

Code of practice on the selection of staff for the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2014 submission

1. Background

Writtle College has for over 100 years provided technical information and practical advice to the rural and related industries based on its expertise and research and development activities. The College aspires to be a leading institution in the land based sector and the impact and quality of its research is a theme of utmost importance to achieve this goal.

As stated in the *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions for the REF2014* submissions (REF 02.2011), all HEIs that will participate in the REF have to establish lawful criteria for the selection of staff. Writtle College will submit to the REF2014 and this Code of Practice sets the College approach to a fair and transparent mechanism for the selection of staff that will submit research outputs to the REF 2014.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish the internal institutional framework for the selection of staff for the REF2014 submission by ensuring fairness and transparency in the selection of staff, the selection of outcomes and the selection of the Units of Assessment (UoA) of submission. The code will address the principles of transparency, consistency, accountability and inclusivity in a transparent and lawful

manner. It follows the principles stated on the College's Single Equality Scheme 2011-2015 and the Equality Act 2010.

3. Scope of the Code

The code applies to all staff at all levels and positions who work within the College, their potential eligibility, the steps involved in selection, location (UoA) and decision-making, matters associated with the disclosure of individual staff circumstances, and how to appeal in the result of exclusion.

4. Communications plan

The College is committed to ensuring that this Code of Practice is communicated widely to all academic staff eligible or potentially eligible for submission to the REF2014. Staff will be made aware of this Code via e-mail briefings and newsletters. The College will also make this Code of Practice available for reference and will be published in the College's intranet (MyWi). Additionally, hard copies of the code, including those printed in alternative formats, will be available from the Research Coordinator. Staff absent from work will be kept updated by letter. Once the Code is approved by HEFCE, it will be made available in the College Website. The results of staff selection decisions, appeals and feedback will be communicated on an individual basis. Terms of Reference for the Selection Panels will be available on MyWi.

5. Staff and Committees

The College's Research Committee will be the body that deals with all the matters that will relate to the REF submission on behalf of the Academic Board. The decision-making process for the submission of outputs and for overseeing the preparatory process leading to submission falls within the Research Committee. The Committee has the responsibility to follow the timetable published in the *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions* (REF 02.2011) for the REF2014 submissions. It will also have the responsibility for the selection process of the

College staff, their outputs and UoA. See appendix A for the terms of reference and membership of the Research Committee.

A REF working group formed by members of the Research Committee with knowledge of research activity, other relevant skills or strategic responsibility from across the University, who have the expertise to judge the quality of work available in subject disciplines will be appointed to oversee the selection of staff, outputs and will determine the UoA to which submissions will be made. The REF working group will be formed by:

- The College Research Coordinator (chair)
- The Head of Higher Education
- Heads of Centres

The Group will be responsible with attending to all matters relevant to and associated with the REF including the determination of eligibility, selection, location (UoA), decision-making, adhering to the principle of transparency and fairness. The Group will report the outcomes, recommendations, proposals and decisions relating to the REF to the Research Committee and in turn to the Academic Board.

6. Training

All individuals involved in the selection process will receive additional specific training in equality and diversity in light of the Equality Act 2010. The training will utilise REF-specific training materials published by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), including the case studies providing examples of individual staff circumstances. The appeals panel (see Section 10) will also receive this training. Online materials will be available to ensure a sufficient level of understanding so that the selection process is based only on the quality of research.

7. Transparency

The processes implemented by the REF Working Group for the selection of staff, outcomes and UoA for submission to the REF 2014 will be transparent and accountable. This Code of Practice will be approved by Academic Board and made available across the College.

8. Eligibility

Staff eligible for participation to the REF 2014 will be determined principally by criteria and definitions surrounding research, outputs, impact, UoA, environment and other matters as set out in the *Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions* (REF 02.2011) and the *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01:2012). Following existing HR policy, when considering staff for inclusion in REF2014, the College will comply with the Equality Act 2010.

The College will consider excellence in research as part of its strategy for submission, including staff whose ability to produce four outputs, or its equivalent due to staff and individual circumstances as stated on the *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01: 2012).

9. Staff Circumstances

The *Assessment Framework and Guidance on Submissions* (REF 02.2011) and the *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01:2012) documentation list and describe the specific circumstances that can be used as evidence for submitting fewer than four outputs for any member of eligible staff where those circumstances significantly constrained the ability of a member of staff to produce four outputs throughout the assessment period. Any member of staff who requires support, guidance or advice in relation to their personal circumstances should contact the College's Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group.

