

University of Sussex
REF 2014: Code of Practice

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) requires Higher Education Institutions to develop, adopt and implement a Code of Practice on preparing Research Excellence Framework ("REF") submissions and selecting staff for submission. The requirement is set out in the full Guidance on Submissions ([REF 02.2011](#)).

1. Introduction

1. The Research Excellence Framework ("REF") is the mechanism used to assess the quality of research in UK higher education institutions, and its results are used to inform research funding.
2. The REF is the new system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions (HEIs). It replaces the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and will be completed in 2014.
3. The REF will be undertaken by the four UK higher education funding bodies. The exercise will be managed by the REF Team based at HEFCE and overseen by the REF Steering Group, consisting of representatives of the four funding bodies.
4. The primary purpose of the REF is to produce assessment outcomes for each submission made by institutions:
 - The funding bodies intend to use the assessment outcomes to inform the selective allocation of their research funding to HEIs, with effect from 2015-16.
 - The assessment provides accountability for public investment in research and produces evidence of the benefits of this investment.
 - The assessment outcomes provide benchmarking information and establish reputational yardsticks.
5. The REF is a process of expert review. HEIs will be invited to make submissions in 36 units of assessment (UoA). Submissions will be assessed by an expert sub-panel for each unit of assessment, working under the guidance of four main panels. Sub-panels will apply a set of generic assessment criteria and level definitions to produce an overall quality profile for each submission.

2. Basic principles

6. The University of Sussex REF 2014 Code of Practice outlines the positive steps being taken to ensure that the principles of fairness and equality are being applied in determining which staff will be included in the University submission to the HEFCE Research Excellence Framework 2014.
7. The Code of Practice must to be read alongside the University's Equal Opportunities and other equality policies, which can be found on the Sussex staff web site (www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities). The purpose of the Code of Practice is to demonstrate that the University has put in place a fair and transparent selection process. The Code is based upon transparency, consistency, accountability, and inclusivity. The Code will ensure that the University meets its responsibilities and obligations to its staff in respect of all equal opportunities legislation current on the submission date for REF 2014. Researchers will be included in the REF submission on a strategic basis, thereby maximising the outcome to the University in terms of both reputation and QR income. Final decisions will be informed by the University

mission to undertake and be recognised for pioneering research and achieving research-led and research-intensive activity (University of Sussex Strategic Plan 2009-15).

3. Management and responsibilities

8. The senior officer responsible to Council, Senate and the Vice-Chancellor for the University REF 2014 submission to the Funding Council is the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research). The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) is appointed by the Council of the University.
9. The Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group (VCEG) will receive recommendations from the Research Excellence Framework Steering Group (Annex 1), which is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), for discussion and / or approval with regard to the University's REF 2014 submission. VCEG will approve the final submission.
10. The membership and terms of reference of the REF Steering Group has been approved by the Council (29/6/12) and Senate (22/6/12) of the University (Annex 1).
11. The terms of reference and membership of VCEG were approved by the Council (16th December 2005) and Senate (9th December 2005) of the University. VCEG is authorised by Council to make decisions with regard to preparing for the 2014 REF.
12. All processes concerned with the selection of staff for inclusion in the University REF 2014 submission will be transparent. The REF Steering Group, in consultation with the Heads of School, will oversee the preparatory work relating to the submission and report regularly to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group.
13. The REF Steering Group will assume responsibility for ensuring that the Code of Practice is consistently applied across the University, when making decisions about the submission, based on information that is provided by the Head of School responsible for each Unit of Assessment. The REF Steering Group will follow the University's Equality and Diversity Policy, in relation to: age; disability; gender; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sexual orientation; socio-economic background; employment status. The REF Steering Group will consider, in consultation with UCU, an equalities monitoring profile for the University at appropriate points during REF preparations.
14. The REF Steering Group will take due consideration of the individual circumstances of staff that fall into the categories listed by the Funding Council in the Guidance and in the Panel Criteria Statements (REF 01.2012). In line with the intentions of the Funding Council, when identifying staff for submission, the REF Steering Group will be mindful of the circumstances that may have affected the quantity of outputs produced during the assessment period.
15. Any relevant member of staff will be able to make a case for individual or special circumstances to be taken into consideration, through a confidential, on-line disclosure process managed by the REF Team in Research & Enterprise Services, with advice from Human Resources. All such cases will be considered by the REF Steering Group on an anonymised basis. Only the central REF Team (three individuals) will have access to the un-anonymised information. They will be responsible for recording the information in the REF submission system. Relevant HR staff may also be engaged in the process for advisory purposes.

