



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

(REF) 2014

Code of Practice



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Introduction

The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 is the new system put in place by the four UK Higher Education Funding Councils for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions. It will replace the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and will be completed in 2014¹. This Code of Practice sets out the process to be followed by the University of Oxford for selecting staff for inclusion in its submission to the REF 2014. It also provides information about how the submission will be coordinated, the timeline involved, the support structures available, and how *individual circumstances* will be managed.

The Code is designed to ensure that the University adopts a fair, evidence-based, and transparent process for the selection of staff for the REF 2014 submission. Its purpose is to ensure that all eligible staff who are conducting excellent research are included and that the process is undertaken in such a way as to promote equality, avoid discrimination and comply with legislation.

The Code has been developed by the REF Project Board following widespread consultation across the collegiate University, including staff from protected groups², equality consultative groups, trade union representatives, the Conference of Colleges and Divisional Boards. The remit of the REF Project Board and its membership can be found in Part B.

The Code should be read in conjunction with the University's Integrated Equal Policy³.

1 Further information can be found at <http://www.ref.ac.uk>

2 The Equality Act 2010 covers the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

3 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/eop/missionstatement/integratedequalitypolicy>

A

Background

It is a requirement of the Funding Councils that each higher education institution (HEI) making a REF submission will develop, document and apply a code of practice on selecting staff to include in their submission. The code of practice “will aid institutions in including all their eligible staff in submissions who are conducting excellent research, as well as promoting equality, complying with legislation and avoiding discrimination”⁴. The head of the HEI will be required to confirm adherence to this code on making their submission.

The University’s submission policy

The REF 2014 submission is an institutional return intended to optimise the reputational and financial position of the University of Oxford. Decisions on the composition of the submission, including numbers of staff submitted, will be taken with these aims in mind.

The submission to REF 2014 will be guided by the first objective of the University’s Strategic Plan, which is to produce *internationally leading* research across the University’s disciplinary spectrum⁵. All Category A staff (or Category C where appropriate⁶) will be eligible for inclusion in the submission and the primary criterion for their inclusion will be the quality of their research outputs. This policy of staff selection is consistent across the collegiate University and will underpin all decision-making.

Submission principles

The overarching principle of the Code is that each member of staff who is eligible to be included in the University’s submission should readily be able to find information on the following:

- how a decision is taken;
- who will be taking the decision;
- how the decision can be discussed; and
- the outcome of any such discussion.

As a key measure to support equality and diversity in research careers, individuals may be returned with fewer than four outputs in the assessment, where their circumstances have significantly constrained their ability to produce four outputs or work productively throughout the assessment period. Part E of the Code outlines how the University will identify and deal with such circumstances.

4 Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions (REF 2011.02) Part 4, para 187

5 University of Oxford Strategic Plan 2008/09-12/13. Objective (1): “Lead the international research agenda across the University’s disciplinary spectrum and through interdisciplinary initiatives”

6 For definitions please see Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions (REF 2011.02) Part 3, Section 1

B

Decision-making

The responsibilities of the key participants in the University's preparations for the REF 2014, and the principles on which decisions will be taken, are set out below. All formal bodies will be minuted when discussing REF decision-making.

Training and guidance

Staff who are in decision-making roles receive tailored guidance and training on equality and diversity principles and how these relate to the selection of staff for the REF.

- The objectives of the guidance and training are to ensure that staff have:
- A clear awareness of the legislative context and Funding Councils' guidance;
- An understanding of relevant University policies for equality and diversity and the REF; and
- Confidence in their ability to make fair and transparent decisions and know where to seek additional support and advice as necessary.

Decision-making bodies

The following individuals and committees are responsible for contributing to the development of the University's submission to the REF 2014.

Unit of Assessment (UOA) Coordinators

Description of role and responsibilities

A coordinator has been identified for each UOA to which the University intends to submit a return. UOA coordinators are responsible at the local (departmental/faculty) level for the coordination of the dry run in 2012, and the preparation of the final submission.

