

The University of Reading

Research Excellence Framework 2014: Equality & Diversity Code of Practice

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Code of Practice is to support Reading in promoting Equality & Diversity when preparing its submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014. It has been produced in line with the Funding Bodies' requirement that all institutions submitting to REF should develop, document and apply a Code of Practice on selecting staff to include in their REF submissions. The Code seeks to ensure transparency and fairness in the selection of eligible research staff for submission to REF, in order to secure the best possible outcome for the University. Adherence with the Code will also ensure that Reading complies with relevant equalities legislation and avoids discrimination

The Code has been produced following a consultative process with relevant staff groups across the University, including the Equality & Diversity Committee, Staffing Committee and local joint consultative committee with UCU. It was approved by Senior Management Board, Senate and Council in Spring Term 2012. It is available on the University's website (www.reading.ac.uk/humanresources/equality/humanres-policies.aspx). See section 8 for further information on communication of the Code and broader REF-related information.

The Code should be read alongside the University's Equality & Diversity Policy (also available at www.reading.ac.uk/humanresources/equality/humanres-policies.aspx), which commits the University to providing an inclusive environment, which promotes equality, values diversity and respects the rights and dignity of all its staff, students and visitors.

2. Basic Principles

The primary purpose of this Code is to ensure that fair and transparent policies and procedures are used in deciding on those staff to be submitted to REF. In order to ensure this, the Code of Practice is based on the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity.

Transparency: to ensure that the Code is available in accessible format and widely publicised to all relevant staff.

Consistency: to ensure that consistent processes are used in deciding on those staff to be submitted to REF, and that the Code is implemented uniformly across the University.

Accountability: to ensure that staff are aware of who is responsible for decisions relating to the selection of staff in REF.

Inclusivity: to ensure that the University is promoting an inclusive environment so that all eligible excellent research can be submitted to REF.

3. Reading's legal responsibilities

In line with the Equality Act 2010, the University will ensure that its REF policies and procedures do not discriminate unlawfully against individuals because of any of the characteristics listed below. It will also not discriminate unfavourably against individuals who are perceived to have, or are associated with someone with a protected characteristic.

- Age
- Disability
 - The definition of disability is very broad and includes many long-term physical and mental health conditions. Further information on what constitutes disability is outlined in the REF Guidance on Submissions.*
 - As individuals are protected if they are associated with a person who is disabled, the protection also extends to carers of disabled people*
- Gender identity
 - It is recognised that trans people who undergo gender reassignment will need to take time off for appointments and, in some cases, medical assistance, and that transition can be a lengthy and difficult process.*
- Marriage & civil partnership
- Race
 - The definition of race includes colour, ethnic or national origins or nationality.*
- Religion or belief (including non-belief)
 - 'Belief' includes any structured philosophical belief with clear values that has an effect on how its adherents conduct their lives*
- Sex (including breastfeeding and additional paternity and adoption leave)
 - The impact of breastfeeding on a woman's ability to research productively will be taken into account.*
 - People who take additional paternity or adoption leave have similar entitlements to women on maternity leave.*
- Sexual orientation
- Pregnancy or having recently given birth.
 - Primary adopters have similar entitlements to women on maternity leave*

Full descriptions of the protected characteristics covered in the Equality Act are available in the REF Guidance on Submissions (www.hefce.ac.uk/research/ref/subs). Anyone wanting further advice should contact the University's Equality & Diversity Officer.

The University recognises that people with equality related individual circumstances may be submitted to REF with fewer than four outputs, without penalty, if their circumstances have affected their ability to research productively throughout the assessment period. The University is aware that many of these protected characteristics are of a sensitive nature and, accordingly, every effort will be made to ensure confidentiality of any information that is disclosed (see section 6 for more information on the disclosure process).

Fixed term and part-time staff:

The University will also be mindful when deciding on those staff to be submitted to REF that, under fixed-term employees and part-time workers regulations, fixed-term employees and part-time workers are treated as favourably as comparable staff on open contracts or working full-time. Where staff meet the REF eligibility criteria and have the appropriate number of outputs (taking account of their part-time or fixed-term status and other individual staff circumstances), decisions as to whether or not they will be submitted will be made on the basis of the quality of outputs in the same way as for full-time staff and those on open contracts (see section 5).