16. External advisors (Critical Friends) have been or will be appointed, where appropriate, to support and advise the University in preparation of its REF 2014 submission. External advisors will be approved by the Vice-Chancellor, upon the recommendation of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) or the REF Steering Group. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and REF Steering Group will seek the advice of Heads of Schools in making a recommendation.

4. Selection of Units of Assessment

17. The decision of the Units of Assessment to which submissions will be made rests with VCEG, on recommendation from the REF Steering Group, informed by the Heads of Schools.
18. Staff will be mapped to appropriate Units of Assessment, based on the best alignment of their research activity to the description of the Units in the Panel Criteria Statements.

5. Criteria for inclusion

19. The REF Guidance on Submission (REF 02.2011, paragraph 78) defines eligible staff 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'.
20. The expectation is that every member of staff on an academic contract will be included in the 2014 submission, unless an explicit decision not to include a member of staff has been made on the basis of (i) their research contribution during the assessment period and (ii) the potential overall impact on a Unit of Assessment (UoA) based on their inclusion. The expectation extends to research staff who will be in post on the census date and who meet the Funding Council's definition of independent researchers. It applies equally to those on part-time and full-time contracts, and to those on fixed-term and open-ended contracts.
21. Decisions with regard to the composition and structure of the REF 2014 submission, including the detailed documents prepared for review by UoA Sub-Panels, will be informed by the key research statement in the University's Strategic Plan 2009-2015, namely that the University will undertake pioneering research, which inspires innovative thinking. In the context of the REF, research activity has three components: (i) research outputs; (ii) research environment; (iii) research impact. Details of the three research activity indicators are provided in the relevant Panel and Sub-Panel criteria and working methods.
22. The principal criterion in selecting staff (who are in post on the census date of 31/10/13) will be the volume of high-quality research activity generated by an individual within the assessment period that meets the stated expectations of the relevant Panel and Sub-Panels, having due regard to any individual staff circumstances. The quality of research activity generated by an individual member of staff throughout the assessment period will be determined against the strategic guiding principles of the University, namely that research should be of the highest quality. In order to present the strongest possible submission to REF 2014 the University will have to make choices in selecting the staff for submission. For this reason, although the University recognises and values the contribution of eligible staff, not all may be included in the submission, for strategic reasons. Staff not included in the submission will continue to be supported in their research and

scholarship. The University will not use staff selection or non-selection for the REF as part of other decision-making processes relating to contractual status or performance. There are other agreed processes for dealing with such issues.

23. Final decisions about staff and the UoA under which they are to be submitted will be made by VCEG, on the recommendation of the REF Steering Group. The final selection of staff for submission will be confirmed by VCEG following the conclusion of the appeals process.

6. Units of Assessment

24. For each Unit of Assessment (UoA) to which the University intends to make a return in REF 2014 as part of the submission, a senior academic member of staff will be designated as UoA Leader. The UoA Leader will normally be the Head of School. In exceptional circumstances, an alternative UoA Leader can be recommended by the REF Steering Group and approved by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, based on the previous research leadership / management experience of the individual. UoA leaders are responsible for the following:

- requesting details from all staff eligible for submission within that UoA about research outputs and other research related information relevant for inclusion in the REF submission;
- ensuring that the REF publications database (Sussex Research On-Line) is up to date;
- in consultation with other relevant staff in the UoA, preparing and submitting to the REF Steering Group, the proposed full documentation (drafts and final copy) to be considered by the relevant REF 2014 UoA Sub-Panel by agreed deadlines;
- revising drafts of the proposed full documentation on the basis of feedback, to produce a final set of papers by no later than 31st August 2013;
- providing additional information that might be requested by the REF Steering Group, so that informed decisions can be made about the identification of eligible staff and their research activity.

