



Harper Adams
University

Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014

Code of Practice

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1. Background

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 is the system put in place by the four UK funding bodies for assessing the quality of research in the UK higher education institutions. It will replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and will be completed in 2014.

Each Higher Education institution making a submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 is required to develop, document and apply a code of practice on selecting staff to include in their submission.

The Harper Adams University (HAU) Code of Practice has accordingly been developed and has been approved by Academic Board. The Code of Practice sets out the process that the University will follow for selecting staff for inclusion in its submission to REF 2014. The Code of Practice covers how individual staff circumstances will be managed, the timetable that will be followed and how information will be communicated.

The Code of Practice has been prepared in such a way as to ensure that the University will adopt a fair, evidence-based and transparent process. The process will ensure that all eligible staff are considered whilst avoiding discrimination and adhering to appropriate legislation. The Code of Practice has been developed by the Harper Adams University REF Steering Group following consultation across the University .

The REF 2014 submission will be an institutional submission, the objective of which is to maximise the outcome of the exercise for Harper Adams University.

Harper Adams University does not intend to use staff selection or non-selection in any other decision-making process. Whether staff have, or have not, been included in our REF submission, will not be used by the University as a measure of research performance of an individual member of staff, lead to any contractual changes nor will it be regarded as material to the University 's promotion procedure.

2. Decision Making

As a specialist institution focusing on education and research in the rural economy, Harper Adams University has approximately 110 FTE academic staff, around half of whom are research active.

Harper Adams University will make a single submission to Panel A, Unit of Assessment 6: Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science.

Harper Adams University intends to submit all eligible staff who are conducting excellent research. This will include staff who have not been able to produce four outputs of work during the assessment period due to constraints covered by the Equality Act 2010. The Equality Act covers:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Harper Adams acknowledges the significant contribution made by staff funded on external fixed-term contracts, and those who work part-time. Staff on fixed-term and part-time contracts, including contract research staff, will be considered for inclusion in the REF 2014 in accordance with the University's submission policy.

The Harper Adams University Code of Practice aims to provide a process which is based on the principles set out by the Equality Challenge Unit Guidance Notes for transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity.

The Code of Practice is designed to provide a clear and consistent guide for preparing Harper Adams University's submission to the REF and selection of staff for inclusion.

Each eligible member of staff for the REF 2014 submission at Harper Adams University will have access to information on who will be making decisions, how those decisions will be discussed and the consequences of those decisions.

Harper Adams University will conduct equality impact assessments on its policies and processes for staff selection for REF 2014.

The Code of Practice has been approved by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee and Academic Board, and the local UCU branch has been invited to make comments.

3. Selection and Submission Process

Eligible Staff

A list of all staff at Harper Adams University with research outputs is maintained by the Research Grants Administrator and updated on a continuous basis. The Research Grants Administrator acts as committee secretary to the REF Steering Group.

Data

Verification of the outputs to be considered will be sought from individual members of staff. It is the responsibility of individual members of staff to confirm the accuracy of the data held on the Research Grants Administrator's database.

Applicable circumstances

All staff that have produced research outputs will be asked by the Human Resources Department to provide information on whether there are any individual circumstances (see section 5) which have prevented them from publishing four suitable outputs for submission. If appropriate, information on individual circumstances will be provided confidentially to the REF Steering Group or the University Vice-Chancellor.

Training

All staff at HAU undertake Equality and Diversity training. REF Steering Group members will receive additional training prepared by the Equality Challenge Unit (Research Excellence Framework Equality) by the Human Resources Officer responsible for Equality and Diversity, Mrs Jackie Cameron.. This will provide a clear awareness of Funding Council guidance on the legislative context for REF 2014, and the relevant policies within Harper Adams University relating to equality and diversity.

Selection

Selection of individuals for inclusion in the Harper Adams REF 2014 submission will be based on:

- The volume of outputs (taking into consideration the individual staff circumstances) as set out in the REF 2014 guidelines (REF 02.2011).
- The quality of outputs as judged against the criteria set out in the REF 2014 guidelines.
- The fit within Harper Adams' submission to Panel A, Unit of Assessment 6.

Due to its relatively small population of research active staff, Harper Adams University will adopt an inclusive approach to the assessment of output quality. Professorial staff will be invited to take part in a Peer Review Panel. This Panel will make quality assessments of outputs. Outcomes of assessment by the Peer Review Panel will be submitted to the REF Steering Group which will resolve any issues of inconsistency. The REF Steering Group will have the responsibility for making recommendations to be submitted to Academic Board which will be responsible for ratifying the final selection of staff.