4. Roles and responsibilities

4.1 REF Steering Group

Membership & responsibilities

The Senior Management Board has delegated responsibility to the REF Steering Group (see Annex 1 for full details of membership and Terms of Reference) for determining which staff and which outputs will be returned in the REF, and for ensuring that this Code of Practice is consistently implemented across the University when making those decisions.

The Group is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research & Innovation (PVC R&I), who has overall responsibility for the University's REF submission. The PVC R&I is supported by the four Faculty Directors of Research, who are responsible for overseeing preparations for REF within their individual faculties. The Chair of the University Equality & Diversity Committee provides guidance on ensuring that the processes used by the Steering Group are fair and transparent and in line with relevant equalities legislation. The Planning Support Officer (Research) acts as secretary to the group and takes minutes of all meetings and discussions. The Deputy Director of HR is available for consultation as necessary.

The Steering Group is responsible for determining which staff and which outputs will be returned to REF. Specifically they are responsible for:

- Reviewing the information provided by the Unit of Assessment (UOA) leads (see below) in the 2012 mock preparatory exercise and the final submission exercise
- As part of the mock exercise, determining the need for any additional external assessment of research outputs, in areas where the Group does not have confidence that its own assessment (having taken the advice of the UOA lead) is sufficiently reliable. Assessors will be asked to comment on output quality only, and not to refer to an individual's suitability for submission to REF.
- Providing feedback to UOA leads on the Group's assessment of the mock submission
- Following completion of the mock exercise in Autumn 2012, making initial judgements about which relevant staff (and outputs) will or will not be submitted to each UOA. As part of this, the group will take account of information about any individual staff circumstances that has been disclosed (see section 5)

- Communicating these preliminary judgements (and a reason for the judgement) to members of staff concerned, in writing, and to UOA leads (within four weeks of the conclusion of the mock exercise)
- Finalising decisions about which staff (and outputs) will or will not be submitted in each UOA in Spring 2013, again taking account of any updated information about individual staff circumstances
- Communicating these decisions (and a reason for the decision) to members of staff concerned (again in writing) and to UOA leads
- Taking account of the outcome of considerations of any appeals hearings
- Finalising and signing off completed Environment Templates
- Overseeing the Equality Impact Assessments that are carried out (see section 9).

Decisions about which staff members' outputs will be included in the submission will be made by the group as a whole, on a consensus basis. If it is not possible to reach a consensus, then a vote will be held.

Training

All members of the Steering Group have taken, and passed, the University's Equality & Diversity on-line training module during the 2011-12 academic session. The module was developed after the 2010 Equality Act came into effect. In addition, the University Equality & Diversity Officer and the Chair of the Equality & Diversity Committee have provided additional REF specific training for the Steering Group, which covered awareness of REF equality & diversity principles, Equality Impact Assessment as applied to REF, ensuring confidentiality, and taking account of disclosed individual circumstances when making submission judgements. The latter part made use of the ECU case studies.

4.2 Unit of Assessment leads

The PVC R&I has appointed one or two senior members of academic staff as Unit of Assessment lead/s for each UOA to which the University intends to make a submission. The selection was based on assessment of their previous research leadership /management experience and knowledge of the subject areas covered by the UOA. The UOA leads are responsible for:

- Requesting and receiving information on outputs of all staff eligible for submission within the UOA
- On the basis of this, advising the REF Steering Group on the quality of research of individual staff members within the UOA
- In consultation with other relevant members of staff in the UOA, preparing draft responses for the UOA's Environment Template

Unit of Assessment leads are NOT responsible for making decisions about which staff will or will not be submitted to REF; nor will they receive or consider information about individual staff circumstances. However, to ensure that they are aware of the overall context, and how personal

circumstances will be taken into account, they have received training on the relevant equality & diversity legislation, institutional related REF responsibilities, ensuring adherence to the basic principles, and how the Steering Group will take account of equality & diversity related staff circumstances.