25. UoA leaders will not have final responsibility for making decisions about the selection of staff, or particular outputs to be included, but will be fully consulted as part of the decision making process.

7. Equal opportunities

26. The University of Sussex is committed to equality of opportunity in employment, recognising that a diverse group of staff and students enhances the scholarly community and adds greatly to the research and teaching & learning environment.

27. The Code of Practice has been prepared in this context. Guidance from the Equality Challenge Unit, which was issued as part of the REF 2014 Guidance on Submissions (REF 02.2011), has been and will be used when considering equal opportunities issues. The REF 2014 Panels and Sub-Panels have produced guidance on how they will deal with circumstances that might have had an effect on an individual's contribution to a submission. In this regard, the Panel Criteria document includes an equal opportunities statement (REF 01.2012).

28. Decisions will be made in accordance with the following statutory provisions: Equality Act 2010; Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000; Fixed-term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002.
29. The University is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity for all staff, including those employed on a fixed-term or part-time basis. All eligible staff will be considered for submission by the University; the type of employment contract held by an eligible member of staff will not be a factor in decision making.
30. All staff involved in preparing the University REF 2014 submission will receive equal opportunities training appropriate to the tasks that they are required to undertake. Those to be trained include: VCEG, Heads of School, School Directors of Research and Knowledge Exchange, the REF Steering Group, UoA Leaders where this is not the Head of School, and the REF Team. Other appropriate individuals may also be trained at the request of a Head of School or the REF Steering Group. The equal opportunities training will encompass all aspects of legislation and the University's own policies and procedures on equal opportunities that are relevant to the REF. The training will be provided by the Human Resources Division, with the support of the University's external legal advisors, enabling staff to have a full appreciation and understanding of the framework within which they will be making decisions.
31. In considering the research contribution of an individual member of staff, care and attention will be paid to individual personal circumstances. These include both career and equal opportunities issues and are identified in Part 3 paragraphs 88-95 of the Guidance on Submissions and Part 1 paragraphs 63-91 of the Panel criteria and working methods for all Panels and Sub-Panels. The circumstances include:
 - status as an early career researcher (individuals of any age who started their career as independent researchers on or after 1st August 2009 and qualify for REF submission as Category A staff);
 - absence on maternity, paternity, parental or adoption leave and arrangements on return to work after these periods of leave;
 - part-time / fixed-term work or other flexible working arrangements;
 - time spent acting as a carer or other similar domestic commitments;
 - any disability which falls under the jurisdiction of the Equality Act 2010 (including permanent disabilities and temporary disabilities with a duration of 12 months or more);
 - absence from work on the advice of a registered and appropriately qualified medical practitioner;
 - other absences which the University is legally obliged to permit, such as absences for religious observance and absence arising due to commitments as a formally recognised representative of the workforce;
 - any other personal circumstances which are thought to have impacted on the research activity of an individual within the REF 2014 assessment period.
32. The University has a responsibility to its staff and must be satisfied that any relevant circumstances exist or have existed and that the impact is or has been as described. To support this process, staff will be able to disclose individual or special circumstances through a confidential disclosure process managed by the REF Team in Research & Enterprise Services, with advice from Human Resources. All such

cases will be considered by the REF Steering Group on an anonymised basis (see paragraph 15).