Details of the types of activity which the UOA coordinators are expected to undertake or oversee are as follows:

- Recommend, on the basis of the quality of their research outputs, which staff to include in the return. In all cases where they recommend that an individual does not have the required number of outputs of sufficient quality for inclusion as Category A, at least two individuals with relevant expertise will have reviewed the quality of the outputs before the final decision is made. The divisional responsibility for submission decisions will rest with the appropriate Divisional Board(s).
- Deal with **clearly defined** circumstances and determine the minimum number of outputs required.
- Co-ordinate details of publications for submission, and ensure these details are appropriately uploaded to the data collection system.
- Draft supporting documentation in response to the requirements set out in the relevant panel criteria and working methods document.

- Work with the divisional office/departmental administration as appropriate to ensure that data for doctoral degrees awarded, research income, and any other UOA-specific data, have been correctly assigned for 2008–2013.
- Work in accordance with the timetable defined by the Planning and Resource Allocation Section (PRAS), and the relevant division.

Selection and membership

UOA coordinators were identified by Heads of Division following consultation with academic colleagues. They are senior academics who are expected to work with colleagues to deliver their responsibilities. A list of UOA coordinators is available from the University's REF webpage⁷ and states to which division(s) each UOA belongs.

Divisional Boards

Description of role and responsibilities

Each Divisional Board, or a body established by the board and acting on its behalf for matters relating to the REF, will be responsible for establishing the division's timetable to prepare for the UOA submissions within their remit, and for maintaining oversight of the submissions as they develop. The divisional responsibility for submission decisions will rest with the appropriate Divisional Board(s).

Each UOA sits under the appropriate division by discipline. Where UOAs cross divisional boundaries a lead division has been identified, but collaboration with other divisions will take place as necessary. The Board will review all the division's constituent submissions prior to submitting them to the University's REF Project Board for consideration.

Selection and membership

Divisional Boards are responsible, under the University's Council, for oversight and development of the general context of research, in the broad subject area covered by the division concerned, in close consultation with the units of academic administration (i.e. departments or faculties) in the division. Terms of reference and membership of the Divisional Boards can be found on the University webpages⁸.

REF Project Board

Description of role and responsibilities

The Research Committee, which reports directly to Council, will act as the Project Board for the REF2014 submission. The Research Committee will oversee all preparations, including setting the timetable and agreeing the Code of Practice. The Research Committee will consider and approve all submissions for the Units of Assessment to which the University will provide returns, prior to their submission to the Funding Councils. It will also review the dry run submissions from the divisional boards.

7 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/pras/research/ref/>

8 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/councilsec/council/divbd/>

Selection and membership

The Research Committee is responsible on behalf of Council for responding to proposed changes to national research strategy from funding or research councils and for production and approval of any overarching strategies required within the University related to research. Research Committee terms of reference and membership can be found on the university webpages⁹. Membership is drawn from across the collegiate University.

In order to ensure that equality considerations are embedded into the University's REF preparations, the Head of the Equality and Diversity Unit (EDU) will attend as an officer of the Research Committee where it meets as the REF Project Board. The Head of EDU will be supported in her role by the University's consultative groups on equality, which will discuss REF issues as appropriate.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Description of role and responsibilities

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) is responsible for the overall timetable for, and preparation of, the exercise. He will chair review meetings with each UOA coordinator at two key points to check progress and will be the final arbitrator in cross-divisional decisions if necessary.

Selection and membership

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) chairs Research Committee and hence the Project Board, and is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for the overall preparation of the exercise.

REF Equality Committee

Description of role and responsibilities

The REF Equality Committee provides a forum for dealing with **complex** individual circumstances related to the REF in a consistent and, where necessary, confidential manner.