5. Decision making processes

The University will apply a consistent approach and process across all units of assessment. The University's expectation is that outputs from members of academic staff who meet the Funding Bodies' eligibility criteria will be entered into the REF unless a decision not to do so has been made on the basis of an evaluation of the quantity (in terms of meeting the minimum number required) and / or the quality of the research outputs produced during the assessment period. The decision will take account of the expected level of quality to be attained for the relevant UOA, the particular quality profile of an individual's outputs, and their stage of career. It will also reflect the institutional decision on the volume work assessed to be of a standard below 3* that might be returned. The evaluation of the quality of outputs will be based on internal peer review of outputs (in some cases with advice from external assessors); decisions will not be based to any significant extent on impact factors or citation indices. If a more specific quality threshold is to be applied in one or more UoAs, all eligible staff in the relevant UoA will be informed, in writing, of the threshold prior to the selection process (including how it will be adapted to allow for consideration of individual staff circumstances).

When making decisions, the Steering Group will be mindful of the equality related circumstances outlined in Section 6 of this Code and in Funding Bodies' Guidance on Submissions and Panel Criteria and Working Methods statements, to the extent they have affected the QUANTITY of outputs produced during the assessment period. In doing this, it will ensure that any selection decisions that are made do not unfairly impact on staff with such circumstances. Consistent processes for taking account of equality related circumstances will be used for all units of assessment across the University, and all decisions will be evidenced and recorded.

In order to promote an inclusive environment, it will be made clear to line managers and heads of unit that only PVC(R&I) and Faculty Directors of Research can discuss with staff decisions relating to whether or not their outputs will be selected for submission, and that this will not be done until the relevant evidence is available following the 2012 mock exercise, and updated in Spring 2013.

An initial evaluation of which eligible staff are likely to be submitted to REF (in terms of inclusion of their outputs) will be made by the REF Steering Group following completion of the mock exercise being carried out in 2012. The Steering Group will receive information from UoA leads on the predicted quality level of eligible individuals' outputs (as assessed by peer review and / or external assessment). Where the Steering Group makes the judgement that the staff member 's outputs are unlikely to be included in the submission, the PVC(R&I) will write to the individual concerned (and the Unit of Assessment lead) within four weeks of the conclusion of the evaluation. Staff who feel that these initial judgements are unfair in any way, or have not taken account of all relevant information, will be offered an opportunity to discuss this with the appropriate Faculty Director of Research (in the first instance). The process will operate consistently across the University.

'Final' decisions about which staff members' outputs will be included in the submission will be made by the REF Steering Group in Spring 2013, whilst recognising that, in some cases, these may be subject to pending outputs appearing in time. Where a decision is taken not to include a member of staff's outputs in the submission, the PVC R&I will write to individual concerned (and the Unit of Assessment lead) within four weeks of the completion of the evaluation. The letter will include a reason for the exclusion and information about future actions that are available, including details of the appeals process (see section 7). Again, a consistent process will operate across the University.

Records of all discussions / meetings on staff selection, and all personal data relating to REF, will be kept in line with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Where a decision is taken not to include a particular individual's outputs in the submission, the person's research may still contribute to the submission in other ways; for example, by being a co-author on a paper submitted to REF under another staff member's name, by contributing to an impact case study or the impact statement, or to the information provided on the environment template, or to research income or research student data. Staff will be informed if, and how, their research (other than outputs) has contributed to the submission. The University recognises that staff contribute to the excellence of the university in many diverse ways and, that not being part of the REF submission, in and of itself, will not impact on how they are valued and supported by the university in the future.