33. Personal information provided by a member of staff for REF purposes and the resulting individual's Assessment profile will be used for REF purposes only, with access limited to those directly involved in relevant decisions. These will not be published at any time. These will be destroyed at the completion of the REF, when the outcome is announced by the Funding Council.
34. It is recognised that the University has obligations with regard to the Data Protection Act 1998. This requires individuals upon submitting details on personal circumstances to give consent for the consideration of the same information in the context of the REF assessment criteria and, where appropriate, that information being included in the University REF submission and Equality Analysis.
35. The University will prepare an equality profile, covering race, disability, gender, age, and employment status, for all academic staff who are eligible for inclusion on the census date. In order to assess whether any noticeable imbalances or anomalies are present, in terms of proportions of staff in the above categories who will or will not be included in the submission, an initial working profile will be produced in March 2013, updated in June 2013 and finalised no later than November 2013. The equality profile will be reviewed by the REF Steering Group and submitted to VCEG for consideration, alongside any recommendations arising from the review of information.

8. Appeals procedure

36. Eligible staff not included in the submission will receive feedback, normally from the Head of School, or from an alternative appropriate person agreed by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research). This will include a written statement, agreed by the REF Steering Group, explaining the reasons for the non-inclusion.
37. Eligible staff not selected for submission by the REF Steering Group may appeal. Appeals should be submitted to the Registrar & Secretary within 10 working days of receiving the written statement explaining the reasons for non-inclusion.
38. Appeals will be considered by an Appeals Panel, chaired by the Registrar & Secretary. An Appeals Panel will comprise the Registrar & Secretary, two Heads of School / UoA Leaders identified by the Registrar & Secretary, and the Director of Human Resources or her nominee. If a conflict of interest is identified with regard to the Registrar & Secretary, the Vice-Chancellor will appoint an alternative chair for the Panel. Members of the Appeals Panel will not have a direct connection with the School in which the appellant is based. The grounds for appeal must be clearly and succinctly stated in writing by the appellant and based upon the written statement explaining the reasons for non-inclusion or on grounds of incorrect procedure.
39. The Appeals Panel will consider the written statement presented to the appellant explaining the reasons for non-inclusion, the procedures undertaken, and written evidence supplied by the appellant. No interviews or hearing will take place as part of the REF appeals process.
40. The Appeals Panel will notify the appellant in writing of the outcome of their appeal within 20 working days of the same being received by the Registrar & Secretary. The outcome of the appeal will be reported to the REF Steering Group.

41. The appeal process will be confidential.
42. The decision of the Appeals Panel will be final.
43. The final selection of staff for submission will be confirmed by VCEG following the conclusion of the appeal process.

9. Review of the Code of Practice

44. In accordance with the REF Guidance on Submissions (Part 4, paragraph 203), this Code of Practice may be reviewed and refined in the light of the 2013 REF Trial Run exercise and other activities conducted in the lead-up to the REF 2014 submission by the University. Material changes will be approved by VCEG, Senate and Council.
45. An Equalities Impact Assessment of the Code of Practice has been undertaken and an action plan produced (see Annex 4). These will be updated as necessary in light of any changes to the Code or to the processes required.

10. Communication

46. This strategy and other information relevant to the University REF 2014 preparations will be published on the University intranet (www.sussex.ac.uk/research). However, information relating to individuals will not normally be available other than in the form of documents that are part of the provisional and final submissions.
47. The Code of Practice and other relevant information will be brought to the attention of all relevant staff via email. For staff who are absent, the relevant Head or School or UoA Leader will ensure that a written communication is sent to their home or other work address. This method of communication will be repeated for any significant new information, including any changes to this Code of Practice.
48. Any decisions with regard to the REF submission by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group, REF Steering Group or other groups within the University (e.g. Council and Senate) will be recorded centrally by the Secretary to the REF Steering Group on behalf of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) and reported to the relevant Head of School. Heads of Schools will be responsible for disseminating decisions to staff in the UoA(s) for which they are responsible. Information relating to general decisions or progress in preparation of the REF submission will be published on the University intranet.
49. This Code of Practice was approved by the University's Council on 29 June 2012 following consideration as detailed in Annex 3.