The REF Equality Committee will:

- Deal with all **complex** circumstances (including any cases where there is a mixture of **complex** and **clearly defined** circumstances) regardless of whether they are disclosed centrally or via Unit of Assessment Coordinators/divisions.
- Collect (where necessary, and having discussed with the individual) and review evidence on individual circumstances. Evidence *may* be gathered from the individual, from Occupational Health and from departmental and divisional administrators responsible for personnel matters.
- Apply the REF Guidance, with reference to the worked examples provided by the national Equality Challenge Unit, and decide the minimum number of outputs which can be justified.
- Inform the UOA Coordinator of the minimum number of outputs required.
- Provide feedback to the individual on the outcome (i.e. the minimum number of outputs required); and, where relevant, sign-post the individual to sources of continuing support (e.g. Staff Disability Advisor, Occupational Health).
- Provide guidance, if requested, to Unit of Assessment Coordinators on dealing with **clearly defined** circumstances.

⁹ <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/pras/committees/research/membership/>

Selection and membership

Membership of this Committee was agreed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research and Personnel, to ensure expertise on equality and personnel issues, REF guidance, and academic representation. The members and terms of reference can be found on the University's REF webpage¹⁰.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel & Equality)

Description of role and responsibilities

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel & Equality) will receive and consider appeals related to individual circumstances as described in Part E.

Selection and membership

The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel & Equality) has responsibility for equality issues and is outside the REF decision-making process, therefore they will hear and determine whether an appeal should be upheld.

Right of appeal

The University's decision as to whether an individual's outputs fulfil the criteria of the University's submission policy on quality grounds (as outlined in Part A) is **not subject to appeal**.

The REF 2014 submission is an institutional return intended to optimise the reputational and financial position of the University of Oxford. Decisions on the composition of the submission, including numbers of staff submitted, will be taken with these aims in mind.

Appeals will not be accepted:

- regarding the peer review of the quality of the individual's outputs,
- on the decision as to which UOA an individual's outputs will be returned, or
- by an individual wishing to 'opt out' of the University's submission.

The only situation in which the University will reconsider decisions on whether an individual will be included in the return is **if individual staff circumstances have not been given appropriate consideration and that therefore there may be grounds for submission with fewer outputs**. In these cases, the process set out in Part E "*Appeals against decisions on individual circumstances*" will be followed.

¹⁰ <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/pras/research/ref/equality>



Support

Divisional REF Officers

Each division has identified an Officer who is responsible for co-ordinating the exercise within each division and who will work closely with Unit of Assessment coordinators and the central REF team in PRAS (see below), and ensure the Divisional Board (or any body established by it for matters relating to the REF) is aware of progress, and the timetable for preparation.

Division	Divisional REF Officer	Email
Humanities	Fiona Groenhout	ref@humanities.ox.ac.uk
Maths, Physical and Life Sciences	Lewis Williams	lewis.williams@mpls.ox.ac.uk
Medical Sciences	Tertia Softley	tertia.softley@medsci.ox.ac.uk
Social Sciences	Esther Byrom	esther.byrom@socsci.ox.ac.uk

Central REF team

The central REF team in the Planning and Resource Allocation Section (PRAS) will:

- Service the REF Project Board, and define the University's overall timetable for preparation.
- Work with Divisional REF Officers and UOA coordinators to prepare the overall submission, and offer policy advice and guidance in matters relating to the REF.
- Collect data from sources across the collegiate University relating to staff, doctoral degrees awarded, and research income, and issue them to Divisional REF Officers in a format consistent with that expected by the Funding Councils.
- Act as first contact point between the University and the Funding Councils on matters relating to the REF.
- Have responsibility for the testing and implementation of the REF data collection system, and offer guidance and advice on its usage across the University once issued by the Funding Councils.
- Work with the Equality and Diversity Unit to ensure the University develops, adopts and documents an appropriate internal code of practice, which attends to all relevant equal opportunities legislation in force on the REF census date of 31 October 2013.