Clearly defined circumstances include:

- 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.

Complex circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- Disability.
- Ill health or injury.

- Mental health conditions.
- Constraints related to pregnancy or maternity, paternity adoption or childcare, in addition to a clearly defined period of maternity leave. (These may include but are not limited to: medical issues associated with pregnancy or maternity; health and safety restrictions in laboratory or field work during pregnancy or breastfeeding; constraints on the ability to travel to undertake fieldwork due to pregnancy or breast-feeding).
- Gender reassignment.
- Other circumstances relating to protected characteristics.

There may be other circumstances comparable with the examples given above which the REF working group would consider as long as an explanation is provided as to the way in which these are said to have impacted on the individual's ability to produce the expected volume of research outputs.

For clearly defined circumstances, the *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01: 2012) has provided tariffs to determine the number of outputs that may be reduced without penalty in the assessment, depending on the duration of the circumstance (or combination thereof). For more complex circumstances, the College will need to make a judgement on the appropriate reduction in the number of outputs submitted. The College will form a panel that will make decisions based on the *Panel criteria and working methods* (REF 01: 2012) guidance regarding clearly defined and complex staff circumstances. This panel will be named the Individual Staff Circumstances Panel.

The Individual Staff Circumstances Panel will consist of the following members:

- College Principal (Chair)
- Human Resources Manager
- Research Coordinator

The disclosure of this information will primarily be through a form that will be available on the staff intranet, and in other formats on request. Staff will be notified of the availability of this form through the e-mail system and other media. This information will be treated with strict confidentiality, and the information will only be seen by the Individual Staff Circumstances Panel.

Decisions on the appropriate level of reduced outputs will generally be based on the correlation of individual circumstances with total absence from or disruption to work over the assessment period (i.e. the cumulative effect on ability to undertake contracted hours of work across the whole of the assessment period). This can include a decision that a reduction in outputs cannot be recommended based on the disclosed information, in line with the official guidance and tariffs. A recommendation for a reduction in outputs can only be made where the panel can provide a clear rationale for the reduction based on the official guidance.

Disclosed information will be kept securely through the use of password-protected files with restricted access, and used only to inform the REF2014 selection process, as outlined above. Permission will be requested from individuals for the information to be added to existing confidential staff HR records. Disclosed information will be destroyed following the conclusion of the REF process, in line with REF audit requirements.

Only decisions on appropriate level of reduced number of outputs will be provided to the REF working group. No details of any individual circumstances that can be deemed personal or sensitive will be disclosed to the group. In accordance with the processes in REF 02.2011 and REF 01.2012 the information may be disclosed to the Appeals Panel (see below) where this is necessary to make an informed decision on an appeal brought by the individual. In such cases the confidentiality arrangements for the Individual Staff Circumstances Panel will be exceptionally extended to Appeals Panel members.

Where staff have been subject to constraining circumstances but do not disclose this information through the identified channels, they will not be considered for submission with reduced outputs. Such staff will be considered only through the general selection process outlined in this document. External advice will be sought where required.

10. Appeals

Members of staff have the right to appeal the decision within one month from receiving written notification regarding the submission of their research outputs. In the first instance, staff should direct initial enquiries in writing within 30 days to the

College Research Coordinator. An REF Appeals Panel will be convened with a membership different to that of any other REF Group and/or Panel to ensure its independence from membership of these groups and also its independence from the submission process and will include at least three members. Membership of the panel will consist of:

- Member of the College's Governing body (chair)
- Head of Teaching and Learning
- Head of CADE

The purpose of the Appeals Panel is to act as an independent body to consider appeals and to make judgements based on its assessment of the strength of each case (taking into account the grounds stated) and having consideration for the impact of decisions on the College overall. The Appeals Panel will also refer to the criteria and processes established by the REF team in accordance with document *Assessment framework and guidance on submissions* REF 02.2011 and subsequent publications on criteria and working methods. In all cases, the decision of the Panel will be final. External advice will be sought where required.

The Appeals Panel will consider the appeal on the grounds of quality of research and on the inclusion to the selected UoA. The appeal will be considered within 2 months from being received by the Appeals Panel, and in any case before the final submission is made. Appeals at any point in the process outlined in number 8 and 9 will only be possible in the case of exclusion from the REF and on the basis of fairness or personal disclosure.

