

## **Research Excellence Framework (REF) Submissions Equal Opportunities Code of Practice**

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### **Introduction**

Research output is an integral part of The Royal Veterinary College (College) strategy. The College Corporate Plan states:

‘We will enhance our global reputation as an outstanding independent veterinary college by:

- Undertaking research of international quality in focused areas of global significance for animal and human health
- Promoting public health and supporting society through the study of the relationships between people, animals and food’

The REF is an Institutional bid for funding to support Research at the College and the results of the exercise will be used to determine the level of funding the College receives from HEFCE from 2014. The exercise is one of peer review providing an assessment of the quality profile of research undertaken at the College and will also have an enormous influence on the College’s reputation both nationally and internationally. Thus, decisions on what research outputs to be included in the REF are of great importance to the future of the College and will be made solely on the basis of maximising the quality of the outputs that can be presented and therefore the College’s reputation for its research.

The College is committed to ensuring that the maximum number of employees conducting high quality research should have their work included in submissions. However, it is also recognised that employees should only be submitted where there is confidence of a positive result.

Managerial decisions as to which employees are submitted are made at the discretion of the College. Submission decisions should be transparent, consistent and defensible and this code of practice outlines the principles to be applied to the stages of the process and sets out the relevant procedures.

It is the intention of the College to create an inclusive environment for everyone and promote equal opportunity for all employees regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation or any other characteristic such as part-time, flexible or fixed term working.

To this end, the College operates a number of policies and procedures to support inclusivity and this Code of Practice is specifically aimed at ensuring that the internal selection process for REF submissions is free from any adverse effects. The Equality Strategy Group (ESG)

reviews and co-ordinates the application of these policies and procedures and does so in collaboration with the Research Strategy Committee (RSC) in respect of this Code of Practice.

This code of practice will be kept under review and may change from time to time.

## **Principles**

Any decisions regarding the REF submission will be made for the benefit of the College and its employees in order to safeguard its reputation in research excellence and is in support of the College's strategic plan. The College will be guided in its deliberations by the following principles to demonstrate fairness and as recommended by the 'REF2014 Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions':

**Transparency** – The processes used in preparing submissions will be clearly defined and available to be examined by all staff in the College.

**Consistency** – Responsibilities, criteria and processes will be applied consistently for selection of employees in all submissions.

**Accountability** – All individuals and bodies involved in evaluating REF submissions and making decisions about the selection of employees will be identified, by role or name, together with their clearly defined responsibilities. Everyone involved in assessing submissions will have received appropriate Equality and Diversity related training and will be familiar with this REF Submissions Equal Opportunities Code of Practice (REF EOCoP)

**Inclusivity** – The REF submissions process will promote an inclusive environment, enabling the College to identify all eligible employees who have produced excellent research. Any particular circumstances that may have had an effect on an individual's contribution to a submission will be taken into account by the submission process. Each individual's research will be evaluated on its merits and not the situation of the individual.

The REF EOCoP will be widely distributed throughout the College and be made available to all employees via the College Intranet. The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation contacted employees who were absent from the College at the time of producing this Code of Practice to inform them of its existence and the processes to be followed to ensure the College's REF submission process and procedures are fully transparent. The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation will continue to liaise with employees who are absent either through direct contact or via the individual's Head of Department on an ongoing basis to ensure those employees are kept up to date with developments.

## **Responsibilities**

### **Selection of designated senior member of staff**

The Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation will act as the senior designated member of staff for the College with responsibility for conducting and/or delegating aspects of the REF process as well as having responsibility for making key decisions associated with the REF process. The College Principal will support the Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation.

The College's Research Strategy Committee is the main body in the College for advising, discussing, implementing and monitoring research strategy, policy and regulations. It will also be responsible for making the final selection of research outputs and impact case studies for REF submission (See page 7). Members of the College's Research Strategy Committee (which includes the Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation and College Principal) will have undertaken Equality and Diversity training available through the College. This training will be tailored to the REF2014 and is aimed at ensuring that individuals fully understand their responsibilities in the workplace and to raise awareness of diversity issues. The training covers legislation and individual responsibilities and uses studies, scenarios and a series of questions to assess an individual's understanding.

The role of this designated senior member of staff will be to assess the quality of publications produced by individual employees in conjunction with the Head of Department and the Research Programme Leader. They will be responsible for ensuring that all personal circumstances are taken into account during this assessment to ensure that decisions are free from any direct or indirect discrimination.

