



**University of
Sunderland**

Research Excellence Framework - REF2014

Code of Practice for the Selection of Staff

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University of Sunderland

Code of Practice for the Selection of Staff for REF2014

1 Introduction

This document is the Code of Practice for the University of Sunderland's submission process to the 2014 Research Evaluation Framework, required as a prerequisite for any submission. Each institution making a submission is required to develop, document and apply a code of practice on the fair and transparent selection of staff for their REF submissions.

This document and the policies and practices herein have been developed in accordance with the guidance to institutions outlined in section 4 of the Assessment framework and guidance on submissions document and the University's own commitments to equality and diversity in the workplace. The code of practice supports the key principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity. Particular focus is given to the processes for selection of staff for submission to ensure that they are inclusive, equitable, fair, transparent and legal.

This Code of Practice (hereafter referred to as the Code) addresses the principles to be applied within the different stages of the process.

2 University Principles of Inclusiveness

The University of Sunderland is proud to promote a culture of inclusiveness and dignity and respect. Our Equality and Diversity statement sets this out, and is owned by our university community:

"The University of Sunderland celebrates and values the diversity of all students and staff. We are a multicultural community that values and promotes equality and diversity. We do not tolerate discriminatory practices of any kind. In line with our strategic aims, we work to continue to deliver a positive environment for the conduct of all our activities, where all members of our community treat one another with mutual respect and dignity. Through our policies and practices we work to ensure that all students and staff are welcome in our community and do not face discrimination with regard to any aspect of their identity, such as age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage/civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief or sexual orientation."

3 Principles for REF 2014

Our approach to selection of staff within the REF will support the key principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity, each of which is discussed below.

We will be *transparent*, and open, within our decision making process, so that at any point any individual member of staff will understand their own situation with respect to the REF.

We will apply *consistent* approaches, systems and decision making processes within our REF planning. These will be applied consistently across the University, and within each Faculty and Unit of Assessment (UoA), as outlined within the Code.

We have established a clear structure for management of the REF process, with clear *accountability*, and clear responsibilities, as outlined within the Code.

Our approach will be *inclusive* at all times. We will strive to use as many possible modes of communication as possible to inform and involve staff in the REF decision making process.

Responsibilities are defined within the Code, including operating criteria and terms of reference. These have been made available to all individuals.

All individuals involved in the process have been trained in the operation of the Code, and in best practice equality and diversity practices and principles.

The Code supports and is underpinned by our corporate value of inclusiveness, which recognises the diverse nature of our academic community through a proactive approach to equality and diversity, embracing a culture of mutual respect.

4 Quality Thresholds and our University Research Plan

Our University Research Plan sets out the context for research within our University:

“The University of Sunderland is a research active university, with a research active curriculum, enhancing the academic standing of the institution as a seat of higher learning and scholarship, undertaking research which both enhances the learning experience of our students, and delivers impact.”

All decisions relating to the selection of individual staff will be made solely on the basis of quality and quantity of outputs. In general we are taking an approach which is inclusive and supports research development across the university. Our University Research Plan states: *“All academic staff will have the opportunity to engage in research activity.”*

5 Management responsibilities

The responsibility for making key decisions is held by the Pro Vice-Chancellor with responsibility for Research (hereafter referred to as the PVC) with the advice and support of the REF Core Group. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the REF Core Group are set out in Appendix 1 of the Code.

The relevant Assistant Director of RIEE (Research, Innovation and Employer Engagement) has overall responsibility for upholding the Code. The Associate Deans with responsibility for Research in each of the four Faculties are responsible for ensuring that the Unit of Assessment (UoA) leaders comply with the Code, and meet the timescales and requirements of the process as set by the REF Core Group.

The PVC, the Associate Deans with responsibility for Research and the UoA leaders have received equal opportunities training from the Assistant Director Human Resources, and the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group, using the training materials provided by the ECU (Equality Challenge Unit).

The PVC will be the final arbiter in terms of staff selection for inclusion and will give final approval to all parts of the University submission.

Any appeals against these decisions should be made to the REF Appeals Panel. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the REF Appeals Panel are set out in Appendix of the Code.

6 The Role of the REF Core Group

The REF Core group consists of the PVC as Chair, relevant Assistant Director of RIEE, the Associate Deans with responsibility for Research and the UoA leaders. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the REF Core Group are set out in Appendix 1 of the Code.

The REF Core Group has received equal opportunities training from the Assistant Director Human Resources, and the Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group, using the training materials provided by the ECU (Equality Challenge Unit).