Appeals

The REF 2014 submission will be an institutional submission, the objective of which is to maximise the outcome for the University. Decisions made by the Academic Board will therefore be made based on the principle of ensuring staff selection has taken place in order to meet this strategic goal (see section 'REF Steering Group Members (f)' below). An appeals process will be instituted in this situation (see timetable). Following final feedback, individuals who wish to appeal against the final outcome will be invited to do so. However;

- Appeals will not be accepted on the basis of an individual wishing to be excluded from the submission.
- Appeals will be limited to issues of potential bias. This could include the belief that there is prejudice against a particular field of research or methodology.
- Appeals will be accepted if individuals believe that special or complex circumstances have not been applied appropriately such that they have been excluded from the submission.
- Appeals will be accepted if individuals believe that our stated procedure has not been adhered to.
- Individuals will be encouraged to have informal discussions with HR staff prior to an official appeal.

If necessary, a staff member appealing against a decision on the grounds of special or complex circumstances, or on the final outcome of selection will be able to meet with the Vice-Chancellor (who will also have received training prepared by the Equality Challenge Unit) and be accompanied by a local UCU representative or work-place colleague as part of the appeals process.

Equality Impact Assessments

As part of the requirement of the Public Sector Equality Duty of the Equality Act 2010 to consider and understand the effect of our policies on equality, Harper Adams University will

undertake a rolling Equality Impact Assessment on all elements of the selection process: the Staff Selection Policy within the Code of Practice, the 'dry run' selection and the outcome of the process. This will take place over the 18 month period from July 2012 – December 2013. The impact assessment will compare the protected characteristics for which data are available for the group submitted with those not submitted. This assessment will determine whether the selection procedure has had a detrimental impact on particular groups. Results of this assessment will inform future similar exercises.

4. Harper Adams University REF Steering Group

Membership

- Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair); Professor Peter Mills
- Research Co-ordinator; Professor Peter Kettlewell
- Director of International Policy; Professor Brian Revell
- Research Professor; Professor Liam Sinclair
- Research Grants Administrator (Secretary); Ms Kreseda Smith
- Head of Human Resources; Mrs Ennis Vingoe

External Input

A RAE 2008 Panel member for the Unit of Assessment for Agriculture, Veterinary and Food Science was used to provide comment on the quality of outputs published by August 2011. Those comments were used to inform the REF Steering Group and were not used to decide on the final list of staff submitted in the REF, as no information on special circumstances was provided to the external assessor.

Roles and Responsibilities

The REF Steering Group, which reports to the Academic Board, will act as the Steering Group for submission to REF 2014. The REF Steering Group will oversee all preparations including preparation of the Code of Practice.

Chair of the Steering Group

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Chair) is responsible for the overall timetable and preparation of the REF 2014 submission.

REF Steering Group Members

Steering Group members will:

- a) Review submissions of individual members of staff.
- b) Provide a cross University perspective on quality.
- c) Where required, seek external advice on the assessment of individual publications and/or of the portfolio of nominated publications of an individual (in such circumstances, the external advisor will be briefed on the Harper Adams Code of Practice).
- d) Consider appropriate issues of equality and diversity.
- e) Coordinate the internal 'Peer Review Panel' for assessment of quality of outputs.

- f) Make recommendations through the REF Steering Group Chair to Academic Board for inclusion of staff in the Harper Adams submission to REF2014. On the basis of this recommendation, Academic Board will determine the final composition of the submission to REF 2014 and the appropriate quality 'cut off' to meet Harper Adams's strategic aim of maximising the proportion of internationally recognised or internationally excellent research.
- g) Provide feedback to staff who are included and excluded from submission where required.
- h) Draft the 'impact' and 'environment' sections of the REF 2014 submission.

5. Individual Staff Circumstances

Harper Adams University is committed to following the guidelines outlining how REF Panels will allow for variation in circumstances by individual staff. Harper Adams will apply those specific criteria which will allow individuals to be included in the submission to REF 2014 with fewer than four outputs.

Clearly defined circumstances include:

- a) Qualifying periods of maternity, paternity or adoption leave resulting in a reduction of one qualifying output per qualifying period of absence.
- b) Absence from work due to working part-time, secondments or career breaks.
- c) Qualifying as an early career researcher.
- d) Other circumstances that apply to UOA 1-6 (for further details see Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF01.2012), para 86).