6. Disclosure of Individual Staff Circumstances

The REF Guidance on Submissions and Panel Criteria and Working Methods statements document how individual circumstances will be taken into account by the Funding Bodies in the assessment process. Category A and C staff¹ may be returned with fewer than four outputs without penalty in the assessment, if one or more of the following circumstances significantly constrained their ability to produce four outputs or to work productively throughout the assessment period. (Details of qualifying periods are documented in the REF Panel Criteria and Working Methods statements)

- 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 leave
- Other circumstances that apply specifically in UoAs 1-6 (relating to clinical academics)
- Disability
- Ill health or injury
- Mental health conditions

¹ Category A staff are defined as academic staff with a contract of employment of 0.2 FTE or greater and on the payroll of the submitting HEI on the census date (31 October 2013), and whose primary employment function is to undertake either 'research only' or 'teaching and research'

Category C staff are defined as individuals employed by an organisation other than an HEI, whose contract or job role (as documented by their employer) includes the undertaking of research, and whose research is primarily focused in the submitting unit on the census date (31 October 2013).

- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, paternity, adoption or childcare that fall outside of – or justify the reduction of further outputs in addition to – the standard allowances as specified in the Criteria statements
- Other caring responsibilities
- Bereavement, due to the death of a significant other
- Gender reassignment
- Other circumstances relating to the protected characteristics listed in paragraph 190 in the Guidance on Submissions or relating to activities protected by employment legislation.

The University is keen to encourage staff to disclose any relevant circumstances that might have affected their research productivity during the census period to ensure that the University is able to include outputs from all of its excellent researchers.

All staff who are potentially eligible for submission to REF have therefore been sent a simple form that asks them to outline any equality related circumstances that have affected their ability to carry out research within the assessment period and have affected the quantity of outputs they have been able to produce. The form, which was based on the example proforma produced by the Equality Challenge Unit, includes an introductory paragraph explaining why the information is needed, how it will be used, and who will have access to it (both within the University and, if included in the submission documentation, in the panel assessment process). It was made clear that the information will be used in relation to the REF submission process only, unless staff confirm that they would like to be contacted by a member of HR staff to discuss their requirements and ongoing support.

The proforma is being completed as part of the mock submission exercise in 2012 and will be re-circulated as part of the final selection process in Spring / Summer 2013.

To ensure confidentiality, the completed proformas are being submitted through the Human Resources (HR) staff portal. The Deputy Director of HR is responsible for identifying those completed templates where relevant disclosure information has been provided and for sharing these with two members of the REF Steering group (the Chair of the University E&D Committee and the secretary of the Group), so that the three of them can take account of the disclosed information when advising the full Group on appropriate output reductions. For each case, the Steering Group will receive an anonymised summary of the circumstances and their impact, and the recommended reduction.

The Chair of the Steering Group will provide feedback to staff who have disclosed circumstances about the minimum number of outputs they would be required to put forward if a decision is made to include their outputs in the submission. UoA leads will also be informed of this minimum number, but will not receive any information about the nature of the circumstance.

7. Appeals Process

A standing appeals committee has been established for the purpose of hearing any appeals resulting from the REF selection process. Appeal cases will need to be submitted to the University Secretary

within 14 days of receiving formal notification of submission decisions. Appeals can only be made on the grounds of unfair selection processes and / or failure to take account of relevant information about individual staff circumstances. Appeals against judgements of output quality will not be eligible.

The Committee will be chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, with the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Teaching & Learning and for International and External Affairs as the other two members. None of these individuals will have any involvement in discussions relating to whether or not the appellants' outputs will be included in the REF submission. The University Secretary will act as secretary to the Committee. The Committee have all taken and passed the University's on-line E&D training module and will have received additional REF related training by the time of any appeals hearings. When hearing appeals, the members will receive the candidate's letter of appeal, a written statement from the relevant Faculty Director of Research outlining the reason for the selection decision and, if appropriate, advice from the Equality & Diversity Office or HR Director. Appellants will be invited to an appeal hearing, and will have the right to be accompanied by a friend or Trade Union representative.

Eligible appeals will be heard in late Spring / Summer 2013, and the timing of the hearings will be such that outcomes of the process can be implemented in time for the final submission date. There will be no further right of appeal against the decision made by the Committee.