Contact	Email
Gillian Rendle (REF Project Manager)	gillian.rendle@admin.ox.ac.uk
General enquiries	ref@admin.ox.ac.uk

D

Timetable and Process

What happens during 2012?

The University will conduct a dry run of the REF during 2012. The dry run will include indications of whether staff are likely to be included in the REF. The dry run returns will be considered by the Divisional Boards or their nominated bodies, and then the University's Project Board, based on staff data available as at the end of December 2011 payroll.

The dry run returns will be submitted by Divisions to the central REF team in the Planning and Resource Allocation Section (PRAS) in June 2012.

The dry run exercise will conclude with an interim equality impact assessment (EIA). The interim EIA will analyse the results of the dry run for differences in submission rates against all the protected characteristics, to the extent that relevant data is available. Qualitative information on decision-making at the UOA level will also be gathered through consultation with a small sample of staff. The outcomes of this equality impact assessment will be reported to the Project Board and used to ensure that any necessary changes to prevent discrimination or promote equality are taken **before** the submission deadline. Any changes will be reflected in the Code of Practice and clearly communicated.

Differences in submission rates that are not the result of inequalities in the selection process will be considered further in the full EIA conducted after the submission to REF. Further details on equality considerations can be found in the appendix.

During Michaelmas Term 2012 the Divisional Boards will consider the likely quality profiles which would result from the dry run information.

What happens during 2013?

During 2013, UOA Coordinators will review and revise the returns prepared for the dry run, making decisions and dealing with staff arrivals and departures. In all cases where they recommend that an individual does not have the required number of outputs of sufficient quality for inclusion as Category A, at least two individuals with relevant expertise will have reviewed the quality of the outputs before the final decision is made.

The REF assesses some aspects of academic work but is not an assessment exercise associated with performance management and has **no link** to individual career development within the collegiate University.

Individuals will be informed whether or not they will be included in the University's return by **5 April 2013**. In a small number of cases it is possible that there will be reasons why a decision on final status will not have been determined by 5 April 2013, and in such cases individuals will be advised of this by letter by this date and kept informed of the process leading to a final decision, which will be advised to them as soon possible afterwards. Staff may contact the relevant Divisional REF Officer with queries relating to their REF inclusion status at any time after 5 April 2013. Information on individuals submitted to REF will not be disseminated

within departments and faculties.

What happens after the submission date?

After the 29 November 2013 submission date, a full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) will analyse the final submission for differences in submission rates against all the protected characteristics, to the extent that the relevant data is available. The full EIA will inform policy and practice on a longer timescale by identifying areas of inequality which should be addressed to ensure that all staff are able to progress in their research careers, and so that inequalities can be addressed where possible in future exercises to assess research excellence.

E

Individual staff circumstances

Guidance has been produced on how national REF panels will deal with individual circumstances that constrained an individual's ability to produce four outputs or work productively throughout the assessment period. Special consideration affects only the decision on the *quantity* of outputs submitted. The University will only apply those grounds that the REF panels have agreed convey eligibility for an individual to be returned with a reduced number of outputs, as outlined below. This section describes how staff may indicate that they qualify for such consideration, while maintaining confidentiality.

Staff may be returned with fewer than four outputs in the assessment, if one or more of the following circumstances¹¹ significantly constrained their ability to produce four outputs or to work productively throughout the assessment period:

Clearly defined circumstances, which are:

- Qualifying as an early career researcher.
- Absence from work due to working part-time, secondments or career breaks.
- Qualifying periods of maternity, paternity or adoption leave¹².
- Other circumstances that apply in UOAs 1-6: junior clinical academics and category C staff who are employed primarily as clinical, health or veterinary professionals¹³.

Complex circumstances that require a judgement about the appropriate reduction in outputs, which are:

- 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.

¹¹ For full definitions of all circumstances, see Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF01.2012), para 69.