Complex circumstances

Complex circumstances based on criteria covered in the Equality Act 2010 will be dealt with using case study examples available from the national Equality Challenge Unit (<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/documents/ref-materials/complex-circumstances-examples>).

Complex circumstances:

- Disability.
- Ill health or injury.
- Mental health conditions.
- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption or childcare that fall outside of, or justify the reduction of further outputs in addition to, the allowances made under clearly defined circumstances.
- Other caring responsibilities (such as caring for an elderly or disabled family member).
- Gender reassignment.
- Other circumstances relating to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation; or relating to activities protected by employment legislation.

Procedure for dealing with individual circumstances

The Harper Adams University Human Resource Department will invite eligible staff (names provided by the Research Grants Administrator) to disclose any clearly defined or complex

circumstances in November 2012 and returns will be accepted no later than 30 November 2012. A template form developed by the Equality Challenge Unit will be used for this process.

Clearly defined circumstances will be dealt with by the REF Steering Group.

Complex circumstances will be dealt with by the Human Resources Department and recommendations made to the REF Steering Group Chair. Appeals against decisions made on clearly defined circumstances should be made by 31 December to the University Secretary (who will not be part of the original decision making process).

Appeals against decisions made on complex circumstances should be made to the Vice-Chancellor who will not have been involved in the earlier process and who will either personally investigate the matter, or request a senior member of academic staff (not involved in the original decision) to do so on his behalf by 31 December 2012.

6. Indicative Timetable

- i) During 2011: An external advisor (RAE 2008 Panel member) was retained to provide an opinion on the quality of outputs produced by individual staff members between 2008 and 2011. Information provided by the assessor was supplied to the REF Steering Group. The REF Steering Group made a preliminary benchmark assessment of output quality.
- ii) July 2012: Commence Equality Impact Assessment on REF Staff Selection Policy.
- iii) 31 July 2012: Code of Practice drafted, circulated for revisions by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Committee members and local branch of the UCU and submitted.
- iv) August 2012: REF Steering Group conduct dry run of selection based on assessments conducted in 2011.
- v) November 2012: Code of Practice communicated to staff (see section 7)
- vi) November 2012: Further Equality Impact Assessment conducted on outcome of dry run selection (to be used to determine any required changes to avoid discrimination).
- vii) November 2012: Staff invited to disclose any clearly defined or complex circumstances.
- viii) November 2012: Peer Review Panel established and review process of outputs commences.
- ix) 14 December 2012: Returns accepted on any clearly defined or complex circumstances.
- x) 21 December 2012: Outcomes of for clearly defined or complex circumstances promulgated and invitation to appeal launched
- xi) 11 January 2013: Appeals against decisions made on clearly defined and complex circumstances to made
- xii) 31 January 2013: Outcome of appeals to be promulgated.
- xiii) January 2013: Outputs of Peer Review Panel to be submitted to the REF Steering Group.

- xiv) April 2013: REF Steering Group to finalise draft list of staff to be included in submission (decisions on a small number of staff may still be outstanding at this stage).
- xv) May 2013: Academic Board makes final decision.
- xvi) May 2013: Staff notified of decisions (for a small number of individuals, a decision may be delayed and these individuals will be informed if this is the case).
- xvii) June 2013; appeals against any aspect of the process to be made
- xviii) July 2013; appeals considered by Vice-Chancellor or nominee (not previously involved in the selection process)
- xix) August; Outcome of appeals promulgated
- xx) 29 November 2013: Submission date.
- xxi) December 2013: Further Equality Impact Assessment conducted on outcomes.

At any stage during the process, staff will be able to enquire from the REF Steering Group Secretary on the progress of the current position relating to their own circumstances.

7. Communication

Harper Adams University is committed to making the REF preparations and submission fair and transparent and will communicate the Code of Practice and selection procedure to staff. This will be achieved by:

- The Code of Practice is available on the Harper Adams University webpage at <http://www.harper-adams.ac.uk/research/ref2014.cfm>
- The Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Chair of the REF Steering Group will individually e-mail all academic members of staff and send a copy of the Code of Practice and timetable for completion of the REF 2014 exercise.
- Staff who are absent from work for an extended period will be sent hard copies to their home address.
- Briefing sessions on the Code of Practice will be offered to staff during the Autumn term 2012.
- The outcome of the selection process will be communicated to staff through the Chair of the REF Steering Group.