The role of the REF Core Group is to provide advice and support to the PVC, who will be the final arbiter for decisions for the University REF submission, including the selection of staff for inclusion.

UoA subgroups will be created to plan the proposed submissions for all UoAs (other than those where the small size of the possible cohort makes this impractical).

7 Units of Assessments (UoAs)

Faculties will form their own subgroups with respect to the UoAs to which staff members will be submitted. Subgroups must comply with the Code and will report to the REF Core Group. It might be the case in some areas that a single subgroup will be formed to co-ordinate the returns for two or more closely related UoAs. It is required that each UoA have a nominated UoA Leader, who will be a senior member of staff. Normally this would be the chair of the UoA subgroup.

Each UoA will be required to provide the REF Core Group with information on selection and submission processes that have been applied and how they adhere to the Code. The REF Core group will ensure that these UoA decisions are in line with the Code and with the University Research Plan.

8 Dummy REF Exercise

A Dummy REF Exercise has been undertaken, to inform the University as to which UoAs it will submit, and to form an initial, draft, list of who might be submitted within each UoA. The Dummy REF was also used to pilot the Code, and to inform the final version of the Code. External experts for each UoA were recruited to provide independent feedback and “critical friend” analysis, to inform and improve our analysis and future planning. The REF Core Group oversaw the operation of the Dummy REF.

9 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Assistant Director of Human Resources, and Chair of Equality and Diversity group undertook an equality impact assessment of the Code. This involved:

- An EIA of the data from the Dummy REF in terms of all protected characteristics, comparing the profiles of initial list of staff to be submitted generated by the Dummy REF with the profiles of the academic staff body. This analysis did not reveal any significant differences in the profiles.
- Discussion of the Code, its communication, and implementation with the University Equality and Diversity Group, which comprises representatives from the Disabled Staff Group, the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Group, the Race Equality Group, and Trade Union representatives
- Completion of the University EIA Online Tool, to identify any potential barriers and negative impacts
- An EIA of the Dummy REF process, by focus group discussion with a selection of staff from a range of UoAs.

- Reference to the ECU guidance on EIA

The EIA above highlighted the following areas for further development:

- Communication of the plan to all eligible staff. The need to use all possible avenues of communication.
- The Appeals process. Ensure that the process is distinct to the management process, and recognised as fair by all staff.
- Early Career Researchers (ECRs). To ensure that all ECRs are fully informed of their eligibility for the REF, and of the specific rules and arrangements relating to ECRs.

The above areas have been fully discussed by the University Equality and Diversity Group, and by the REF Core Group, and the Code has been revised to ensure that it addresses these areas and represents best practice.

Our final REF submission will also be subject to EIA.

10 Appeals

Feedback on the decision on inclusion within the REF will be available and discussed with each individual explaining the rationale and circumstances, with the aim of reaching an informal understanding of the position. Every attempt will be made to reach an informal resolution of any disagreements which is acceptable to the individual, to the UoA, and the REF Core Group. However, if, following discussion, individuals wish to appeal they may do so to the REF Appeals Panel setting out the reasons for their appeal.

The REF Appeals Panel (see Appendix 2) will handle all formal appeals, and any complaints that have cannot be resolved informally. There will be specific timescale in line with the REF timetable (see below) which will ensure that all formal appeals are dealt with prior to the final submission.

11 Individual circumstances

We are committed to ensuring that decisions about selecting staff for the REF are made in a fair, transparent and consistent manner. All eligible staff will be invited to formally state their wishes as regards submission to the REF and, at the same time, staff will be invited, in a fully safe and confidential manner, to inform the University of any circumstances which they feel has impacted upon their research output.

In determining whether eligible staff may be submitted to the REF with fewer than four research outputs, we will take the following circumstances into consideration:

- Early career researcher (started career as an independent researcher on or after 1 August 2009)
- Part time employment
- Career break or secondment outside of the higher education sector in which the individual did not undertake academic research
- Maternity leave, statutory adoption leave, and additional paternity leave (taken by partners of new mothers or co-adopters)
- Disability (including conditions such as cancer and chronic fatigue)
- Ill health or injury
- Mental health conditions

- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, adoption, paternity or childcare **in addition to** periods of maternity, statutory adoption or additional paternity leave taken. This could include for example, pregnancy related illness and health and safety restrictions in laboratory and field work.
- Other caring responsibilities (including caring for an elderly or disabled relative)
- Gender reassignment

An Individual Circumstances Panel will be established to consider all such requests from staff. The Terms of Reference and Membership of the Individual Circumstances Panel are set out in Appendix 3. The members of the panel will be trained in Equality and Diversity principles, and in the specific processes relating to Individual Circumstances, using the ECU training materials.

