and Research' contracts) to be informed whether they are provisionally being selected/not selected for inclusion in the REF submission, and to advise staff about the appeal procedure. Information about where to access the final version of the Code of Practice will also be included in this communication which will also be sent to members of staff absent from the university, as described previously. Staff will be encouraged to speak to their Head of Department/Unit of Assessment Co-ordinator /Research, Business and Innovation Office if they require clarification as to the reasons why they are being selected/not selected. Staff who feel that the decision to select/not select them for inclusion in the REF submission should be reconsidered will be asked to outline their case in writing and send it, in confidence, to the Research Strategy/REF Manager. A template for this purpose will be made available.

A REF Appeals Review Group, who are independent of decisions on the selection of staff, will meet to consider any appeals and will inform the REF Steering Group if it is felt appropriate that the decision regarding selection should be amended. This panel will be chaired by a member of the Board of Governors and will, in addition, consist of the Director of Student and Academic Services, two Representatives of the Professoriate with relevant experience, and a representative of People and Organisation Development.

The Chair of the Appeals Panel will request any information deemed relevant to the case and a meeting of the appeals panel will be arranged to consider this information along with the member of staff's appeal statement. Following the meeting, the Appeals Panel will write to the appellant, carbon copied to the chair of the REF Steering Group, detailing their reasons for a) supporting the case of the appellant, or b) upholding the decision of the REF Steering Group.

If the Appeals Panel supports the case of the appellant then arrangements will be made for the REF Steering Group to be reconvened to amend the submission.

As illustrated in the table on pg 9 of this Code of Practice, staff can normally return Individual Circumstances Disclosure Forms until March 2013, whilst provisional decisions about selection of staff will be communicated in February. This is to allow staff who have not previously done so the opportunity to notify the institution of additional (not already taken into account) individual circumstances, and for the institution to revise initial selections in the light of this further information if appropriate. The submission deadline for registering appeals will normally be 29<sup>th</sup> April 2013 and the Appeals panel will be activated in May/June 2013. These timings have been selected to allow time for the Individual Circumstance process to complete before the Appeals process begins. However, there may be exceptional cases where a later individual circumstances statement or appeal needs to be considered (e.g. if a member of staff who joins us in May 2013 and wishes to appeal against their non-selection). We therefore reserve the right to recall either panel to consider any such exceptional appeals on a case-by-case basis as appropriate.

## **Equality Impact Assessment**

The University's initial plans and procedures for preparations for the REF have been equality impact assessed. All Equality Impact Assessments are published on the University web site. See [Equality impact assessment/equality analysis](#).

This Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is part of an on-going process to provide a thorough and systematic analysis of our selection policies and to understand whether these policies have a detrimental impact upon particular groups and to prevent indirect or direct discrimination. The EIA will also help both to identify inadvertent discrimination that may have occurred and to highlight positive impacts on the achievement of equality. The EIA will be reviewed and revised at key points in the process with major dates for revision being in the period before the initial selection staff in February 2013, to inform any appeals, and post the normal appeals process but before the final submission. It is noted that the EIA will be used in this context to ensure that any necessary changes to prevent discrimination and to promote equality are reflected in the selection of staff.

The initial EIA has been informed by analysis of staff returned in the 2008 RAE exercise (described below), and both the Code of Practice and EIA were developed in dialogue with groups representing those with protected characteristics (see pg 2). As the REF selection process develops, more detailed analysis of data from those staff who are eligible to be returned will be fed in. The institution reserves the right to undertake an EIA at the UoA level if there is any perception of an imbalance within a specific UoA. This policy has been drafted through a synthesis of the institutions existing procedures (which can be accessed on the link referred to above) and following consultation of paragraphs 212-218 in the REF Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions.

### **Action taken as a result of the Initial EIA of Plans and Procedures for REF Preparations**

DMU diversity data collected for the RAE in 2008 indicated that women may be under-represented in the research community at senior levels (i.e. fewer women than men were selected for the RAE). However, the University is committed to the advancement of the careers of women, especially in science, engineering and technology subjects, where the data indicates that women are particularly underrepresented in the senior research community. The University has been awarded membership of the Athena Swan Charter – an initiative which recognises and celebrates good employment practice for women working across science, engineering and technology areas in higher education and research.