Appeals on the grounds of discrimination by staff concerning the inclusion/exclusion of research outputs within the REF submission can be made on the grounds of a:

- personal characteristic (age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex or sexual orientation or because they are pregnant or have recently given birth); or
- work pattern/absence that has not been fully taken into account.

The Appeals Panel will meet with the appellant (and any supporter that the appellant may consider appropriate) to consider the appeal. Where the Appeals Panel clearly defines that the excluded research does not meet the criteria for quality or submission to the selected UoA, the Appeals Panel will inform the individual stating the reasons. However, if the appeal is valid, it will be considered by the Appeals Panel. If the majority of the Appeals Panel agrees, the appeal can be upheld without a hearing.

After the hearing, the Appeals Panel will determine whether the appellant will be included in the submission or is unsuccessful in their appeal. This appeal process will be used to exhaust the informal part of the grievance procedures.

11. Equality Impact Assessment

The College has conducted an equality impact assessment (EIA) on this Code of Practice and will conduct an EIA on the procedures for selecting staff for REF 2014. These EIAs will help to identify where discrimination may inadvertently occur, differential impact on particular groups, and where a particular policy or practice has a positive impact on the advancement of equality. The EIAs have and will be informed by thorough and systematic analyses of data on staff that are eligible for selection in respect of all the protected characteristics for which data are available. Members of staff will therefore be encouraged to complete the Equal Opportunities details form available from the College intranet.

The Chair of the Equality and Diversity Group is responsible for ensuring the completion of EIAs and making the information available to all groups involved in the selection process. The EIA on the procedures for selection of staff is scheduled to take place after the REF 2014 submission in November 2013. The EIA produced following the REF 2014 submission in November 2013 will also be published.

12. Data protection

The institution has an obligation to provide information as part of the REF which will be accessed by those individuals nominated above together with an REF administrator. All personal data relating to the REF will be processed fairly and lawfully and in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Individuals have a right to check or amend the data held; to know what it is being collected for and how it will be used, and due care will be taken to ensure confidentiality. The data collected for the REF will only be used to inform the REF and to inform future research strategy.

Appendix A Terms of Reference and Membership of the Research Committee

1. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The College Research Committee operates to co-ordinate the research objectives and activities of the College and acts to promote and support the engagement of College staff and students in research and scholarship.

The College Research Committee will:

- 1.1 Promote research and its benefits and integrate into the taught curriculum.
- 1.2 Formulate, implement and monitor a strategy for research for the College.
- 1.3. Ensure that all research supported by the College has clear objectives and outcomes, and is relevant to the institution.
- 1.4 Monitor and review the progress of research programmes receiving College resources and to evaluate their effectiveness.
- 1.5 Establish a programme of research seminars and conferences to publicise the research work of the College and to give opportunity of staff and students to be exposed to research taking place both within and beyond the College.
- 1.6 Advise the Heads of Schools and Senior Management Team of the scale of funding required to support on-going research programmes.
- 1.7 Oversee the submission of the College to external research inspections and audits.
- 1.8 Prepare an annual report on the research activity of the College on behalf of the Academic Board.
- 1.9 Verify reports and recommendations of the Research Students Progress Committee.

2. REPORTING

The College Research Committee will report directly to Academic Board.

3. MEMBERSHIP

The Research Committee shall consist of:

Full members:

- Principal
- Head of Higher Education
- Research Co-ordinator (Chair)
- Heads of Schools and nominated School representatives
- Heads of Centres or nominated Centre representatives
- Research Postgraduate Representative

4. QUORUM

The quorum for a meeting shall consist of:

- Chairperson, or nominee
- At least 4 other full members

5. MEETINGS

The College Research Committee will meet at least 3 times per academic year.

The purposes of the meetings will be to:

- 5.1 Formulate the College research strategy.
- 5.2 Provide guidance and support on the implementation of the research strategy within Schools and Centres.
- 5.3 Make recommendations for the resourcing of research via School and Centre budgets.
- 5.4 Evaluate progress of on-going research programmes.
- 5.5 Receive reports of the Research Postgraduate Progress Committee
- 5.6 Discuss and formulate policy on any other items of business which are encompassed within the Committee's terms of reference.

6. ACTION PLANNING

The Chair shall be responsible for identifying responsibilities and setting agreed deadlines for action arising from the Minutes to be completed. The Chair and designated individuals shall be responsible for monitoring progress against action plan targets.