All staff eligible for inclusion within the REF will be written to, explaining the above process, and inviting them to make us aware of any individual circumstances which they believe has impacted upon their research output. The Covering note and staff disclosure form in Appendix 4 will be used to communicate with all staff.

In determining the number of outputs staff are required to submit, the institution will observe the definitions of individual staff circumstances provided in the published [REF Panel criteria and working methods](#) (January 2012) available at www.ref.ac.uk under [Publications](#)

Equality of opportunity for those on fixed-term and part-time contracts will be ensured. There will be no differentiation of treatment of staff based on the conditions of employment in terms of fractional and time-limited appointments, other than those imposed by the [HEFCE REF submission guidelines](#).

12 Status of individuals

The fact that a member of staff was or was not submitted to the REF 2014 will not in any way affect their status in the University.

It is understood that the level of attainment within each UoA submission will be different and hence the submission profiles will also be different, for strategic and tactical reasons. It therefore follows that it is possible that the research outputs of one individual not submitted to the REF in one UoA may be considered to be of equal or of higher quality than another who was submitted in a different UoA.

Non submission to the REF 2014 will not in itself be deemed to be an indicator of research inactivity. The non submission of an individual in the REF will not be used as an indicator in any future University processes.

13 Communication

The University will use as many means and modes of communication as possible to ensure that all eligible staff are aware of their own and the Universities current situation as regards the REF, and to ensure inclusivity and transparency. This will involve:

- Direct email communication with all staff from a central university point within RIEE
- Through a dedicated REF website, and the Equality and Diversity section of the Human Resources site

- Staff briefings at UoA level, and between team leaders and individual staff members
- University newsletters

14 Timetable - Selection of staff for REF 2014

Dec 2011	Initial Draft Code of Practice for selection produced.
Dec 2011	May 2012 Dummy REF undertaken to form initial lists for possible selection, and inform the Code. Dummy REF made use of external critical friends for each UoA
May 2012	Results of Dummy REF available
June 2012	EIA of Dummy REF
July 2012	Code of Practice for the selection of staff agreed at the REF Core Group, and Equality and Diversity Group and submitted to HEFCE
Sept 2012	Formal invitation to all staff to declare their interest in submission to REF 2014, including the process and procedure for agreeing any output reduction due to individual circumstances
Oct 2012	Deadline for expressions of interest for submission and requests for consideration of individual circumstances
Nov 2012	Conclusion of consideration of individual circumstances
Dec 2012	Survey of Submission Intention (HEFCE)
Mar 2013	Further individual circumstances call
May 2013	Production of final list for submission
June 2013	Deadline for appeals
Sept 2013	All appeals dealt with
Nov 2013	Final deadline for the identification of staff to be submitted to the REF
Nov 2013	EIA of submission

Appendix 1

Terms of Reference and Membership of REF Core Group

Terms of Reference

The REF Core Group is responsible for overseeing the University's preparations for and submission to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The Group will:

- Decide which Units of Assessment (UoAs) the University will make returns to and about the assignment of staff to particular units of assessment
- Decide the quality threshold expected for staff to be included in the submission
- Make decisions about the inclusion of members of staff in submissions
- Ensure that all decisions relating to staff inclusion are consistent with the Code
- Receive recommendations from the Individual Circumstances Panel on staff with individual circumstances who it is considered meet the criteria for submission of fewer than the required number of outputs.
- Receive recommendations from the REF Appeals Panel to reconsider decisions made with regard to the inclusion of particular staff

Membership

Pro-vice Chancellor - Research

Assistant Director - Research, Innovation & Employer Engagement

Assistant Director – Human Resources Associate

Dean – Faculty of Applied Sciences Associate

Dean – Faculty of Arts, Media & Design Associate

Dean – Education & Society

Associate Dean – Business & Law

UoA Leaders for each Unit to be submitted

Appendix 2

Terms of Reference and Membership of REF Appeals Panel

Terms of Reference

The REF Appeals Group will consider all appeals from staff in relation to inclusion with the REF.

Any individual who is dissatisfied with a decision to not be submitted within the REF should first discuss this with the relevant UoA leader. If after informal discussion, the individual remains dissatisfied they may lodge a formal appeal, setting out the grounds for the appeal.

The following are grounds for appeal:

- perceived unfair discrimination,
- procedural irregularity, in particular, that the processes set out in the Code have not been followed,
- evidence, which may have affected the decision of non-submission within the REF has recently come to light.