The Equality Challenge Unit Report on 'The Impact of the Process to Promote Equality and Diversity in the RAE 2008' indicated that across all HEIs no significant differences were noted with regard to ethnicity and that numbers of staff with a disclosed disability 'were so small that it was not possible to draw any meaningful conclusion from the data made available'. Notwithstanding this, the University is committed to employing and developing the abilities of all our disabled staff and has been awarded the Disability Two Ticks kite mark. DMU also has a Disabled Staff Network. Consultations with this group are planned to try to identify any issues relating to the selection of staff for the REF/barriers to the career advancement of staff with disabilities.

The University has joined the Stonewall's Diversity Champions programme, evidencing a clear commitment to improving the working environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual

(LGBT) staff. A Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) staff group, a Disabled staff group and a Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT) staff group meets regularly in the University. Consultations with these groups have sought to identify any issues relating to the selection of staff for the REF/barriers to the career advancement of researchers.

### **Support for Fixed-Term and Part-time staff**

Fixed-term and part-time academic staff on 'research' and 'teaching and research' contracts are given equal consideration to full-time staff for inclusion in REF submissions subject to the standard eligibility criteria (e.g. in post on the census date [31<sup>st</sup> October 2013], with a contract of at least 0.2 FTE).

Access to internal funding supporting research, such as the University Revolving Investment Fund for projects and a research leave scheme for individuals, is open to fixed-term and part-time staff as well as full-time permanent staff on 'research' and 'teaching and research' type contracts.

Fixed term and part-time staff are encouraged to take part in researcher development opportunities of all kinds, both those organised centrally and in Faculties/Departments.

Where possible meetings and events are held at times that are convenient for part-time staff and staff with caring responsibilities. Presentation materials from meetings/events are normally posted on the intranet or circulated to as wide an audience as possible.

All members of staff with questions/concerns are positively encouraged to approach staff in the Research, Business and Innovation Office for information or for an individual briefing on any aspect of the REF process.



### Indicative Timetable for DMU REF Preparations

January to July 2012	REF related Equality & Diversity Training to be arranged for all staff involved in selection of staff for the REF
31 <sup>st</sup> July 2012	Deadline for submission of Code of Practice to HEFCE
May 2012	Staff to be invited to submit details of any individual circumstances. An Individual Circumstances Disclosure form may be downloaded and submitted for consideration until end March 2013.
February 2013	Staff to be informed if it is proposed that they be included/not included in the REF submission and provided with details of the appeal process.
29 <sup>th</sup> April 2013	Deadline for Appeals
May/June 2013	Appeals Panel to meet to consider any appeals
July/August/September	Individual Circumstances Review Group/Appeals Panel to be recalled to consider exceptional appeals on a case-by-case basis as appropriate
October 2013	Final consideration and approval of whole REF submission
November 2013	REF Submission Deadline

## **The University Research Excellence Framework (REF) Steering Group**

### **Terms of Reference**

The Research Excellence Framework Steering Group is responsible for overseeing the University's preparations for and submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). In particular it aims to optimise the submission the University makes. The Group reports to the University Executive Board via the Vice Chancellor. Membership of the group is determined by the Vice Chancellor.

In pursuance of its aim the Group will:

- a) Make strategic decisions about which particular Units of Assessment (UoAs) the University will make returns to and about the assignment of staff to particular units of assessment
- b) Make strategic decisions about the standards of excellence expected for staff to be included in the submission
- c) Make strategic decisions about the inclusion of members of staff in submissions consistent with equal opportunities guidance and equal opportunities legislation.
- d) Will be advised by Faculty PVC Deans, Faculty Heads of Research, UoA Co-ordinators, External Advisors etc on which staff should be considered for inclusion and on the suitability of draft submissions
- e) Receive reports from External Advisors appointed to carry out a review of outputs and to provide feedback on draft submissions
- f) Receive recommendations from the University REF Individual Circumstances Review Group on staff with individual circumstances who it is considered meet the criteria for submission of fewer than the required number of outputs.
- g) Receive recommendations from the University REF Staff Appeals Review Group to reconsider provisional decisions made with regard to the inclusion of particular staff the submission.

### **Operation**

The REF Steering Group will meet regularly in the lead up to the REF submission deadline. This is likely to be at least once per term initially but may be more frequent nearer the REF submission deadline.

All discussion will take place in confidential formal meetings and the reasons for decisions will be recorded in writing.

The terms of reference for the Group will be made available on the University Intranet.