¹² Note that an automatic reduction of one output per qualifying period of maternity/paternity/adoption leave is allowed. For further details see Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF01.2012), para 75

¹³ For further details see Panel Criteria and Working Methods (REF01.2012), para 86

Case study examples of **complex** circumstances are available from the national Equality Challenge Unit¹⁴.

Fixed-term and part-time staff

The University acknowledges the very significant contribution made by the wide range of researchers in externally funded contracts, and those who work part-time, to the research undertaken in the University. 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. Details of support for staff can be found in the Code of Practice on the Employment and Career Development of Research Staff¹⁵ which aims to ensure the University provides a supportive environment for research and research careers at an international level.

Process for dealing with individual circumstances

Disclosure

During Trinity Term 2012, all eligible staff will be invited to disclose any clearly defined or complex individual circumstances via a downloadable form available on the University's REF webpages¹⁶ or in hard copy if requested. The form must be returned to PRAS.

Part 1 of the form will invite staff to provide details of any **clearly defined** circumstances and part 2 will allow *confidential* disclosure of **complex** individual circumstances.

Individuals *may* choose to disclose by other routes, for example directly to a Unit of Assessment Coordinator or the relevant division. Where **complex** circumstances arise in this way, they will be passed to the University's REF Equality Committee so that they can be dealt with in a consistent manner.

It is expected that all existing circumstances will be disclosed by staff as soon as possible, and not later than the 5 October 2012. Any circumstances which arise after this date may be disclosed until the 19 April 2013. This deadline is two weeks after the date by which all staff will have been informed of their submission status.

A process for staff joining the collegiate University during 2013 and before the 31 October 2013 will be arranged following the principles established in this Code of Practice.

Decision-making

Clearly defined circumstances will be dealt with by Unit of Assessment Coordinators, and any centrally-disclosed **clearly defined** circumstances will be directly disclosed to Divisional REF Officers and UOA coordinators.

Complex circumstances will be dealt with in confidence by the University's REF Equality Committee, as outlined in Part B.

14 <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/documents/ref-materials/complex-circumstances-examples>

15 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/personnel/cops/rsemp-career/rscoop/>

16 <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/pras/research/ref/equality>

Appeals against decisions on individual circumstances

If individuals believe that their **clearly defined** circumstances have not been given appropriate consideration by the relevant UOA coordinator, they should contact the REF Project Manager (see part C).

If individuals believe that their **complex** circumstances have not been given appropriate consideration by the REF Equality Committee, they may appeal within one month of receiving the decision from the Committee. Individuals should lodge an appeal by informing the REF Project Manager in writing.

Appeals will be considered by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Personnel & Equality) who will, for that reason, not have been part of any previous REF decision-making.

F

Dissemination of this Code of Practice

This Code of Practice is available on the University's REF webpage¹⁷. Each UOA coordinator will be issued with a hard copy of the Code.

The presence of the Code will be disseminated to all REF eligible research-active staff in 2012 (along with an offer to provide it in hard copy for those who cannot access the internet) using the standard divisional dissemination routes. The Code will also be available in accessible formats from the Equality and Diversity Unit.

In accordance with the Data Protection Act, all eligible members of staff from across the collegiate University will receive a letter in 2013 informing them of how their personal details would be used if their outputs were included in the University's return. This letter will include reference to the Code, and details of the PRAS REF website; and will be delivered directly to all relevant staff, including those currently absent.

All Heads of House, Senior Tutors, Directors of the departments of Academic Services and University Collections, and the Director of OUDCE, will be provided with a copy of the Code.

¹⁷ <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/pras/research/ref/equality>

G

Appendix: Further information on equality considerations

The University's approach to its REF2014 preparations, as described in the Code of Practice, has been informed significantly by equality considerations in order to minimise any differential impact on particular groups, especially those with protected characteristics as defined under equality legislation.