11. Annex 1: REF Steering Group

50. The Research Excellence Framework Steering Group will consider and make provisional decisions about the selection of staff and outputs for submission in REF 2014. The REF Steering Group is chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research). The provisional decisions, with an accompanying explanation, will be reported to the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group. VCEG will either confirm provisional decisions or recommend that the REF Steering Group further consider a matter, providing clear reasons for doing so.

51. The REF Steering Group will be responsible for the following.

- Oversee the University Research Excellence Framework 2014 submission to the HEFCE.
- Provide an equality profile covering race, disability, gender, age, and employment status for all academic staff eligible for inclusion on the census date.
- Review the information provided by UoA leaders in preparing the REF submission to the HEFCE.
- Provide feedback to UoA leaders on draft submissions.
- Ensure that the Code of Practice is consistently implemented across the University.
- Make recommendations to VCEG about which staff (and outputs) will or will not be submitted to each UoA.
- Be responsible for communicating decisions about staff that are not included in the REF 2014 submission to Heads of School, Heads of Department, the UoA leaders and to the members of staff concerned, together with a reason for the decision.
- Other matters relating to the University REF 2014 submission referred to it by the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Group.

52. Membership of the REF Steering Group will be as follows:

Core group

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Chair)

No less than four senior members of the academic staff of the University

Director of Research and Enterprise

REF Manager

Other representatives of the University academic departments and professional services may be co-opted, when required.

12. Annex 2: REF Timetable

53. The outline timetable for the REF is as follows

31 July 2012	Code of Practice approved and submitted to HEFCE
3 Dec 2012	Full Trial Run submissions
May 2013	Final review of all eligible staff
31 July 2013	Final draft submissions
Sept 2013	Final PGR and Income data
31 Oct 2013	Census date
Nov 2013	Final staff data
29 Nov 2013	Submission deadline
Dec 2014	Results published
Feb / Mar 2015	Funding decisions announced

13. Annex 3: Code of Practice Development

54. This Code of Practice was developed using the Code used by the University in the 2008 Research Assessment Exercise as the starting point, taking into account the REF Guidance on Submissions (REF 02.2011).
55. The draft Code was considered by the REF Steering Group and then by VCEG. Following further iterations, it was approved by VCEG on 18/6/12.
56. The draft Code was discussed with UCU on behalf of University staff on 19/6/12.
57. The draft Code was considered and approved by Senate on 22/6/12.
58. The draft Code was considered and approved by Council on 29/6/12.
59. [It has been submitted to and approved by the Funding Councils' REF Equality and Diversity Panel (date). It is available via the Sussex web site: www.sussex.ac.uk/ref]

14. Annex 4: Equalities Impact Assessment

60. An initial equalities impact assessment and action plan were prepared on 27/7/12. These will be updated as necessary in light of any changes to the Code or to the processes required.
61. The University has an established procedure for the equality assessment of policies (see www.sussex.ac.uk/equalities), and this was applied to this Code of Practice. An initial staff equality profile was generated, to act as a reference point. The findings of the initial assessment were that the Code does not introduce unequal opportunities across the protected characteristics. In particular, the REF's provision for individual circumstances, the University's operation of a confidential mechanism for disclosure of such circumstances (see paragraph 15), and the provision of training for those involved in decision-making (see paragraph 30) enable equality of treatment.

62. The Trial Run at the end of 2012 / early 2013 will inform the impact assessment. As noted in paragraph 35, further staff equality profiles will be produced in March 2013, June 2013, and November 2013, to allow for monitoring and assessment of any anomalies that might arise. The timing of these accords with the likely timing of the events identified in paragraph 215 of the REF Guidelines.
63. Equality profiles will be produced at the level of UoAs, although the University will be conscious of statistical significance for small UoAs. It was not possible to do this for the initial assessment, as staff had not all been aligned to UoAs at that time.
64. Following the submission in November 2013, the equality impact assessments and any actions taken will be published on the University's REF web pages.