Disagreement with decisions relating to the quality of publication output alone is not sufficient grounds for appeal.

The REF Appeals Panel will consider all appeals brought on the grounds above. The individual will have full opportunity to present any evidence relating to their appeal to the Panel. Individuals will be given sufficient time and opportunity to raise a formal appeal, and these will be considered and a resolution reached before the final date for submission within the REF.

The REF Appeals Panel may make one of two recommendations:

- The Appeal is successful and the relevant UoA leader will be required to reconsider the case for inclusion of that member of staff
- The selection decision is upheld and the status of the member of staff in relation to selection for the REF is unchanged.

A written confirmation of the Appeal Panel's decision will be sent in writing to the individual making the appeal.

Membership

Deputy-vice Chancellor – Academic (Chair)

Director – Human Resources

Two Independent Senior Academic Members of Staff (Not members of the REF Core Group)

Appendix 3

Terms of Reference and Membership of Individual Circumstances Panel

Terms of Reference

- The Panel will review the circumstances put forward by individuals to ensure that they fall within the criteria indicated in the REF2014 Guidance on Submissions.
- The Panel will make recommendations relating to reduced outputs, to the REF Core Group.
- All information submitted by individual members of staff will be kept confidential to the Panel. The REF Core Group will not be given details regarding any individual's circumstances.
- The Panel will be trained in Equality and Diversity principles using the REF training materials provided by the ECU.
- The Panel will implement the tariffs published by HEFCE on reduced outputs for staff with clearly defined individual circumstances.
- The Panel will review and come to a decision on any reductions on outputs for staff with complex individual circumstances.
- As a reference, the Panel will use the Complex Circumstances Case Studies published for this purpose by the ECU.
- The Panel will use information supplied in the Individual Staff Circumstances Disclosure form to draw up the statements required for REF1b: a maximum of 200 words clearly defined circumstances and 300 words maximum for complex individual staff circumstances.

Membership

Assistant Director - Human Resources (Chair)

Assistant Director – Research, Innovation & Employer Engagement

Nominated Unit of Assessment Leader

Nominated Independent Academic

Appendix 4 Individual Circumstances Covering note and staff disclosure form

To: All members of staff eligible for return in REF 2014

Subject: REF 2014, consideration of individual staff circumstances

The University of Sunderland is committed to ensuring that decisions about selecting staff for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) are made in a fair, transparent and consistent manner. Information on how eligible staff will be selected for submission to the REF can be found in the University of Sunderland's Code of Practice.

To ensure that REF processes are fair, the University of Sunderland is collecting data on individual circumstances from all staff eligible for submission. The data will be used to identify which staff are eligible for submission with fewer than four outputs. Summary level data collected may also inform our monitoring of staff selection procedures at the institutional level.

In determining whether eligible staff may be submitted to the REF with fewer than four research outputs, the University REF Core Group will take the following circumstances into consideration:

- Early career researcher (started career as an independent researcher on or after 1 August 2009)
- Part time employment
- Career break or secondment outside of the higher education sector in which the individual did not undertake academic research
- Maternity leave, statutory adoption leave, and additional paternity leave (taken by partners of new mothers or co-adopters)
- Disability (including conditions such as cancer and chronic fatigue)
- Ill health or injury
- Mental health conditions
- Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, adoption, paternity or childcare **in addition to** periods of maternity, statutory adoption or additional paternity leave taken. This could include for example, pregnancy related illness and health and safety restrictions in laboratory and field work.
- Other caring responsibilities (including caring for an elderly or disabled relative)
- Gender reassignment

If your research output has been affected by other circumstances, not including teaching and administration that are not listed above, please detail them on this form as they may be considered.

In determining the number of outputs staff are required to submit, the institution will observe the definitions of individual staff circumstances provided in the published [REF Panel criteria and working methods](#) (January 2012) available at www.ref.ac.uk under [Publications](#).

What action do I need to take?

If you are eligible for REF submission you are encouraged to complete the attached form.

If further information is required about any circumstances disclosed, you will be contacted by a member of the University REF Individual Circumstances Panel.

Who will see the information that I provide?