### **Identification of Eligible Staff**

The following process was/will be used to carry out the function of selection:

- List of individuals to be considered for REF Submission forwarded by Heads of Academic Departments to Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation (2009-10). New appointments are considered at the time of appointment by consultation between the VPR and Head of Department.
- Individual discussions carried out by Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation for all recommended research active academic staff. Notes of these discussions will be sent to the Head of Department and the Research Programme Leader. The main aim of the discussion is to gather information relating to the papers published by the employee and those planned. The discussion also allows the employee to have their input as to which of their published papers should be considered for submission.
- A mock REF will be undertaken with external input 2 years before the REF submission deadline where the agreed top 4 papers (if 4 papers are available) will be rated
- A follow-up assessment will be made 12 months before the REF submission deadline to review new members of staff and to review new papers of staff whose papers were not rated sufficiently highly in the first mock exercise. The assessment will involve members of Research Strategy Committee and Senior Managers (with at least two opinions) with external views sought if any uncertainty exists.
- All staff will be made aware of the decision relating to their selection by 31 July 2013 at the latest. Staff may appeal the decision made and will be advised to follow the appeal procedure (see page 9).

The VPR will continue to follow up with academics close to reaching 4 papers of sufficient quality until September 2013, to determine whether new papers published have been accepted for publication which might be suitable for submission and might be published in time.

The Head of Department, through the College's appraisal scheme, will identify individuals who are active in research and who are in a position to produce the minimum of 4 research outputs by December 2013 and so can be considered for inclusion in the REF. The Vice

Principal for Research and Innovation, in consultation with Research Programme Leaders and Heads of Department, will evaluate the quality of the research outputs presented by individual employees on an annual basis. External advisors will be used to verify the agreed assessment of the quality of outputs at a mock REF (2011) and where necessary thereafter. The external advisors have been selected by consultation with the College's Research Strategy Committee to ensure there is the appropriate expertise across the breadth of the College's research. The external advisors also have some previous experience in similar research assessment exercises as well as an international perspective. All papers are also evaluated by a member of the College's Research Strategy Committee and therefore to ensure transparency, at least two independent scores are used to decide whether the papers are suitable for selection. Details of the external advisors are available upon request from the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation.

The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation will contact individuals who are identified to discuss their research outputs annually and advice will be given as to how these could be developed and/or improved. Re-assessment will occur to monitor the quality of new research outputs and assess their potential for inclusion in the REF.

The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation will feed back, in writing, to Heads of Department and Research Programme Leaders the assessment of the quality of outputs and the actions suggested to develop or improve the output quality.

### **Process for selection**

All employees involved in research will be considered for submission to the REF regardless of age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, nationality, religion or belief, sexual orientation or any other characteristic such as part time, flexible or fixed term working.

In deciding upon the inclusion of any employee in a proposed submission, careful consideration will be given to the research output of that individual and any factors which may have influenced this. Employees will be invited to cite any personal circumstances (see below) that they wish to be taken into account in arriving at any selection decision.

Selection for submission will be undertaken systematically and candidates matched against the specified criteria with decisions made by an appropriate group of staff (see Committee below). Selection will be based upon the following specified criteria:

- Papers will be assessed on an ongoing basis by peer review as well as assessment against HEFCE's published definition of quality. There will be a requirement to submit 4 papers of international quality at least as defined by REF guidance on submissions.

### **Guidance on Personal Circumstances**

Where criteria are based upon output the Committee will take into account the possibility of volume of research output being limited where an individual is employed on a part-time, flexible and/or fixed term basis. The following personal circumstances will also be taken into account:

- Absence due to maternity/paternity/adoption leave

- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, paternity, adoption or childcare **in addition** to the period of maternity, adoption or additional paternity leave taken.
- Staff new to the academic profession, entering into it during the period 1 January 2008 to 31 October 2013
- Early Career Researchers (started career as an independent researcher on or after 1 August 2009).
- Disability, including temporary incapacity that lasts for at least 12 months. This includes employees with cancer, Multiple Sclerosis and HIV from the point of diagnosis from October 2006
- Absence due to ill-health or injury
- Mental health conditions
- Time spent as a carer or other domestic caring commitments
- Other circumstances relating to the protected characteristics of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation
- Prolonged absence (typically more than 6 months consecutively in the assessment period) which was agreed by the individual with the College but which does not fall into one of the other categories. This could include:
  - Secondment to non-academic positions outside the higher education sector
  - Career breaks for purposes unconnected with research, teaching or other academic duties
- Part time work

In addition, health and safety restrictions imposed on pregnant and breastfeeding women which may have prevented them from undertaking some types of research during the relevant period of assessment will be taken into consideration. Similar consideration will be given to restrictions that pregnancy and nursing might place on fieldwork.

The College will not take account of:

- Sabbaticals, funded by the College or an external funder, during which the individual has, or should have, undertaken research.
- Managerial or administrative positions or responsibilities held during the assessment period.

All criteria used will be assessed to ensure that they do not either directly or indirectly discriminate against any individual on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or any other characteristic such as part time, flexible or fixed term working.

Documented evidence will be recorded to justify selection for REF submission and will be the responsibility of the Vice-Principal Research and Innovation.

### **Staff Disclosure of Personal Circumstances**

The College takes its commitment to equality and diversity seriously, and will undertake all the necessary actions to ensure no member of eligible staff is directly or indirectly discriminated against on the grounds of the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010.

All individuals who are being considered for REF submission are to be made aware of the list of individual circumstances that may be taken into account and given the opportunity to inform the College, in confidence, of any which may apply to them, how these have affected their output and whether they wish them to be taken into account. Individual personal circumstances will need to be identified by completing the Staff Disclosure Form (available to download on the Research intranet page) and submitting this form to the HR Manager (Information and Equality) in Human Resources no later than 15 September 2012. The forms will be collated by Human Resources and submitted to a specially convened meeting of the College's REF Equality panel, who will be tasked with recommending to the College's Research Strategy Committee how the circumstances described are to be taken into account.

The College's REF Equality panel is a separate panel which is independent of the College's Research Strategy Committee, with particular responsibility for advising on and monitoring equality and diversity issues during the College's preparation for REF2014. For this purpose, the College's REF Equality panel composition will be:

College Principal (Chair)  
Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation (REF2014 Manager)  
Director of HR  
Director of Finance  
Assistant Principal and Head of Academic Support and Development  
HR Manager - Information and Equality

Responsibility for the communication between the College's REF Equality panel and the Research Strategy Committee will be taken by the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation.

If any individual circumstances are accepted by the College as grounds for the submission of fewer outputs, it will need to be disclosed to the individual concerned and in outline on the confidential section of the REF return. The College will ensure that outside of the REF Equality panel only those staff from Human Resources with responsibility for inputting data into the relevant sections of the REF submission will have access to this information. However, employees declaring an 'individual circumstance' should be aware that information provided on the staff disclosure form may be shared externally (which includes the REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel and the UK funding bodies' REF team) for the purposes of evidencing any reduction in the number of research outputs.

Members of the College's REF Equality panel and those charged with administering the College's REF submission, will observe confidentiality at all times if and when handling individual staff circumstances. The information will be stored securely.

Those charged with making decisions about submissions must consider all declared individual circumstances and decide whether, on the facts that they have been provided with, there are grounds for an individual to be submitted with a reduced number of outputs. It may be that there will need to be a combination of personal circumstances for an individual to be submitted with less than 4 outputs but each case must be assessed on its own merits.

Each member of this panel will have undergone relevant Equality & Diversity training as referred to earlier in this Code of Practice and tailored to the needs and requirements of the REF process.

## **Committee**

Although the Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation will act as the senior designated member of staff for the College for the REF, the Principal has responsibility for ensuring the overall strategic direction of the College and also sits on the Research Strategy Committee.

The College's Research Strategy Committee is the main body in the College for advising, discussing, implementing and monitoring research strategy, policy and regulations. It will also be responsible for making the final selection of research outputs and impact case studies for REF submission. In this circumstance its terms of reference are to ensure the College achieves the highest possible quality profile as a result of the REF.

Composition: College Principal  
Vice-Principal for Research and Innovation (Chair and REF2014 Manager)  
Heads of Academic Departments  
Research Programme Leaders  
Research Professors  
Head of Graduate School  
Head of RVC Enterprise

The Research Strategy Committee will receive relevant information to help in their decision making and will be responsible for preparing and submitting the final REF submission.

Each member of this Committee will have undergone relevant Equality & Diversity training as referred to earlier in this Code of Practice and tailored to the needs and requirements of the REF process.

The Research Strategy Committee will report on its deliberations to the Academic Board.

## **Mock REF**

A mock REF has been undertaken. Papers were sent in October 2011 to the internal and external members of the mock REF panel (internal members were those on the College's Research Strategy Committee and external members were those as detailed above). Scores were submitted in time for the meeting of the panel in December 2011 where the papers were discussed and any discrepancies in scoring were identified. Feedback was provided to each academic by the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation by the middle of May 2012 where an indication was provided as to which papers needed to be replaced by new publications by the end of 2013.

Although not all members of the mock REF panel could attend the December 2011 meeting, the Vice Principal for Research and Innovation consulted with these members to ensure they were given an opportunity to have their input.

It is planned that another mock REF will be undertaken in November/December 2012. This will review potential submissions which had sub-standard papers in the first mock REF, and any new staff joining the College who would be eligible to be included in the submission.

## **Monitoring**

The College asks all employees to provide information relating to their age, disability, ethnic origin and gender. This can be used to monitor submissions to the REF as well as for the recruitment and promotion processes for the College.

Information available from the Human Resources database also enables the monitoring of part-time, flexible and fixed term working employees specifically and will be used to monitor submissions to the REF.

## **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

The funding bodies require all HEI's to conduct an Equality Impact Assessment on their REF policy and the procedures for selecting staff for REF submissions.

EIAs should be conducted by an analysis of data on staff who are eligible for selection in respect of all the protected characteristics for which data are available. This analysis should cover all eligible staff. The funding bodies also expect HEIs to publish their EIAs after the submissions have been made as a matter of good practice.

An initial EIA has been conducted following the mock REF to ascertain if there is an imbalance relative to the total potential pool. Although there are no major areas of concern, the results of this assessment highlight that the inclusion of individual staff circumstances that meet criteria will be an important part of ensuring equality of opportunity. Therefore the College will monitor the data on a regular basis, including during the follow up mock assessment in 2012 (where individual staff circumstances will be taken into account following data collection of these circumstances by September 2012) and until approximately 5 months before the actual REF submission date, at the point at which individual staff circumstances will have been taken into account and final decisions are to be made about the inclusion of staff in the submission. For further information of the results of the initial equality impact assessment, please visit the College's REF web-page.

Consideration will be given to whether the criteria used to select submissions disadvantages the identified group(s) in any way. If it is found that any criteria used either directly or indirectly discriminates against any particular group action will be taken to eliminate any adverse impact.

The following questions will form the basis of any process to address any adverse impact:

- What are the **causes** of the adverse impact?
- Are there any **alternative measures** which would achieve the aims of the process without adverse impact?
- Are there any **interventions** (such as training) which could help achieve the aims of the policy without advert impact?

It may be useful to consult with representatives of the particular disadvantaged group concerned to help ensure that any action taken alleviates the problem without an adverse impact on other groups.

## **Communication**

Details of the REF process and selection criteria, Terms of Reference and Composition of Committees, will be published on the College Intranet alongside this Code of Practice (Copies will also be available via the Research Support Office).

Those with responsibility for making decisions on REF submissions must:

- Endeavour to ensure that they have all the relevant facts relating to the appropriate individual and their research
- Ignore irrelevant information
- Ensure that any relevant individual circumstances are taken into account
- Keep full records of all decisions which may affect individuals.

The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation contacted employees who were absent from the College at the time of producing this Code of Practice to inform them of its existence and the processes to be followed to ensure the College's REF submission process and procedures are fully transparent. The Vice Principal for Research and Innovation will continue to liaise with employees who are absent through either direct contact or through the individuals Head of Department on an ongoing basis to ensure those employees are kept up to date with developments.

Decisions made with regard to individual selection for REF Submission will be fed back through written communication on an individual basis by the Research Support Office no later than 31 July 2013. All employees will be informed of the decision of their particular submission.

Where a decision is taken not to submit an individual that person will be informed of:

- the basis for the decision
- the right of appeal

The appeal process is set out below.

## **Appeals**

Eligible individuals have the right of appeal should they feel there are grounds of potential discrimination. This could be related to a personal characteristic, such as disability, or an individual circumstance, such as absence due to maternity leave, which has not been taken into account.

There is no right to appeal on the grounds of academic or strategic judgement – unless there are grounds for thinking that the judgement was exercised unfairly or in contravention of the principle of equality.

An employee wishing to appeal should lodge a Notice of Appeal, clearly outlining the grounds for the appeal, in writing, to the Director of HR, within 5 working days of the confirmation of REF submissions decisions.

The appeal will be considered by the appropriate member of the College's Executive Committee who will liaise with the Vice-Principal Research and Innovation, the Heads of Departments and the Director of HR (or their nominated representatives in times of unavailability) to determine the decision which was made and consider and review the situation. The members of the College's Executive Committee will be chosen from those members who have not been involved in making decisions about selection for the College's REF submission.

The appropriate member of the College's Executive Committee will respond to the individual who has lodged the Appeal within 10 working days of the receipt of the letter of appeal with his/her decision. The decision made will be final.

This appeals procedure has been developed by the College being aware of the requirements and deadlines for REF submissions but also being mindful of responsibilities to staff.

These decisions do not impinge on the rights of individuals under normal College policy.