Equality impact assessment

The code, and associated guidance to Unit of Assessment coordinators, has been informed by an equality impact assessment (EIA). This had three stages:

- a) The University undertook an equality analysis of the staff selected for submission to RAE 2008 compared to the overall profile of University staff. This analysis suggested that women were slightly less likely to be returned than men, in line with the national figures. The results of this analysis informed a briefing of all UOA co-ordinators in autumn 2011; and the compulsory equality training for co-ordinators delivered in spring 2012. Both sets of briefings highlighted the risks of using citation or other volume data.
- b) In April 2012, the University commissioned an external consultant to conduct an independent qualitative survey of a sample of UOA co-ordinators from a range of disciplines and embracing both large and small UOAs. The consultant conducted semi-structured interviews to question co-ordinators on how they were applying the draft Code of Practice to the selection of staff. Feedback from the survey showed that all co-ordinators understood how to select staff with clearly defined circumstances, but that there was some uncertainty about how staff would be encouraged to disclose complex circumstances and how those disclosures would be handled; and a possible concern that the process for handling jointly authored papers might disadvantage certain researchers. The draft Code was checked to ensure it addressed these points and the cover letter to staff (which included an invitation to disclose circumstances) was amended to provide greater assurances on confidentiality. The University also decided to provide detailed guidance for UOA co-ordinators which sits alongside the Code of Practice, and outlines exactly how individual staff circumstances will be handled. The University completed its 'dry run' exercise based on the Code in June 2012 and is now conducting a detailed quantitative equality analysis of the dry run, comparing the profile of those selected with the overall profile of the University's research and academic staff. The University's selection policy is that all eligible Category A staff, and Category C staff where applicable, will be eligible for submission and that the primary criterion will be the quality of their research outputs in line with the University's strategic objective 'to produce internationally leading research across the disciplinary profile'. If the analysis reveals any disparity between the profile of those selected and our overall staffing profile, we will undertake further qualitative work to understand the reasons for that disparity; make any necessary revisions to the Code or Guidance; and provide feedback to co-ordinators through 1-2-1 meetings.

c) A final equality analysis of the profile of those submitted will be conducted in early 2014 and used to inform a full impact assessment. It is expected that any issues raised will inform longer term strategies within the University to address the recruitment, retention and progression of staff from under-represented groups, alongside our existing commitment to Athena Swan.

Other actions built in to reduce any discrimination

Equality considerations have shaped the content of the Code of Practice, and the University's approach to REF preparations in the following ways:

- The pool for potentially eligible staff has been widely drawn, with subsequent checking to eliminate staff that are not potentially eligible because of their contract type or other verifiable factors. In view of the complexity of the collegiate university, particular care has been taken in dealing with people who hold college-only appointments. This approach is intended to maximise the number of staff deemed eligible for REF submission and to avoid indirect discrimination by assuming ineligibility based solely on system records.
- All decisions on selection of outputs are reviewed by at least two people, to ensure they are evidence-based.
- Tailored REF equality training has been provided for all UOA coordinators and all other staff involved in decisions on submissions
- Internal and external assessors have been used to advise on impact case studies. Divisions are adopting different approaches to preparing studies, but all involve scrutiny of the proposed impact studies.
- A formal structure has been adopted to oversee the entirety of the REF process and to share good practice.
- The Head of Equality and Diversity is a member of the REF Project Board and REF Equality Committee.
- A letter was sent to all staff, including those absent from the institution for any reason, including maternity leave, inviting disclosure of clear and complex individual circumstances, and providing reassurance about confidentiality.
- Any member of staff may contact the Head of Equality and Diversity, the REF Project Manager or, in cases of disability, the Staff Disability Adviser for confidential advice on individual circumstances; and the contact details of these staff have been made widely available. All forms disclosing individual circumstances are processed centrally, to ensure (where necessary) confidentiality. Cases of clearly-defined circumstances are passed back to UOA coordinators, but cases where complex circumstances are disclosed, either alone or in combination with clearly-defined circumstances, are considered centrally.