8. Communication

A programme of communication is in place to ensure that the Code of Practice is made available to all eligible staff, including those on leave of absence. Following approval by Senate and Council (March 2012), eligible staff have been made aware (via a personalised email and the main staff web pages) of the purpose and importance of the Code, what it covers, and how to access it. Heads of School have been briefed on the need to highlight the importance of the Code to staff in their Schools and to ensure that they have all accessed a copy. Heads of School have also been asked to provide the names of any eligible staff on leave of absence, and those who require Codes in a more accessible format. (HR have also provided information about this, to ensure no-one is accidentally omitted.) Staff on leave have been sent hard copies of the Code, and informed how to access the web version.

In disseminating the Code, it has been made clear that the current version is subject to Funding Body approval in Autumn 2012. A final version (following approval from HEFCE) will be published in late Autumn 2012.

Communication of the Code has formed part of a much broader set of REF related communication activities, whereby all University staff have been invited to lunchtime briefings. In addition, Heads of School, School Directors of Research, and Unit of Assessment leads have attended a series of more detailed workshops covering our overall approach to REF, selection criteria, development and implementation of the Code, and supporting staff throughout the process.

9. Equality Impact Assessments

In line with the Funding Councils' requirements, the University is conducting an ongoing Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) to explore the equality impact of its proposed REF policies and procedures to assess whether they could pose a barrier to staff from a particular group. The EIA is focusing on the staff selection policy (including procedures and criteria adopted, communication methods, and appeals) and has informed the development of this Code of Practice. When conducting the EIA, the University is taking account of a range of information, including the equality impact analysis on RAE2008, relevant HESA data, feedback from the mock exercise and from discussions with relevant staff groups.

The University is using its 2012 mock exercise to inform the EIA. Any disparities in the data at this point will be identified and investigated in order to provide a justification or to amend practice. More generally, the EIA is being kept under review throughout the process of preparing the submission to ensure that any necessary changes to prevent discrimination or promote equality are taken prior to the submission deadline.

An EIA on the final submission will be published on the University website in Spring term 2014. This will look at the proportion of eligible staff from each protected group (where data is available) who were submitted to REF compared with those eligible for submission (using relevant HESA data). It will also consider relevant appeals data. It will include a detailed commentary on any negative impacts that are observed, together with an action plan setting out further investigations and potentially remediating actions. It will also identify any positive impacts to ascertain whether there is good practice that could be applied more widely.

The final EIA will be considered and reflected on by relevant university committees, including the Equality & Diversity and Staffing Committees.

REF Steering Group

Membership

Ex officio

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) [Chair]

The Faculty Directors of Research

Professor R.H. Ellis (Life Sciences)

Professor G. Marston (Science)

Professor G.H. Tucker (Arts, Humanities and Social Science)

Professor V.A. Gibson (Henley Business School)

Chair of University Equality & Diversity Committee

Professor D.C. Berry

Secretary

The Director of Student and Academic Services (for whom Dr N.E. Helsby acts)

The Deputy Director of HR is available for consultation, as required.

Mission

To oversee the University's preparations for the submission to the Research Excellence Framework 2014.

Terms of reference

1. To oversee and evaluate the preparatory REF exercises.
2. To determine the need, if any, for external assessment of the research outputs of any Unit of Assessment.
3. To be the final arbiter on the Units of Assessment to which the University will return staff in 2013, and whether the University will make multiple submissions.
4. To be responsible for determining which staff and outputs will be submitted to REF in 2013.
5. To determine appropriate quality criteria by Unit of Assessment in order to inform decisions about submission of staff and outputs.
6. To oversee the development of the University's REF Code of Practice, and ensure its communication to all staff and consistent application across the University in consultation with Human Resources.
7. To review Equality Impact Assessments against the protected characteristics at appropriate stages of the submission preparations, and determine what action, if any, needs to be taken, should any noticeable imbalances be observed between likely submission and eligible staff.
8. To keep abreast of developments in national REF policy and criteria, and take any necessary action arising from the implications.
9. To finalise Environment templates for submission and to review research related metrics (research spend, research student completion, citations) that contribute to environment profiles, taking appropriate action to maximise in the census period
10. To provide regular updates to the wider University on the status of the University's preparations for REF 2014.

Method of working

- The REF Steering Group will meet termly and report to the University Board for Research and Innovation and Senior Management Board.