Within the institution, the information that you provide will be seen only by members of University REF Individual Circumstances Panel. Members of that group handling individual staff circumstances will observe confidentiality and information will be stored securely. Information provided on the form may be shared externally for the purposes of evidencing any reduction in the number of research outputs:

- For **circumstances with a clearly defined reduction in outputs**, information will be seen by the relevant REF sub-panel, the REF panel secretariat and the UK funding bodies REF team. This will be information about early career researcher status, part-time working, career breaks or secondments, and periods of maternity, additional paternity or adoption leave taken.
- For **more complex circumstances**, information will be seen only by the REF Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel, the REF Main Panel Chairs and the UK funding bodies REF team. This will be information to explain the impact on your research of circumstances such as disability, ill health, injury, mental health conditions, gender reassignment, caring responsibilities or constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, adoption and paternity (in addition to the period of leave taken). This information will **not** be seen by the REF sub-panel.

All REF panel members, chairs and secretaries are bound by confidentiality requirements, and acceptance of the confidentiality requirements is a condition of their appointment to the role. No information relating to identifiable individuals circumstances will be published by the funding bodies REF Team. All data collected, stored and processed by the UK funding bodies REF Team will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

The REF Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions requires all higher education institutions participating in the REF to ensure appropriate confidentiality in handling individual staff circumstances.

What if my circumstances change?

The University of Sunderland recognises that staff circumstances may change between 1 January 2008 and 31 October 2013. If your circumstances change you should complete the attached form.

Individual staff circumstances disclosure form

Name	
Faculty / Department	
Unit of Assessment	

Section one:

Please select one of the following:

- I have no individual circumstances that I wish to be taken into consideration for the purposes of the Research Excellence Framework (REF).
- I have individual circumstances that I wish to make known but I am not seeking a reduction in outputs. (Please complete sections two and three)
- In completing this form I am seeking a reduction in research outputs. (Please complete sections two and three)

Section two:

Please select as appropriate:

- I would like to be contacted by a member of human resources staff to discuss my circumstances and requirements and/or the support provided by University of Sunderland.

My contact details for this purpose are:

Email	
Telephone	
Preferred method of communication	

- I do **not** wish to be contacted by a member of human resources staff

Section three

I wish to make the University aware of the following circumstances which have had an impact on my ability to produce four outputs or work productively between 1 January 2008 and 31 October 2013:

Please provide information required on relevant circumstance/s and continue onto a separate sheet of paper if necessary:

Circumstance	Information required
Early career researcher (started career as an independent researcher on or after 1 August 2009)	Date on which you became an early career researcher
Information	
Part time employee	FTE and duration in months
Information	
Career break or secondment outside of the higher education sector	Dates and duration in months
Information	
Maternity leave, statutory adoption leave, or additional paternity leave (taken by partners of new mothers or co-adopters)	For each period of leave state which type of leave was taken and the dates and duration in months
Information	
Disability (including conditions such as cancer and chronic fatigue)	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	
Mental health condition	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	
Ill health or injury	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	

Constraints relating to pregnancy, maternity, breastfeeding, paternity, adoption or childcare in addition to the period of maternity, adoption or additional paternity leave taken.	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	
Other caring responsibilities (including caring for an elderly or disabled relative)	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	
Gender reassignment	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	
Other exceptional and relevant reasons, not including teaching or administrative work	Impact on ability to fulfil contractual hours and other impacts on ability to undertake research. Duration in months
Information	

Please select as appropriate:

- I confirm that the information provided is a true and accurate description of my circumstances.
- I recognise that the information provided will be used for REF purposes and will be seen by the REF Individual Circumstances Panel.
- I realise that it may be necessary to share information with the UK funding bodies' REF team, who may make the information available to REF panel chairs, members and secretaries and/or the Equality and Diversity Advisory Panel. Where permission is not provided University of Sunderland will be limited in the action it can take.

Signature: Date:
 (Staff member)

For official use only

Following consideration of the personal circumstances described above, the REF Core Group:

- Will progress the staff member's inclusion in the REF submission with [insert number] of research outputs. [Subject to specified institutional criteria].
Rationale for the proposed number of outputs:
E.g. this decision is based on the tariffs outlined in the panel criteria.
- Requires further information of the circumstances described as follows:
e.g. please provide information from your occupational health assessment on the effectiveness of reasonable adjustments provided.
- Does not feel that the staff member meets the criteria outlined within the REF Panel criteria and working methods" for submitting fewer than four research outputs. The reason(s) for this decision are: E.g. circumstances detailed are not recognised within the assessment framework and guidance on submissions.

If [insert name of staff member] wishes to appeal against the decision of the REF Core Group they will need to do so by June 2013 and details of the appeals process can be found in the University Code of Practice on Selection of Staff

Signature: Date:
([insert name of person/chair of committee responsible for decision])

Signature: Date: